

The Cross, the Holy Spirit and the Response of Man.

INTRODUCTION.

I just wonder – when you think about the cross, do you see it as a place of a sad martyrdom where a good man died because of an impossible dream – a dream that in some way or another He could influence for good the essentially evil ways of man. There are many who do, even some within the Church who deny the resurrection ever happened. Well, I'm sure you don't otherwise you probably wouldn't be reading this. The cross, and the events surrounding it, is not a symbol of defeat but is of a total victory over sin, sickness and death. In fact the cross is the absolute revelation of God's judgement of sin - and its consequences.

Jesus' death was not an unfortunate event that left a spiritual vacuum, nor was it something that could easily have been avoided. You see, His death was the very reason why He came; it was His destiny from the beginning of time. Stop to think for a moment what would have happened if God had somehow intervened to prevent the crucifixion. First off it would have proved that Jesus was not the Messiah, awaited so long, and we would still be waiting for Him. Not only that but none of the benefits of His death would be available – forgiveness, restoration, health, and so on.

Regardless of all that, for it's all a bit beyond my imagining, if I were to teach you that God's forgiveness is freely available to you, for no other reason than because He loves you, I would be teaching you serious error. Such teaching would make unnecessary the suffering of the cross; it would have been a waste of time, an unfortunate mistake. But not only that, it would make all the gifts and benefits that we may know, of redemption, justification, and forgiveness even, grace itself, of no value.

When God forgives a repentant sinner He does so only **because of** the death of the Messiah, a death that was, in itself, the absolute manifestation of His love for mankind. We need to understand this, it's so important, for we must not understate or devalue the cross in terms of our salvation. Why? Because of this fact – there is no other way that God forgives the sins of men and women other than through the death of His son. The trumpet sounds of

victory that blasted through the heavens when Jesus rose up from the dead are hushed into silence when compared with the words that still echo around the universe – **‘It is finished.’**

THE PURPOSE OF THE CROSS.

1 Peter 2:24...

‘...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.’

Here we have it – the purpose. Through what Jesus did on the cross He turned around the destructive course that we, and all humanity, were on so that we might come into the possibility of a right relationship with God, as Father. Through this amazing sacrificial act we can benefit from all of the wonderful gifts of grace that are available, one of which is that we can be reconciled to God. He does not need to be reconciled to us, He is not the offender, but, boy, do we need to be reconciled to Him. **1 Corinthians 15:22-28** speaks of the new life that Jesus has brought to those who are in Him, and to the ultimate destruction of death itself.

Romans 14:9...

‘For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.’

Romans 5:6-11, especially verse 5...

‘And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.’

Note the tense here, we **have** received the reconciliation, therefore we must avail ourselves of it – I mean, the door is open. But not only that, for there is something else that goes with this...

2 Cor.5:18-20...

‘Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you, on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.’

The message I pick up from this is that, just as we have been the beneficiaries of reconciliation with God, we have been appointed ambassadors to communicate the call to

all that we meet that they too need to be reconciled to God, that the heart of God is revealed in us as we share the message with others. The message? That God was in Christ on the cross, that the cross removed the barrier that sin had erected to peace and acceptance, and through the cross the first step was taken in the restoration process. God, therefore, has done His part but for the change to be effective man must also do his.

But then, in **Ephesians 2:14-22**, we see something else in terms of reconciliation. We won't read this now, just summarise it. The death of Jesus had side effects beyond that of bringing **us** into the place of reconciliation with God, for it also brought about reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. How come? It is through the cross, Paul tells us in **verse 13**, that we have *'been brought near.'* Which raises a question - near to what? Put simply, it is near to something that we were previously far from. So what was that? It tells us in **verse 12**, where we can see that we were *'without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.'*

This is a topic in itself that we don't have time for, but we see that through the cross the *'middle wall of partition has been broken down.'* That wall, it tells us, was the Law as contained within the Old, Mosaic, Covenant, thus bringing reconciliation between the two elect and chosen people, Jew and Gentile believers, into **one** new man, in communion with God, through the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the cross, too, was to rescue the lost.

Mark 10:45...

'For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'

A ransom is the price paid for the redemption of a captive – in this case the captive is the whole of mankind. What does redemption mean? Quite simply, it means the buying back of something. In the context of the cross it means the buying back of those who had previously lived their lives in the kingdom of darkness. So how come we all got there ? (I say 'we' because we are all included). It's because we were all born as sons of Adam, subject to the Adam nature and, just as was Adam, we are slaves to Satan. Adam threw away his inheritance, eternal life, in favour of knowledge, and so became a slave to Satan. And the child of a slave is also a slave – until redeemed. Just as slaves were bought and

sold in the market place so we, as believers in Jesus, have been bought out of the market place of sin into the kingdom of light and now we have a new Master. (**Luke 19:10, Romans 6:4**).

Galatians 3:13...

'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")'

One of the purposes of the cross was to set us free from the curse of the Law. The law here is the Law given through Moses, but why should something given by God be considered a curse? Probably the best place to go for an answer to that is **Romans 7**. Summarising, Paul is saying that for sin to be sin it has to have a base to work from, and that base was the Mosaic Law. It works a bit like this. When the Law says, *'Thou shalt not,'* the sinful nature inside us says, *'O yes I will,'* and so sin is birthed within us and we are moved in the opposite direction to God's commandments. Does that mean that the problem lies with the Law? No, it does not! The problem is what the Law has to work with. And that's you and me. The curse, therefore, is not in the Law itself but in our disobedience of it, and in the consequences for breaking it. You will be pleased to know that this Law, through another one initiated by the death of Jesus, is now obsolete and has been replaced.

Hebrews 10:19-22...

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.'

The blood of Jesus makes possible the way into the Holiest place – the throne room of God. We may enter right into the presence of God Himself – no longer needing the priest or the human intermediary. Jesus Himself is our High Priest, seated at the right hand of God the Father, in other words in total equality with Him. As sin cannot exist in God's presence this means that we really can be set free from all the guilt and shame that has kept us bound for so long. We **can be** totally and wonderfully cleansed.

John 3:3-7... This is the account of Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus – most of us know it very well. Jesus speaks here of a new birth, a new beginning. And we need one! As we have seen, it is because our natural birth that we inherit a sin nature – sometimes called 'The

Old Man.’ There is, therefore, within each one of us, a propensity to sin, to rebel against the ways of God. The way to the new birth is first through the natural one, (the water), followed, some time later, by the new birth in the Spirit, where the Old Man is gradually replaced by the New Man. There is something happening within each one of us right now – it’s a process of renewal, a transformation, where the impact of the old diminishes and the new develops.

Galatians 4:4-6....

‘But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.’

If you look back to **Exodus 4:22** God said there something important about Israel. He said:

‘Thus says the Lord, “Israel is My Son, My firstborn.”’

This does not mean a son by natural birth, quite obviously, but what it does tell us is that, as far God is concerned Israel, as a nation, is seen by God as His firstborn son. As we have seen elsewhere, this places Israel as being part of a family, with the status of the elder brother among the family of nations. Then, later, we learn that God speaks of Jesus as being His ‘beloved Son in whom He is well pleased,’ making Jesus the elder brother within the family of Israel. But then the family gets bigger still as believers are individually adopted into it. As sons, therefore, we are inheritors of an eternal kingdom alongside the Jewish people and in which Jesus is our brother. We share in all the privileges and benefits of being part of a royal family in which we are princes and princesses. How do you feel about that?

We must be honest, when we are talking about the cross, to point out that the death of Jesus, if that had been the end of the story, would have achieved nothing. It really would have been the end of a very nice man, someone who was kind to children, was a prophet and a healer, but who would be forgotten and ignored now, except possibly by a few historians. But just as the cross was an integral part of God’s redemptive plan for mankind, so was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Philippians 3:20-21...

'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'

What we can derive from these verses is that the cross is an open doorway into the LIFE of Jesus. His resurrection now means that the power that raised Him from the dead is now available to release His life into me, so that, when I am born again, I receive into my innermost being the same life that Jesus was resurrected into.

Romans 8:19-22...

'For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.'

The whole of creation is waiting; there is a tingle of expectation, which is waiting first for the revelation of the sons of God. A slightly difficult expression to understand perhaps, but one I think that ties in very well with **Romans 11:25....**

'For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part had happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.'

The verse shows very clearly the link between the restoration of the Jewish people and the Church of true believers – that the blindness imposed on the Jews by God will not be removed until the full number of the Gentiles has come in to the kingdom. After all of that, and a lot of other things take place too, creation itself will be redeemed – by the bringing in of a new heaven and a new earth – **Revelation 21:1-2.**

The cross will be the means through which the powers of evil in this present age will be disarmed, later to be followed by the destruction of Satan and all his powers, as he is thrown into the Lake of Fire – the eternal destiny of all not of God. (**Revelation 20:10**). **Matthew 25:31-46** is an important scripture in terms of the judgement of the nations following Jesus' second coming. **Colossians 2:15** speaks of the demonic powers being disarmed and defeated. **1 John 3:8** defines Jesus' task as being to destroy the works of Satan, and so on.

The final purpose of the cross is that it will be the means whereby, through the advent of the new heaven and the new earth, all the pain, tears, sadness and sorrow of the present age will give way unspeakable joy and gladness in the new.

Revelation 21:3-4...

'And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'

This statement is supported by words written centuries earlier, in **Isaiah 25:8...**

'He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.'

Several points are made in these declarations – first that God is going to make His habitation with men, in the form of the *Shechinah*, the Shekinah glory. Secondly, Jesus confirms that all the consequences of man's original sin, and the curse upon mankind (**Genesis 3:16-19**), will be completely removed. There is another declaration in **verse 5** which says that the future Eternal Kingdom is guaranteed, because the one making the promise is faithful and true. Finally, the rebuke that has followed the Jewish people will be taken away, and death will be no more.

THE APPLICATION OF THE CROSS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER.

Romans 6:6-7...

'...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died is free from sin.'

There is something in these verses that doesn't, on the face of it, sound very attractive – it's called co-crucifixion. That tends to raise a few eyebrows, a few questions as well, and we need to ask these of ourselves. For instance: Have I made up my mind about the sin that is in my life? Do I agree with God's judgement of it? Do I understand that sin in my life must die? Am I prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to search me and provoke me until I fully realise what my sin really is? If we answer 'yes' we shall come to the place of agreeing with God's verdict on how to dispose of the sin. It is no use us trying to curb it, we can't compromise with it, we can't counteract it; what we have to do is all we can do – crucify it.

Romans 8:1-2...

'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.'

The first part of this verse is very comforting – no future condemnation. Great! But then it says, *'..who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.'* Aha! A snag, for that means there is a condition to be met and it's got something to do with our walk. If we walk according to the Spirit of life in Jesus, we shall be free from the law of sin and death. Humm! Lets think about that. What do we mean by our 'walk?' To start with it's got nothing to do with how we put one foot in front of the other. I think it's this. I believe it is a term used to describe the way we live our lives. To walk means a movement, generally in a forward direction, that leads towards a destination. We already know what is our ultimate destination – it is to dwell with God in the Eternal Kingdom.

But Jesus set a few standards before we can apply. First, is our attitude like that of the man in **Luke 9:57** – *'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go?'* If it is, and you mean it, Jesus adds a cautionary note, in **Luke 9:23-24**:

'If anyone desire to come after Me, let him deny Himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.'

To deny ourselves means we disown all our perceived rights in order to follow Him. It's not giving up chocolates, or sticky toffee pudding, it's nothing like that. It means we give up the right to live our lives the way we want to and we reject all those things that are opposed to the will of God for our lives. We can get quite a lot of help in this because Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to be our teacher, counsellor and guide.

- a. It is the Holy Spirit who works in our lives to help us to be like Jesus, **Romans 8:26-29**.
- b. The victory that Jesus had over temptation and sin we also can have, **1 Corinthians 15:57**.
- c. And Jesus Himself brings healing to spirit, soul and body, **1 Peter 2:24**.

HEALING AND THE CROSS.

In your notes there is a question, 'Is healing included in the atonement and is it available this side of heaven?' I take 'atonement' to mean the moment of reconciliation, for it seems

to me the terms are synonymous – the moment when, through our response, we experience our redemption. Bear in mind that there must be a response otherwise the cross and the resurrection will be ineffective in our lives – as though they had never happened. The answer to the earlier question, then, in terms of our experience, is yes, but not always. We do not have to wait for heaven to be healed for God is sovereign, and He is the healer. Whether the healing is applied or not is therefore in His hands, not ours.

Isaiah 53:3-4... This is a very familiar passage so we won't read it, just note a few things about it. In **verse 3** the word translated 'sorrow' is interchangeable in translation with 'pains', and the word used for 'grief' can also mean 'sickness' or 'disease'. If we believe, therefore, that Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross and that we can be cleansed by His blood then we should rightly be able to expect that, by His taking our pains and sicknesses, our grief and our sorrow, He is also able to bring healing and wholeness to us in all of these things.

There is a Greek word in the New Testament that is invariably translated as 'salvation.' The word is *sōtēriah*, (soh-tay-ree-ah), but, as well as salvation it can equally well be translated 'health', and also 'deliverance'. Another Greek word is *sōzō*, (soad-zoh), which we find translated as 'save' but it can also mean 'heal', 'preserve' and 'make whole'. Looking at **Luke 19:9-10**, therefore, these verses can be read as: *'And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation, health and deliverance, has come to this house, because he (Zacchaeus) also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of man has come to seek and to save, preserve and make whole that which was lost.'*

We should be able to see by now, I hope, that the cross is effective in both saving us from our sins and also healing us of our sicknesses. Physical, emotional and spiritual healing is available to us, as we may see from various accounts in Scripture. Consider **Mark 5:21-34**. There are two people involved in this account, Jairus's daughter, and the woman with the haemorrhage, both the child and the woman being healed through Jesus' ministry. **Luke 7:50; Acts 4:9-12; James 5:15**.

It is salvation, therefore, that does more than transfer us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God. It also brings with it healing of the body and restoration of the soul.

Wholeness, in spirit, soul and body, the total being of men and women, is available through the cross.

As I said earlier, the effectiveness of the cross in our lives is determined by our response to the message communicated by it. God's desire is that we respond positively – through belief, as in **John 3:16**, and with repentance, as in **2 Peter 3:9**;

- a. Through belief, another way of saying faith, through total trust and dependency upon God's provision and promises through Jesus, **Hebrews 11:1**.
- b. Through repentance, not remorse, but by totally turning away from our old ways, beginning to make right choices, and changing all our old behaviour patterns.

Finally, when we have done all we shall find ourselves seated with Jesus in the heavenly places. Read **Ephesians 1 and 2** for confirmation of this.