

Your Cross – Part 6

Welcome to Your Cross, Part 6, June 20, 2007. As we get into the series on Your Cross, we follow these subtopics: We discussed the foundation of Your Cross; there is a battle in the spirit realm; and at its foundational level it goes right down to your next thought over what is truth. We looked at the mechanism of Your Cross. Since we're given choice that it may be of love and God only asks that we choose Him; the mechanism is that we by choice, give up choice when we come to the purpose of choice which is to choose Jesus Christ. And when we come to abide in Him, from that point on, exercising choice can only take you out of the position of abiding in Him. So you don't need choice when you fulfill the purpose of choice which is to abide in Jesus Christ. Then we began to look at the purposes of Your Cross; and we picked that up last time. We looked at the first two stages out of four: tribulation-revelation. We looked at the revelation of me to myself—that is to say residual ungodliness in me that I would not know existed except for the stress of circumstances. We looked at the revelation in some small way of Christ to me. That is to say all suffering, if properly translated, can only help you grow in the revelation of the suffering of Jesus Christ. It cannot approach that because His suffering was spiritual to the max to the point of no communion with the Father, total forsakenness by the Father, while receiving the fullness of wrath of the Father to pay the price for all sins for all men for all time. So what human suffering can approach that? So we can't approximate it; but every bit of suffering that we endure can help us grow in the revelation of the suffering of Christ. And we know love by this: that He laid down His life for us. And when we grow in the revelation of all that's included in that statement, then we have followed the pathway of progression that God intends for us to see His Son evermore clearly including in our suffering.

Today we'll pick it up with the revelation of Christ in me, to me. You may recall that in the first stage the revelation of me to myself, the outcome is to grow in the joy of the Lord; because the more sin that you have the revelation of in your own life, the more grace that you became aware of. The grace was there; but you thought it was limited because you had only a little revelation of what you thought was your little sin. But as you progress through life and have the progressive revelation when the sponge gets squeezed and the filth gets revealed, you then get awe-struck by the grace of God that's so much bigger than you ever realized. That's the grace that's amazing. It's not the grace that you think exists when you're in your comfortable human circumstance. Stage two is to help you grow in the joy of the Lord; because if we love because He first loved us and we know love by this, that He laid down His life for us, and the measure of your revelation of His love is limited by your revelation of the suffering that He endured in the process because He did it all voluntarily for you. Gave up the glory of Heaven, came to Earth as a man, went to death (even death on a cross), all the spiritual suffering and physical suffering; that is the revelation of the love that God has for you. So that can't help but lead you to grow in the joy of the Lord as you see how the creator God of Genesis 1:1 did all that so you could spend eternity with Him. That's how you understand the love of God. Now when you begin to grow in the joy of the Lord from stage one and the joy of the Lord from stage two, then a transition begins to occur when we get towards stage three.

You begin to take your eyes off yourself in your suffering and put them on Jesus. Now that's of course, where they were to have been all along, but in our immaturity we didn't understand it. Hebrews 12:2 – Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. I Peter 1:13 – Fix

your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. You don't fix your hope on your ability to withstand suffering. You fix your hope completely on the grace brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. So suffering's intent is to give you a greater revelation of Jesus Christ; and therein, you fix your hope. Faith in Jesus cannot be perfected unless faith in all else is shown to be defective. And, of course, suffering is a mechanism allowed by God or brought about by God to reveal your faith in anything other than in His Son. Because the whole plan of God is to have everything summed up in His Son. When your eyes and hope are fixed on Jesus rather than on yourself, the following ensues. You will notice that you will have endured far more pain with far less complaining than you ever thought possible. That's part of the grace of God. Grace is unmerited favor; but part of unmerited favor is the empowering presence of God in the Holy Spirit within you. But what does the Holy Spirit do? Jesus said He will not bear witness of Himself; He will bear witness of Me, the Son of God. So in your suffering, the Holy Spirit's function is to bear witness of Jesus. So when you have your eyes on Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit is accessed. When you have your eyes on yourself, the power of the Holy Spirit is not accessed because the Holy Spirit didn't come to bear witness of you; He came to bear witness of Jesus.

The revelation of Jesus in the midst of your suffering is what brings the grace to you that is sufficient for the suffering. That also continues the process of growing in the joy of the Lord. And the joy of the Lord (we know the verse well), Nehemiah 8:10 – is your strength. So in your suffering, if you're not growing in the joy of the Lord, you're not accessing the sufficiency of the grace of God which will result in the joy of the Lord and that joy of the Lord becomes your strength in the suffering. That's why we're told to count it as joy. We call the things which are not yet, but which will be, as though they already were. When we begin to count it as joy, we begin to grow in joy. So when your eyes are on yourself, grumbling is the result and fear is the result. But when your eyes are on Jesus, strength is the result. That strength propels you to endure far more than you thought possible with far more grace than you thought possible. And thus, it fulfills stage three of revealing Christ in me, to me. That further increases the joy of the Lord and you continue the crescendo of the joy of the Lord that you began in stage one, continued to stage two, and now discover that it grows even more in stage three.

Then it reveals Christ in me to them (to the outside observers). You would all know that one of the greatest testimonies that Christians can give is how we suffer. Do we do it with self pity? With murmuring? Grumbling? Anger? Bitterness? Taking offense at God? Well, that's how the world does it. Thus, that gives testimony only to the fact that we are human—that is to say mere men. Or do we do it with joy, love, grace, peace? Do we do it while fulfilling I Thessalonians 5:16-18? Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in all things, give thanks; because the suffering you're enduring is physical suffering. But when you're functioning in the spirit realm, which is the true reality, there are always reasons to rejoice. There are always reasons to give thanks. And there are always reasons to commune with your God because you're in love with Him; because you know His love for you. So when you're in the spirit realm, you will rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in all things give thanks. When you're living in the flesh, paying attention to the physical realm and the circumstances, you will do none of those things. But if we do those things, that's when the world will take notice. I Peter 3:15 – Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is within you. When you suffer and fulfill I Thessalonians 5 in the process, the world will ask you

to explain the hope that is within you. They will ask because mere men don't do that. The fact that you do that is the testimony that you are a God-man and not a mere man. That was the testimony of Jesus on the cross as He's hanging there receiving unfathomable torture; He says forgive them for they know not what they do.

So the thief that we're told in Matthew 27:44 that began by cursing Him then witnessed the testimony of Jesus on the cross, within a few hours we're told in Luke 23:42, the same thief said Jesus remember me when you come in Your Kingdom. The testimony originating from how Jesus bore His cross. So, if we likewise persevere in our suffering, by grace and displaying grace (even unto death), then we will provoke others to say as the centurion said at the foot of the cross of Christ in Matthew 27:54 – Truly this was the Son of God. Why? Because no mere man can suffer like that. Only a God-man could do that. See, our tribulation/revelation will be complete when we suffer well to the point of hearing others say truly your God is God as the centurion did with Jesus. Even to the point of our death, while giving Him glory with praise and thanksgiving, and prayer without ceasing.

The evangelism intrinsic in our suffering well as we glorify God continues the crescendo of the joy of the Lord; because we know that all Heaven rejoices when a lost sinner is found. So if you're playing a role in that by provoking people to ask you, would you explain how you're doing this, you can't help but grow in the joy of the Lord. So you'll notice that all four stages of our tribulation/revelation, when viewed properly in the spirit realm, not the physical realm, have an intended outcome of having you grow in the joy of the Lord. That's why we're told to count it as joy; because that's God's plan for how we're to behave in the midst of it. The progression of our relationship with God is revealed, I think, in part allegorically by the Song of Solomon. Remember, we think of the bride as the church. That's us because the church is called the bride of Christ. The bridegroom is Jesus. The mountain of myrrh is suffering. And the sequence as follows briefly stated: The relationship began, she blessed out with him (that's akin to us as a new believer), then He asked her to leave her comfort and to go with him to the mountain of myrrh to fulfill his purposes. She refused, preferring to stay behind in her comfort. He departed. She mourned his absence. She went looking for him. She then says I will go to the mountain of myrrh with you and then the relationship is fully consummated. The bride had to learn that she couldn't be limited by the circumstances of this world including her comfort and still access the full pleasure of his company; because he has purposes that are not yet fulfilled. For full relationship in an ongoing fashion, we need to adopt His purposes, travel His way, according to His plan, while growing in the display of His character. Because how can you expect a sovereign God to be satisfied with anything less than having us progress toward becoming like Him, by coming into Him, including in the midst of our suffering.

So why is suffering in His name a part of our kingdom? Well remind ourselves of the purposes and the nature of God to our understanding. God is love. Love is a passion for oneness. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. God wants the world to believe in Jesus; and thus, to spend eternity with Him in Heaven and then on the new Earth. Remember Jesus came to save the world. He could have stayed in Heaven and judged the world just like happened with the great flood. We are the earthen vessels by which this testimony of Jesus is to be communicated to the world. Our most powerful testimony is when we suffer well and die well in

His name. That is the most unnatural thing that a human being can do; and thus, our most potent testimonial tool. Recall Cassie Bernall at Columbine High School. Her simple profession of faith in the midst of the threat of death provided more authentic witness about her and her faith and her God than if she had lived to be a 100 years old and witnessed about God from then on to the max that whole period. The world was awestruck (at least temporarily) by her faith, her commitment, her purpose, even in the threat of death with a gun to her head. See all of these points relate to suffering well, to accomplish the purposes of God. It's not to suffer to suffer; it's to suffer to accomplish the purposes of God, purifying us; because there are worse things than having the creator God of Genesis 1:1 want you to become like Him. It's testimony of how much that God loves you; because if He's content with having you continue to hold onto things, that preclude oneness with Him, that means He doesn't love you. So the fact that He's driven to purify you and allow circumstances to occur to bring this to the forefront is testimony to the fact that He does love you. So we human beings perversely turn it on its ear by taking suffering as evidence God hates us. When, in fact, to the Christian, it's testimony that He loves you and He will not be fully satisfied until everything in you that's not like Him is out of you; because that thing you're hanging onto is precluding oneness with Him. And He loves you; He has a passion to be one with you. He loves that you're His child; but He will not love anything contrary to Himself in an ongoing fashion because it interferes with the fullness of communion with your Holy God.

So, yes, purifying us is one of his goals in our suffering. Spreading the Gospel; it reveals Christ in me to them. Now these two things, purification of ourselves and spreading the Gospel, can be distinguished but not separated. Because our greatest evangelistic tool is purification as we suffer well. The purification process is part of spreading the Gospel. Why is that? Because anytime a Christian starts to speak, what does the world immediately say? Hypocrite! Because they see that the Christians are no different from the world. Child abuse is the same; spousal abuse is the same; divorce rate is the same; addictions are the same; and so on. So why should the world turn to our God? They could do what we do without our God. There's no testimony in the Christian life when you remain unchanged and remain like the world. They can do that without our God. Ah, but if they see us living supernaturally, not as a mere man, as the most powerful evangelistic tool available. Why? Because they can't do it. And they know they can't do it. Then we become the visible testimony of the invisible God. They know God by seeing the impact of the wind. We don't see the wind; we see the impact of the wind and when a human being sees a Christian suffer well while giving glory to God, that's the impact of the spiritual wind. That's the testimony that your God is God. And that's when they will come and say would you explain how you do this? But not to do this; not to embrace your cross, but reject it, is to fulfill self, not to follow Jesus. And that's when we fulfill instead, II Timothy 3:5 by having a form of godliness while denying its power. We deny its power to suffer well, because we keep our eyes on ourselves and grumble in the process. We deny its power to observers because they conclude rightly that they could do that without our God. So why do they need our God?

But to embrace this, understand this, is to access the power of God, to become like Him to accomplish His purposes. It's to access power, not impotence. It's to have godliness, not to have the shadow of godliness which the world charges appropriately with hypocrisy. So what is our usual response to this line of spiritual thinking? Well our natural carnal minds can't fathom it at all; and thus, reject it. And we reject it most commonly by refusing to choose, by picking

certain parts of the Bible that we refuse to mediate on. But recall the Words of Jesus. This is a person we call Savior, the person we call the Creator; if we call Him those things, shouldn't we listen to Him? Matthew 12:30 – He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters. And that goes right down to your next thought. Because at every moment and with every thought, we are either gathering momentum to gather the harvest or scatter the harvest. By not choosing in an aggressive active fashion, we default to the flesh; because the flesh is the natural state and function of our unrenewed minds. We do that by habit. We don't need thought to be in the flesh. That weakens our testimony by exposing our hypocrisy; and thus, scatters the sheep, as we claim to worship God while following self. But we gather when we worship God in fullness of faith in the midst of our cross; because God would have no reason to change your circumstance until you've learned to worship Him in your circumstance. Because the purpose of the circumstance is to have you worship Him regardless of circumstance. But we scatter when we live in the fear of suffering and when we give glory to the suffering by focusing on it and grumble about it. God says I will share My glory with no one, nor should He. But whatever we fear, we are giving glory to; because we only have two choices: fear God meaning live in the awe and reverence of our Holy God or fear something else. It's a forced choice and if you're fearing something else, you are not fearing God. That's the whole point. He wants you to consolidate all your fears into one fear and that's the fear of Him, meaning awe and reverence.

When we fear, we're behaving like the world. So what kind of testimony of our God do we give when we behave like the world? How can we give effective witness of that which for a large part we refuse to choose or grumble about as process? We thus behave as the children of Israel did at Mount Carmel. I Kings 18:21 – Elijah says why do you not choose? If the Lord be God, then Him. If Baal be god, then him. But the people spoke not a word. So do we fear Islamic terrorists? Well, if Islamic terrorists be god, then choose them. But if our God be God, choose Him and quit fearing Islamic terrorists. We have a tendency to remain double minded between the spirit and the flesh. And as James taught us in James 1:8 – the double minded man is unstable in all his ways. And instability testifies of self, not God; because our God says I the Lord do not change. So if He doesn't change, that means He's stable. So when we're unstable in our circumstances, including our suffering, we're testifying only of self and never of our God. Then we honor Him, somewhat, but we don't honor Him as God. Huge difference! The purpose of our cross can only be understood in the light of the purposes of Jesus Christ and succinctly stated here are enough for us to chew on. Luke 19:10 – For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. I John 3:8 – The Son of Man appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. John 10:10 – I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly.

So, number one: Jesus came to have unbelievers become believers. Number three: Jesus came to have believers access the abundant life. Well the work of Satan is to keep unbelievers from believing and to keep believers from accessing the abundant life. So if you are fulfilling purpose number one and are fulfilling purpose number three, you're automatically fulfilling purpose number two. Because the work of the devil is to resist everything that's of Christ. So if He came to do number one and number three, Satan will oppose both of those. What then? Well, given a choice of our comfort or His purposes, what would you want God to choose? He will choose His purposes. Given a choice of our comfort or revealing our residual ungodliness, He will choose to

reveal our residual ungodliness. Can we expect less from a God Who loves us? He wants us to see—I mean He said seek My face. And He also tells us Matthew 5:8 – Only the pure in heart can see God. So the purer in heart you become, the clearer you will see God and the more you will love Him, because you will more know His love for you. We want to be comfortable. He wants us to become holy, like Him. There are worse things than having our creator God wanting us to become like Him. Given a choice of our comfort while letting the rest of the world go to Hell, or of using us as earthen vessels to bear effective witness of Him (including suffering well), God will choose to have us bear witness of Him through suffering well. Would we expect less when He loves them as much as He loves us? Our whole relationship with God is based on faith. It's not based on comfort and it's not based on circumstances. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter; but do we need a Comforter when we're comfortable? We need the Comforter when we're uncomfortable. Hebrews 11:6 – Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith is the fuel of the spirit realm; faith is what brings us to love. And if you have not love, you have nothing. Why? Because God is love. And Galatians 5:6 tells us faith works through love.

So the purpose of faith isn't just faith; the purpose of faith is to bring you to God and then God is love as you grow into the image of God, you become love. So given the choice of our comfort, or of revealing our unbelief to us, He will reveal our unbelief to us. But that's grace, not cruelty. Because the only way to fulfill love, to come into total oneness with Him is to be cleansed of that which cannot become one with Him. Given the choice of our comfort or destroying the works of the devil, He will choose to destroy the works of the devil. Our addiction to comfort, in fact, is a work of the devil. So given the choice of our comfort or having us access the abundant life, he will choose to allow circumstances that will bring us into the abundant life if viewed properly. Because we view the abundant life as a life of comfort; he views the abundant life as His life operating within you as you seek His face and behold Him regardless of what goes on in the physical realm.

We want to seek and to save that which was lost and to access the abundant life and to destroy the works of the devil without suffering. But we're in the world; and He says in this world, you'll have tribulation. But we're not of the world. What that means is we're to adopt His purposes, walk in His plan, bringing Him glory regardless of what happens in this world. So to deny self, take up your cross and follow Him is to be embraced, not rejected. Embracing it is nothing more than embracing God; because embracing God is more than just embracing Him as Savior. Embracing God is to embrace His will, which includes His purposes, His plan to implement those purposes, His ways, and display His character. Those are all purposes of God. So pertinent question: Are we to seek a cross so that we can display these things? Do we seek to suffer? No; because in His divine sovereignty, God has one prepared for you and it will look too big for you. But it's just like the children of Israel when they saw the promised land and said there are giants within and we're grasshoppers in their eyes. It was too big for them. But that's because they were looking at themselves as mere men, measuring themselves against other men. It is too big for you, but that's not the point. The point is you are not just you. You are not a mere man. You are a God-man. Do you not know the Spirit of Christ dwells within you? Do you not know you are a temple of the Holy Spirit?

So when you mount your cross, voluntarily—that is embracing whatever suffering comes your way as you give glory to God, you'll not only endure it, you will grow into your cross. And in so

doing, you'll reveal your Creator to the rest of the human race and have all Heaven rejoice anytime one observer is provoked to say your God is God; because that's when Heaven truly rejoices. The unsaved to witness as you do this will say how do you do that? I couldn't have done that. Will you explain the reason to me for the hope within you in the midst of this suffering. Now they may come like Nicodemus, in secrecy in the middle of the night. But if you implement this, you will provoke someone to ask you questions like that; because they'll recognize that your embracing your cross is not natural. And remember Sherlock Holmes said if you list all the possibilities and exclude all but one, it must be that one. So if you embrace your cross and it can't be done naturally, it must be the only other possibility. It must be supernatural.

So what are the purposes of your cross? Tribulation/revelation: To reveal you to you; to reveal Christ to you; to reveal Christ in you to you; and to reveal Christ in you to others. To what end? To fulfill the purposes of God on planet Earth, to seek and to save that which was lost, to usher in the abundant life, and to destroy the works of the devil in the process; those are the purposes of your cross because those are the purposes of His cross and the slave is not above His master. So in regard to your cross, we've covered the foundation, the mechanism, and the purposes.

Now the next time which will be three weeks hence, because we're gone the next two weeks, we're going to pick it up by your cross choices. And I do believe that's at the core of our spiritual walk as Christians accessing the Kingdom of God on planet Earth. So I hope you make it back and join me. So thank you for listening.