

# "The death of the cross"

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### **1-1-1 The Background To The Crucifixion**

This study begins with the moment when the crowd chose Barabbas, upon which the Lord is flogged and handed over for crucifixion. The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. The following table makes this apparent. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man...this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all. A going through of the whole process of trial and crucifixion should make us revolt at our own nature, to the point of being ashamed we have anything to do with our own race. Such intensity of repulsion is probably far too rare in our spiritual experience.

### **The Possibility Of Avoiding The Cross**

It was probably inevitable that the swaying back and forth of Pilate's opinion as to whether to release Him, had some effect on the Lord Jesus. Our study of the background to the crucifixion must bear this in mind. Any bearer of human nature would have held some kind of bated breath, in case he did suddenly release Him. This is made all the more potent in the Lord's case because all the Old Testament types pointed to a last minute deliverance. It is even possible that " Eloi lama sabachthani" was an allusion to the ram caught in the thicket (see later); as if to say: 'Why have you entangled me as the ram, and not saved me as Isaac was saved at the last minute?'. If the Lord even considered the possibility of a last minute deliverance, which He evidently did at least in Gethsemane, the tension within Him was so much greater. He must surely have been tempted to pray those words again as the trial progressed: " If it be possible, let this cup pass..." . But perhaps instead His prayers were simply that the Father's will would be done; and He knew what that was. And yet the Lord

must have considered that Pilate's release of a prisoner at Passover was a custom requested by the Jews in order to represent the freeing of Israel from certain death in Egypt by the Passover lamb. This must have gone round in the Lord's mind. He was the lamb, as well as the symbol of the people to be saved. Will I be released as they were and would be? But surely I'm the lamb, and the lamb must die before this actually happens? " My God, why hast thou forsaken / entangled me?" , His request for the cup to pass... these are proofs enough that the Lord hadn't got it all neatly sorted out in His mind when it actually came to the crisis of impending death, even though beforehand He had it clearly worked out. The fact He was an intellectual genius, devoted to the study of the OT (one of His phrases can contain eight or more allusions, in perfect context, to the OT), would have meant that He agonized for the right interpretation and foreknowledge of His death experience. He was aware that Psalm 22 was prophetic of His sufferings, and yet the popular Jewish idea at the time was that it was a midrash / commentary on the story of Esther. The intention at that time had been to hang / crucify the Jews, they cried out as to why God had forsaken them, and a way of escape was found, to the extent that it was their enemies that were crucified.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don't under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah's sufferings "unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew "all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: "In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

A theme of the whole record is that Christ gave His life of His own volition. This must be remembered as we reflect upon the background to the crucifixion. His refusal to answer Pilate meant that Pilate had to pronounce Him guilty (Mk. 15:4)- hence his marvel at the Lord's silence, as if the Lord was willingly allowing Himself to be condemned.

We will often have cause to remark that the Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. His mind was evidently full of the word, He would have seen the symbolism of everything far more than we can, from the thorns in His mock crown, to the hyssop being associated with Him at the very end (the hyssop was the fulfilment of types in Ex. 12:8,22; Lev. 14:4,6,49-52; Num. 19:6,18). Often it is possible to see in His words allusions to even seven or eight OT passages, all in context, all relevant. Reflect how His response to Pilate "thou couldest have no power against me" (Jn. 19:11) was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 8, about Rome becoming mighty "but not by his own power". Or how His crucifixion "night to the city" (Jn. 19:20) connected with Jerusalem thereby being guilty of His blood (Dt. 21:3). Or how the mocking "behold the man..." would have been seen by Him as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: "Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father's eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to

the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word. It is inevitable that to someone of His intellectual ability as the Son of God, to a man with His sense of justice and with His knowledge of the Jews and their Law, everything within Him would have cried out at the protracted injustices of His trials. He had the strong sense within Him at this time that He was hated without cause, that the Jews were "mine enemies *wrongfully*" (Ps. 69:4). "Are ye come out as against a thief...? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me" (Mt. 26:55). "Why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me...If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (Jn. 18:21-23). All these indicate a keen sense of injustice. It must have welled up within Him when He saw the servant come with the bowl of water for Pilate to solemnly wash his hands in. Yet His response was one of almost concern for Pilate, lest he think that the guilt was *solely* on him (Jn. 19:11; cp. His concern for Judas' repentance, Jn. 13:27). The Lord did not just passively resign Himself to it with the sense that all would have to be as all would have to be. He struggled with the injustice of it all. Some form of anger even arose, it would seem. This fact must have pushed Him towards that dread precipice of sin. His possession of human nature and the possibility of failure meant that there were times when He was much nearer sin than others. But He didn't just keep away from the precipice, as He didn't spare Himself from being tired and tested by the crowds and thereby drawn closer to the possibility of spiritual failure. He came into this world to show forth the Father's glory, and to do His will was His meat and drink. This hangs like a tapestry to the background to the crucifixion.

### 1-1-2 The Chronology Of The Crucifixion

	<b>Mark 15</b> (A.V. / N.I.V.)	<b>Luke 23</b> (A.V. / R.S.V.)	<b>John 19</b> (A.V. / R.V.)	<b>Commentary</b> <b>on</b> <b>chronology</b>
<b>Matthew 27</b> (A.V.)				
"When he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified" (v.26)	He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over (s.w. delivered up) to be crucified (v.15)	But Jesus he delivered up to their will (v.25)	Then therefore he delivered him unto them to be crucified. (v.16)	1
Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers (v.27)	The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers (v.16)	They took Jesus therefore	2	

And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe	They put a purple robe on him,	3
And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head,	then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him.	4
and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!	And they began to call out to him, " Hail, king of the Jews!" . Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat upon him.	5 " They <i>began</i> " - did something make them stop? The spitting and smiting on the head seem to have been part of the same process.
And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.		
Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him.	This was a repetition of the earlier 'bowing of the knee' recorded in Matthew.	6
And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him	And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him.	7
and led him away to crucify him. and he went out, bearing	Then they led him out to crucify him.	8 9

the cross for  
himself,

And as they      And as they      10  
came out      led him away,

they found a      A certain man      they seized      11  
man of Cyrene,      from Cyrene,      one Simon of  
Simon by      Simon, the      Cyrene, who  
name: him      father of      was coming in  
they compelled      Alexander and      from the  
to bear his      Rufus, was      country, and  
cross.      passing by on      laid on him  
      his way in      the cross, to  
      from the      carry it behind  
      country, and      Jesus.  
      they forced  
      him to carry  
      the cross.

And there      12  
followed him a  
great multitude  
of the people,  
and of women  
who bewailed  
and lamented  
him. But Jesus  
turning to them  
said, "  
Daughters of  
Jerusalem, do  
not weep for  
me, but for  
yourselves and  
for your  
children. For  
behold, the  
days are  
coming when  
they will say,  
'Blessed are  
the barren, and  
the wombs that  
never bore, and  
the breasts that  
never gave  
suck!'. Then  
they will begin  
to say to the  
mountains,

'Fall on us';  
and to the hills,  
'Cover us'. For  
if they do this  
when the wood  
is green, what  
will happen  
when it is  
dry?" .

Two others  
also, who were  
criminals, were  
led away to be  
put to death  
with him.

And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,	They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).	And when they came to the place which is called The Skull,	unto the place called The place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha:	13  He didn't carry His cross all the way to Golgotha; He went out of the guard room with His face set towards Golgotha, as it had been so visibly set on Jerusalem a few weeks before.
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Note the  
emphasis on "  
unto" , " to" ,  
" the place" .  
They arrived.  
They stopped  
there. This  
was it.

they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof,	Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh,	14
--	---	----

he would not drink.	but he did not take it.			
And they crucified him,	And when they had crucified him,	there they crucified him,	where they crucified him,	15
and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.	and with him two others, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.	16	John is saying the same thing twice- to emphasize Christ's enthronement between criminals.	

And Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. And there was written, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title therefore read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the Jews therefore said to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but, that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate	17	The victim had to wear the title to be placed on His cross around His neck as He carried His cross. It is unlikely that the placard was put on the cross after it had already been erected. It seems reasonable to conclude that the placard was taken from the Lord's neck and nailed to the cross before it was lifted upright. Therefore John's chronology is to be followed.
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answered,  
What I have  
written, I have  
written.

And Jesus said, 18  
" Father,  
forgive them;  
for they know  
not what they  
do" .

and parted his garments,  
casting lots:  
that it might be fulfilled which  
was spoken by the prophet,  
They parted my garments  
among them,  
and upon my vesture did  
they cast lots.

they parted his garments,  
casting lots upon them,  
what every man should  
take.

And they cast lots to divide  
his garments.

The soldiers 19  
therefore,  
when they had crucified  
Jesus, took his garments, and  
made four parts, to every  
soldier a part;  
and also the coat: now the  
coat was without seam,  
woven from the top  
throughout.  
They said therefore one  
to another, let us not rend it,  
but cast lots for it, whose it  
shall be: that the scripture  
might be fulfilled,  
which saith,  
They parted my garments  
among them,  
and upon my vesture did  
they cast lots.  
These things therefore the  
soldiers did.

And it was the 20  
third hour, and

they crucified him.

And sitting down they watched him there; And the people stood by, watching; 21

and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 22

At the same time, two robbers were crucified with him, one at his right hand, and the other at his left And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. Matthew acknowledges that he is backtracking. He and Mark record this out of sequence. It seems that the thieves were impaled at the same time, but Matthew and Mark put all the focus upon Jesus. 23

But there was standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he said 24

This incident could be placed early on in the crucifixion. "But..." connects it with the dividing of the clothes, probably because Mary had made them. If we are to

unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home.

understand that John took Mary away from the cross to his own home (although this is not actually required by the text), he would have needed time to do this and then return in order to see the end (Jn. 19:35).

However, it is also possible that the Lord said these words just prior to His final words; "After this, Jesus knowing that all things are now finished..." . It was as if He only bade good-bye to His mother at the very end.

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself.

And they that railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself,

and come down from the cross.

27

26

If thou be the  
Son of God,  
come down  
from the cross. 28

Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,	Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes,	but the rulers scoffed at him, saying,	29 Mt. & Mk. record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear.
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He saved others; himself he cannot save.	He saved others; himself he cannot save.	" He saved others;	30
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let him save  
himself, if he  
is the Christ of  
God, His  
Chosen One!" . 31

If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.	Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.	32
---	--	----

He trusted in  
God: let him  
deliver him  
now, if he will  
have him: for  
he said, I am  
the Son of  
God. 33

The soldiers 34  
also mocked  
him, coming  
up and offering  
him vinegar,  
and saying, " If  
you are the  
King of the  
Jews, save  
yourself!" .

There was also 35  
an inscription  
over him, "  
This is the  
King of the  
Jews" .

This is out of  
sequence; the  
inscription  
was placed at  
the actual  
impalement  
(see note  
above). Luke  
seems to  
imply that the  
mocking was  
because of  
this placard; it  
must have  
been a very  
unusual crime  
to die for,  
contrasting  
sharply with  
the usual  
reasons for  
death which  
were  
displayed on  
crosses.

The thieves 36  
also, which  
were crucified  
with him, cast  
the same in his  
teeth. And they that  
were crucified  
with him  
reviled him.

And one of the 37  
malefactors  
which were  
hanged railed  
on him, saying, He had just  
said this, in  
unison with

If thou be the other thief.  
 Christ, save Now he says  
 thyself, and us. it again with  
 But the other more  
 answering vehemence.  
 rebuked him,  
 saying, Dost  
 not thou fear  
 God, seeing  
 thou art in the  
 same  
 condemnation?  
 And we indeed  
 justly; for we  
 receive the due  
 reward of our  
 deeds: but this  
 man hath done  
 nothing amiss.  
 And he said  
 unto Jesus,  
 Lord,  
 remember me  
 when thou  
 comest into thy  
 kingdom. And  
 Jesus said unto  
 him, Verily I  
 say unto thee,  
 Today shalt  
 thou be with  
 me in paradise.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.	And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.	And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.	38
---	--	--	----

And the sun was darkened, and the vail of the temple was rent in the midst.	39 Mk. 15:38 implies that the veil was rent completely when Christ died; therefore
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this was only  
an initial tear.  
If this  
interpretation  
is correct,  
why did it  
occur at the  
sixth hour?  
Was it  
because at this  
point the Lord  
Jesus reached  
a certain stage  
of victory?  
Alternatively,  
" the veil of  
the temple  
was rent in the  
midst" should  
be connected  
with the  
following  
verse 46,  
concerning  
the death of  
Christ. This  
would mean  
that the veil  
was rent just  
before Christ  
actually  
expired, as if  
God foresaw  
that the  
victory  
actually had  
been  
achieved, and  
therefore tore  
down the veil  
of partition  
between Him  
and men a few  
seconds  
before the  
actual death.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried  
And at the ninth hour Jesus cried 40

<p>with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?</p>	<p>with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?</p>
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<p>Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth Elias.</p>	<p>And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.</p>	<p>41</p>
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<p>After this Jesus, knowing that all things are now finished, that the scripture might be fulfilled (Gk. finished, not fulfilled), saith, I thirst.</p>	<p>42 I insert this at this point because it seems that after having quoted the first verse of Ps. 22, the Lord wanted moisture in order to finish quoting the Psalm aloud. They think He calls for Elias (confusing 'Eliyahu' with 'Eloi Eloi'), He says " I thirst" , they bring vinegar; but Matthew says that immediately after He said " Eloi Eloi" they ran to get vinegar. Therefore the</p>
--	---



" I thirst"  
 must have  
 been said  
*immediately*  
 after " Eloi  
 Eloi" , in the  
 same sentence  
 almost.

<p>And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.</p>	<p>And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone: let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.</p>	<p>There was set there a vessel full of vinegar: so they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon hyssop, and brought it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said,</p>	<p>43</p>
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<p>And Jesus cried with a loud voice,</p>	<p>And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said,</p>	<p>It is finished: and he bowed his head</p>	<p>44</p>
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<p>Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. " Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired" (Diaglott).</p>	<p>and gave up the spirit.</p> <p>and having said thus,</p> <p>he gave up the spirit.</p>	<p>Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:</p>	<p>and gave up the spirit.</p> <p>45</p> <p>" Again" - after " It is finished" .          The Diaglott of Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry <i>was</i> the giving up of the spirit.</p>
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<p>And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom;</p>	<p>And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.</p>	<p>46</p> <p>See notes above re. Luke's record of this.</p>
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and the earth 47  
did quake, and  
the rocks rent; This is a clear  
and the graves example of  
were opened; how the  
and many record of the  
bodies of the crucifixion is  
saints which not strictly  
slept arose, and chronological.  
came out of the  
graves after his  
resurrection,  
and went into  
the holy city,  
and appeared  
unto many.

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.	And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the spirit, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.	Now when the 48 centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.
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And all the 49  
people that  
came together  
to that sight,  
beholding the  
things which  
were done,  
smote their  
breasts, and  
returned.

And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee,	There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene,	And all his 50 acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off,
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ministering and Mary the beholding  
unto him: mother of these things.  
among which James the less  
was Mary and of Joses,  
Magdalene, and Salome;  
and Mary the (Who also,  
mother of when he was  
James and in Galilee,  
Joses, and the followed him,  
mother of and  
Zebedee's ministered  
children. unto him:)  
and many  
other women,  
which came  
up with him  
unto  
Jerusalem

The Jews 51  
therefore,  
because it was " The cross"  
the singular-  
Preparation, again, the  
that the bodies emphasis is  
should not focused on the  
remain on the cross of  
cross upon the Christ.  
Sabbath (for  
the day of that  
Sabbath was a  
high day),  
asked of Pilate  
that their legs  
might be  
broken, and  
that they might  
be taken away.  
The soldiers  
therefore  
came, and  
broke the legs  
of the first, and  
of the other  
which was  
crucified with  
him: but when  
they came to  
Jesus, and saw  
that he was

dead already,  
 they brake not  
 his legs:  
 howbeit one of  
 the soldiers  
 with a spear  
 pierced his  
 side, and  
 straightway  
 there came out  
 blood and  
 water. And he  
 that hath seen  
 hath borne  
 witness, and  
 his witness is  
 true; and he  
 knoweth that  
 he saith true,  
 that ye also  
 may believe.  
 For these  
 things came to  
 pass, that the  
 scripture might  
 be fulfilled, A  
 bone of him  
 shall not be  
 broken. And  
 again another  
 scripture saith,  
 They shall  
 look on him  
 whom they  
 pierced.

When the even was come, there	Now when the even was come, because	And, behold, there was a man named	And after these things	52
came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:	it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the	Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just: (the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathea,	Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews,	

Kingdom of God, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the Kingdom of God.

he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. This man asked of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: 53

And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. 54

Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. and Pilate gave him leave. 55

And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And there came also Nicodemus, he who at the first came to him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight. So they took the body of Jesus, and 56

bound it in  
 linen clothes  
 with the  
 spices, as the  
 custom of the  
 Jews is to  
 bury. Now in  
 the place  
 where he was  
 crucified there  
 was a garden;  
 and in the  
 garden a new  
 tomb, wherein  
 was never  
 man yet laid.  
 There laid  
 they Jesus  
 therefore  
 because of the  
 Jews'  
 Preparation  
 day; for the  
 sepulchre was  
 nigh at hand.

<p>And Mary          Magdalene and          Mary the          mother of          Joses beheld          where he was          laid.</p>	<p>And the          women also,          which came          with him from          Galilee,          followed          after, and          beheld the          sepulchre, and          how his body          was laid.</p>	<p>57          Note the          emphasis that          the women          came with          Him from          Galilee.</p>
--	---	--

And there was 58  
 Mary  
 Magdalene,  
 and the other  
 Mary, sitting  
 over against  
 the sepulchre.  
 And they  
 returned, and  
 prepared spices  
 and ointments;  
 and rested the

Sabbath day  
according to  
the  
commandment.

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### 1-1-3 Spiritual Culture

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that " He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses " an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a " son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or " a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV " an evil speaker" ). The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did. Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: " He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his

mouth" . A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

### **1-1-4-1 The Flogging / Scourging**

1 As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions <sup>(1)</sup>.

Scourging was usually " accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms...It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't" <sup>(2)</sup>.

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered...they crucify...and part...casting lots...crucified...was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting...they clothe him...they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him...".



All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading under foot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "while they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "How", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: "Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..." take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind...this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me..." . Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers

once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analyzing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

v. 10	v. 11
always	For we which live are alway
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus	delivered unto death for Jesus' sake
that the life also of Jesus	that the life also of Jesus
might be manifest in our body	might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross.

## Notes

- (1) John Pollock, *The Master* (Victor Books, 1985), p. 160.
- (2) Frank C. Tribbe, *Portrait Of Jesus* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983).

### 1-1-4-2 Ongoing Crucifixion And Death

It is helpful to consider in more detail the Lord's prophecies of this moment of handing over. He said that He would be, in the future, delivered up (Lk. 9:44); but the parallel Mk. 9:31 records Him saying: "I *am* delivered up". And Lk. 24:7 says that at this time, He told them that He *must be* delivered up. It is possible that He said all three things in one sentence, such as His emphasis: "I must be delivered up, I will be delivered up, in fact I am now being delivered up". He saw the future experience of the cross as being fulfilled in His daily experience of life. John the Baptist beheld the Lord Jesus walking, and commented that He *was then*, as He walked, the lamb of God (with all the sacrificial overtones of that phrase), that *takes away*, right then, three years before the cross, the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). The cross was to Christ a baptism He was being baptized with, it was only accomplished in His physical death; the process was ongoing (Lk. 12:50). By inviting the disciples to share His cup and His baptism, He was offering them there and then a part in the life of self-crucifixion, which found its natural and final articulation in the death of the cross. He deftly poured out the wine as a symbol that His life was even then being poured out (Lk. 22:19). He spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying down* his life for the sheep...I *am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand. He speaks of "the cup that I *shall* drink of, and...the baptism that I *am* baptized with" (Mt. 20:22). This sheds light on four occasions when the Lord appears to use tenses in a confusing way. He speaks of how He *will* go to die on the cross, but that in a sense "I am" there already. Each of them occurs within the context of Him foretelling His death on the cross:

- John 7:33-34: "Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come". He then went on to foretell how that out of His pierced side there would come the water of the Spirit. "Where I am" is parallel with "I am going...". Note in passing that He saw the cross as a going to the Father. There the Father was especially manifested.

- John 12:24-26: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me ['following' Christ is normally used by Him in the context of the need to take up His cross and follow Him]; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour". Losing life as the Lord lost His, serving Him, following Him, being "where I am" are all parallel.

- Jn. 12:38 speaks of how the Jews refused to believe in Jesus whilst He was still alive- and yet by doing so, John says, they fulfilled Is. 53:1: "Who hath believed our report". But the "report" there was clearly the message of the cross. It's as if John applies a clear prophecy about the cross to people's response to Jesus during His lifetime.

- John 14:2-4: "[in response to Peter's question as to where Jesus was now going to disappear to, i.e. in death] I go to prepare a place for you [through His death on the cross]. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again [in resurrection], and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know [He had often told them of His forthcoming death]."

- John 17:24: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". John opens his gospel with reference to the fact that they *did* behold His glory. His glory was especially manifested in His death, as shown elsewhere in these studies and in 'The rock that followed them'. "Where I am" and His future glorification are linked into one and the same event, even though the glorification was not then apparent. This use of language is to be connected with the way John's Gospel speaks several hours of the hour coming, and yet having already come (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:32). I have suggested in *The Cross In John's Gospel* that all these references have application to the Lord's death.

Incident after incident in the mortal life of Jesus had echoes of the crucifixion to come. Consider how He met the woman at the well "at the sixth hour" (Gk.), He was thirsty, a woman got Him something to drink and encouraged Him in His work (Jn. 4:6 cp. 19:14,28). No wonder He spoke of His meeting with her as a finishing of the Father's work, which is the very language of the cross. He lived out the essence of the cross in that incident, just as we do, day by day. Jn. 8:28,30 records that He predicted that when He was crucified, then His people would believe on Him; yet "As he spake these things, many believed on him", there and then. There was such congruence between His message of crucifixion and His actual life, that people believed there and then, even before seeing the actual crucifixion. His life was a crucified life, and it elicited faith in those who perceived this.

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final

outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life. He could take the bread and say that "this *is* my body which *is being given* [Gk.] for you"; He saw His sacrifice as already ongoing even before He left the upper room. The cross therefore manifested the real Christ; "He was manifested, that he might put sins away" (1 Jn. 3:5) could suggest that in His atoning death, 'He' was manifested. There God set forth Jesus in His blood, for all to see and respond to (Rom. 3:25 Gk.). There the real essence of Jesus was publicly shown forth. And there we come to know what love is (1 Jn. 3:16). In similar vein we know that the promises were confirmed by the death of the Lord; and yet "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). "In him" is put for 'on account of His death which confirmed them'. 'He' was His death and His cross. In the preceding verse, Paul has spoken of "Christ crucified". He was brought to the cross a man who had already died unto sin; and the very quick time in which He died reflected how physically worn out His body was, in reflection of how sin had virtually already been put to death in Him.

In Gethsemane He spoke of drinking the cup of His final death and suffering. But earlier He had spoken in the present tense: "the cup that I drink of...the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mk. 10:38). The drinking of the cup of death was ongoing. Likewise there are several verses in Psalms 22 and 69 which are evidently relevant to both the Lord's life and also His final hours on the cross. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" is in the context of the cross, but is applied to an earlier period of the Lord's life (Ps. 69:9 cp. Jn. 2:17). "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" is another example (Ps. 69:8); it is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet it is elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. The Lord taught that taking the cross was to be paralleled with loving family members less than Him (Mt. 10:36-38). In the incidents where the Lord Himself showed a relative lack of love for His natural family (Mk. 3:21,22,31-35) He was therefore living out the essence of the cross. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. Luke saw this link between the Lord's death and His whole life when he says that they had been "eyewitnesses" of the Lord's ministry, using the Greek word for autopsy- Luke saw his record of the Lord's life as being an autopsy of His death (Lk. 1:2). Perhaps this idea explains why Paul likens the Lord on the cross to the body of the criminal lifted up *after* death, not in order to lead to death (Gal. 3:13; Dt. 21:23)- as if he understood the Lord to have been effectively dead unto sin at the time the body was lifted up on the cross. He was there the propitiation for our sins, and yet He is that now, each time we sin (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:10).

"Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" was fulfilled both in the final, friendless rejection of the crucifixion, and also in the failure of Israel to really believe as a result of the Lord's miracles done during His life (Jn. 12:48). When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He

brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived. "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" is how Is. 53 described the cross; but these words are quoted in Mt. 8:16,17 about the Lord's healing of people. The miracles therefore were performed in the spirit of the cross- personally identifying with the sick and healing them through that identification.

His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. "Who hath believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38). "He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, Jesus bore the sin of the world. He was glorified in His death (although the world didn't see it that way), as well as in His life (Jn. 12:23,29). In His preaching to the woman at the well, the Lord saw Himself as 'finishing God's work' (Jn. 4:32,34). And yet John evidently intends us to connect this incident with the Lord's final cry from the cross which he records: "It is finished!". Only on the cross was the work finished; but by pushing aside His own hunger, tiredness and desire for solitude in order to convert that woman, the Lord even then was 'finishing the Father's work', in that in essence He was living out the spirit of crucifixion. And so with us; the life of ongoing crucifixion demands that we consciously push ourselves in the service of others. Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it...the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men...the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?' but, 'How much can I *give*?' Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?'"<sup>(1)</sup>.

The cross of Christ is personified in Phil. 3:18, as if to show that the Lord's whole being and life was crystallized in His cross. He could take the bread and wine with the comment that *right then* His body was being broken and His blood shed (note the present tenses). The Jews "slew (Jesus) and hanged (him) on a tree" (Acts 5:30). There seems to be a distinction here; as if the 'slaying' was an ongoing process in His ministry, crowned by the final hanging on the tree. Paul speaks similarly in Galatians; as if the body was already dead when it was lifted up on the tree; for he quotes the Mosaic law regarding the body of a dead criminal being displayed on a tree as if it was descriptive of the Lord's death (Gal. 3:13 cp. Dt. 21:23). The veil symbolized the flesh of the Lord; and yet in it was woven scarlet, a symbol of His blood and sacrifice (Ex. 27:16), which permeated His mortal life. The lesson is that the cross is a daily way of life. The Lord taught this when He asked us to take up the cross daily: to live each day in the exercise of the same principles which He lived and died by. Let's not see spiritual life as a survival of a few crises, as and when they present themselves. It's a way of life, and the principles which lead us to the little victories (when we scald ourselves with hot water, when we dirty a newly washed shirt...) will give us the greater ones also, when (e.g.) we stand before a tribunal, or face death in whatever form. Paul speaks of "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10), as if he full well understood the ongoing nature of the Lord's crucifixion, and saw it as the pattern of his daily living. And this is why the place of crucifixion was so public- it was near a road, for passers by spoke to the crucified Jesus (Mk. 15:29), and Simon was a passerby coming in from the field (Gk. *agros*, Lk. 23:26). The cross confronted people in their daily living, just as it should us today. Quintillian (*Declamationes* 274) records how crucifixions were always held in the most

public places where crowds would gather. For us, if we are living the crucified life with Jesus, it cannot be done in a corner.

Crucifixion is by its very nature a public event. There was once a doctor in Paraguay who spoke out against human rights abuses. Local police took their revenge by torturing his teenage son to death. The local people wanted to stage a huge protest march, but the father disallowed them and chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son's body as it was when retrieved from jail- naked, scarred from electric shocks, cigarette burns and beatings. And the body was displayed not in a coffin but on the blood-soaked prison mattress. This public display of a body was the most powerful witness and incitement possible. And the public nature of the display of God's tortured son was for the same basic reason. Rom. 4:25 states that the Lord in His death was "set forth to be a propitiation". Graham Jackman comments: "Though the primary meaning of the word 'set forth' (*protithemi*) seems to be that of 'determining' or 'purposing', another sense, albeit not in the New Testament, is said to be that of exposing the bodies of the dead to public view, as in a lying in state" (2).

These ideas help us understand more clearly why the Lord chose to be baptized. He understood baptism as a symbol of his death (Lk. 12:50). Rom. 6:3-5 likewise makes the connection between baptism and crucifixion. The Lord knew that He would be crucified, and yet He lived out the essence of it in His own baptism.

One of the common Aramaic Passover sayings at the time of Jesus was: "Behold this is the bread of affliction which our fathers did eat as they came out of Egypt. Whoever hungers, let him come and eat, and whoever is in need, let him come and keep the Passover". The Passover Haggadah of today includes virtually the same words. Now it is evident that Jesus several times in the course of His life alluded to these words. He spoke of how all who were hungry, who were heavy burdened, should "come" unto Him. And the bread which He gave would constantly satisfy. The conclusion surely is that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. He lived out the essence of the cross in His life.

In similar vein, there are evident parallels between Paul's account of the breaking of bread, and the Lord's words about the giving of His body. There is no record of the great preaching commission in John, but he does in fact record it in more spiritual and indirect ways. And likewise there is no account of the breaking of bread, but in fact he has already recorded the essence of it in the discourse about the bread and wine of life in Jn. 6:

Jn. 6:51	1 Cor. 11:24
The bread which I will give	This
Is my flesh	Is my body
For the life of the world	Which is for you

Note in passing how 'we' are 'the world' to Jesus. And He likewise should be our world, as we are to Him. The word of interpretation which Jesus spoke over the emblems was a reflection of the way the head of the family explained the meaning of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread to the participants during the Passover meal. But before His death, during His life, the Lord Jesus as it were proclaimed this word of interpretation over His own body. The conclusion is clearly that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover

lamb. This explains why so much stress is made upon His "blood" saving us, when crucifixion was in fact a relatively bloodless death. It wasn't as if the Lord was killed by His blood being poured out. But it was the life which the blood represented which was the essential basis of our redemption. And that life was lived out over 33 years, not just in the 6 hours of crucifixion. All this means that the spirit of the cross must be lived out in daily life; not merely in occasional acts of heroism, nor only in occasional acts of commitment or religious duty, such as attending ecclesial meetings. The cross was and is a life lived.

Not only was the Lord's death ongoing during His life. It was normal to write over the crucified 'This *was*...' But over the Lord it was written: 'This *is* Jesus', as if for all time, this was His memorial to all generations. Jn. 3:13,14 link the Lord's ascension to Heaven, and His 'lifting up' on the cross. They were all part of the same, saving process. Likewise the atonement is a function of His death and resurrection combined; it was only the empty tomb that gave the cross any power at all. It continues now, in that men can crucify Him afresh, and even now put Him to an open ['naked'] shame. They can strip Him naked and leave Him mocked before men- in their behaviour unworthy of His Name, in the schisms amongst them... The new wine, representing the blood of Jesus, gushes / pours out again each time a life fails to respond to \Him in radical change (Mt. 9:17; the same word is found in Lk. 22:20: "This is... my blood which *is shed* for you"). John seems to purposefully make the point that the Lord *was sent* [as a one time act in the past] "to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). In His blood covered body, He was the place of propitiation, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. And yet: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: for He *is* [right now, each time we sin] the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 2:1,2). In obtaining forgiveness for us He in some way goes through again the essence of His sacrifice. It is too simplistic to say that we repent, and God forgives. He does, but only on the basis of Christ's atoning act that must come ever before Him in the granting of forgiveness. The Mosaic offerings of blood "before Yahweh" all pointed forward to this fact. Awful as His actual physical sufferings were 2000 years ago, we should not separate them from the work He came to do- of obtaining our redemption. He worked this work in His life, on the cross, and continues it until this day. The daily morning and evening sacrifice had to be of a first year lamb without blemish- the identical specification for the Passover lamb. His death on the cross at Passover was the same as His daily life of sacrifice.

The risen and exalted Lord is spoken of as being shamed, being crucified afresh, as agonizing in prayer for us just as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:24 cp. Heb. 5:7-9). On the cross, He made intercession for us (Is. 53:11,12); but now He ever liveth to make such intercession (Heb. 7:25). There He bore our sins; and yet now He still bears our sins (Is. 53:4-6. 11). Somehow, the cross is still there. The blood of Jesus cleanses us, in the present tense, from all our sins; the Lord Jesus loves us and frees us from our sins by His blood (1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). We are cleansed by an ever 'freshly slain' sacrifice (Heb. 10:20 Gk.). We are to go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, his 'having it cast in the teeth' (Gk.; Heb. 13:13). It's as if He is still there, outside the city gates, and we shoulder our crosses and His reproach as He walked the Via Dolorosa, and go out to be crucified next to Him, as we endure being fools for Christ's sake in our worldly decisions. It's a rather strange idea, at first consideration. But His sufferings are ongoing. The cross is still there- wherever we go, and however far we fall away from Him. Heb. 9:24,25 speaks of the Lord's sacrifice as occurring in the Heavenly sanctuary, Heaven itself- as if the cross is an eternally repeated redemptive act. We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small

kindred between His cross and ours. He remembers how it was, and sees the commonality of feeling which we have attained.

And there is something deeper than this. The Lord's self-crucifixion spirit was seen not only in His life and then finally in His death and subsequent life; but who He was in His mortal life, He will *eternally* be. He is the same yesterday as today and as for ever. He will dress Himself to serve us, as a servant, in His future Kingdom (Lk. 12:37 NIV), reminiscent of how at the last supper and on the cross He in principle did the same (Phil. 2:7). Thus the spirit of the cross must be a way of life, and this feature of our characters will be seen in the Kingdom too.

This theme is far from merely fascinating in exegetical terms. "Therefore we *are* buried with him by baptism into death...knowing this, that our old man *is* crucified with him" (Rom 6:4,6). Every time someone is baptized, the Lord as it were goes through His death for them again. And yet baptism is an ongoing process, of dying daily. We are in Christ, connected every moment with the life and living out of His cross. We *are* dying with Him, our old man *is* crucified with Him because His death is an ongoing one. "It is Christ that died... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom 8:34-36). According to Isaiah 53, He on the cross was the sheep for the slaughter; but all in Him are *all day long* counted as sharing His death, as we live out the same self-control, the same spirit of love and self-giving for others, regardless of their response...

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## Notes

- (1) William Barclay, *The Gospel Of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 122.
- (2) Graham Jackman, *The Language Of The Cross* (Lulu, 2008) p. 68.

### 1-1-4-3 The Bruising Of Christ

2 There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16; and notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

3 Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back.

4 The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did (see 24). His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*.



He willed (*not* " pleased" , as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruising') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross.

It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody.

It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).

5 J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it<sup>(4)</sup>. It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption.

The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that " Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), " Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and *kept on* saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying " ...save thyself" , *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

The shame of the cross is another theme of the records. The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don't usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring "such contradiction of sinners against Himself" . These mockings were therefore part of " the cross" . The " cross" process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life* of cross carrying. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles. As " the cross" means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise " the blood of Christ" means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's grace. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

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## Notes

(1) J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

### 1-1-4-4 " A sheep before her shearers"

6 Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: " as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent" . The LXX has: "Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job's experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always "greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice.

The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family <sup>(1)</sup>. "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments <sup>(2)</sup>. All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband" <sup>(3)</sup>. And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

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## Notes

(1) V.C. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *The Social World Of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) pp. 28-29.

(2) B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993) p. 54.

(3) Diane Jacobs-Malina, *Beyond Patriarchy: The Images Of Family In Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1993) p.2.

## 1-1-5 The Walk To Golgotha

7 Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will...* that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all " to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally,

and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).

The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs...just two more...last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): " It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)" .

The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations.

The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

8 John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: " They got him to a place Golgotha" . It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint,

there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the " Where am I?" , the memory and consciousness flooding back. " Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

John's statement that " He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* (Jn. 17:13) just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross—not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, " my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever " rejoicing" , " my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

9 " The crossbar was carried...weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar" [\(1\)](#) . This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost

sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

10 Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness...and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else...until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

11 He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others*

throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'.

" If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

14 They arrived at the destination. " Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum [which Christ carried] would be secured" (Edwards, *op cit.*). The Lord would doubtless have meditated upon it. The cross was waiting. All He had to do was carry the cross bar. His invitation to men to carry the cross to the place where the other part of that instrument of death was already prepared must be seen in this light. The way for our self-crucifixion is prepared. We carry but the cross bar.

To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? " When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).

- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.

- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) " Father, forgive them" , and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.

- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have



been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

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## Notes

(1) W.D. Edwards, *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, JAMA March 21 1986, Vol. 255 No. 11).

### 1-1-6-1 The Crucifixion Of Christ

15 The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. The text suggests there may have been a gap of minutes between them arriving at the place and the actual nailing.

He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm...four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

### The Real Cross

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today" <sup>(9)</sup>. And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious

duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity, would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death

on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects... an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the maldistribution of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. " If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

**16** The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

#### 1-1-6-2 The Inscription On The Cross

17 See chronology note. Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "

King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. The declaration of the Name on the cross is further discussed in *God Manifestation In The Cross*. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

Ps. 40:9,10 speaks of how the Lord Jesus would proclaim righteousness to the *ekklesia* and declare God's faithfulness and salvation, i.e. the things of His Name. Yet this passage is quoted in Heb. 10:5-7 about the cross. It was there above all that "thy law is within my heart" and He "preached righteousness". This is why Paul can talk of "the preaching [which is] the cross". He as He was there is the ultimate witness. And this was why the Yahweh Name was written up over Him.

Note that Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

1-1-7 " Father forgive them"

**18 Because the weight is on the arms, the crucified can't speak easily. The whole conversation between the thief and the Lord would probably have been whispered, with long intervals between words. The final two loud cries of the Lord must have been made with immense pain. It also explains why they confused His " Eli, Eli" with 'Eliyahu' (Elijah); He was probably speaking very quietly. There is no recorded reaction of the crowd to His prayers. Yet Ps. 22:1 speaks of His prayer as a lion roaring to God, and yet He felt that the abuse of the crowd was like the ravening and roaring of a lion (Ps. 22:13). It may be that they hurled abuse back at Him in response to the roaring of His prayers.**

**Note the Lord's appreciation of the Fatherhood of God throughout His passion: Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44; Lk. 23:34,46. Throughout the Gospels, the Lord calls God His Father around 170 times (109 of them in John, as if he noticed this as especially significant). This was a real paradigm breaker for the Jews, who even from the 15 Old Testament references to God as Father, only understood His fatherhood in a national,**

not personal, sense. Yet the Son's relation to the Father has been passed on to us (Mk. 14:36 cp. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The closeness of the Father to the Son, prefigured by that between Abraham and Isaac, is something to be wondered at. " Into thine hand I commit my spirit...thou hast known my soul in adversities" (Ps. 31:7).

### The Sayings From The Cross (1):

#### " Father forgive them"

#### The Seven Last Sayings Of Jesus From The Number of words in Cross Greek

1."Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34)	12
2."Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43)	9
3. " Woman behold thy son!...Behold thy mother!" (Jn. 19:26)	4
4. " My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)	3
5. " I thirst" (Jn. 19:28)	1
6. " It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)	1
7. " Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46)	8

#### Introduction

The pain and difficulty of speech in the position of crucifixion was such that it is apparent that the Lord meant us to hear and meditate upon the words He uttered from the cross. Perhaps it would have been far easier for Him to have prayed those words to Himself, within His own thoughts; but instead He made the effort to speak them out loud. The passion of the Lord's intercessions on the cross is matchless. He roared to God in His prayer, regardless of whether there was light or darkness (Ps. 22:1,2). He reflected there that His prayer was offered to God " in an acceptable time" (Ps. 69:13). And yet this very passage is taken up in 2 Cor. 6:2 concerning the necessary vigour of *our* crying to God for salvation. That the intensity of the Lord's prayerfulness and seeking of God on the cross should be held up as our pattern: the very height of the ideal is wondrous.

It is worth noting that if the Lord's seven recorded utterances are placed in the conventional chronology, the number of words Christ actually spoke can be seen to steadily decrease until the final utterance (although it should be noted that in our reconstruction, saying 3 comes before no. 2).

Not only does this serve to illustrate the intensity of effort wrung forth from our Lord in His final utterance, but we also sense that He found physically speaking increasingly difficult. The picture of a man carrying his cross towards the place of death, the image of a man hanging upon a cross in his time of dying, these are images of a man who finds it *increasingly* difficult to carry on, a man who finds the way harder and harder. And yet these are the very images picked up by our Lord and applied to all those who seek to follow Him.

The conclusion: life in Christ *in a sense* becomes increasingly difficult, it is increasingly difficult to truly hold on to the spirit of our crucified Lord. And yet as so many of us can testify, the possibility of turning back recedes further and further as the months and years go by. " Lord, to whom shall we go?" becomes more and more underlined in our Bibles.

### **" Forgive them"**

" Father forgive them" were the first words said by the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross. It seems from the context that they were said soon after the cross was lifted up into a vertical position and dropped down into the hole prepared for it. Physically, this would have been the time of greatest shock and pain, as the body of Jesus came to rest with its full weight upon the nails, as they tore into the flesh and sinews of His hands and feet. As His nervous system began to fully react, He was in great pain and shock. And yet immediately His thoughts went to forgiving those who had brought this upon Him; and, as we hope to see, His thoughts were immediately with us, with the possibility of our salvation and forgiveness. In this we see a matchless example of being so concerned for the salvation of others, so taken up with a desire to show love to those who hate us, that the physicality of our own sufferings, however immediately and insistently they press, becomes totally relegated.

We must face up to a fundamental question: Who was it that Christ was asking God to forgive? By eliminating who Christ did *not* pray for, we can come towards an answer. Christ did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

### **- Not The Romans**

Forgiveness is related to repentance. There would seem little point in Christ praying for the Roman soldiers to be forgiven. It would be rather like a believer praying for some youths to be forgiven for vandalizing a bus shelter; to what point would this be? Would such a prayer really lead them towards salvation? Would it be an appropriate thing to pray for?

Throughout the Acts, both Peter and Paul accuse the Jews of having crucified Christ, even though the Roman soldiers physically did it. Peter even goes so far as to say that it was their *hands* which placed Jesus on the cross and nailed Him (Acts 2:23- notice how their physical contact with the Lord's body is stressed in Mk. 14:46,53). The Roman hands which did this were effectively Jewish hands. Psalms 22 and 69 outline in some detail the things done to Christ on the cross. Some were done by the Jews, others by the Romans. And yet the same pronoun " they" is used, as if these things were all done by the same group of people. This further suggests that the Spirit saw the actions of the Romans as being attributable to the Jews. There seems no reason to think that the Roman or Italian nation were held guilty by God for the part they played in the death of His Son.

### **Nor The Jewish Nation**

The Jewish people generally were punished because they saw the Son of God coming to their vineyard, and yet they killed Him, despite recognizing who He was <sup>(1)</sup>. " This is the heir" , they recognized (Mt. 21:38). Pilate *therefore*, because of the Jews, ordered the death of the Son of God (Jn. 18:40 cp. 19:1). They must take full responsibility for it. The Roman soldiers set Christ at nought (Lk. 23:11); but this very act (the same word is used) is counted to the Jews (Acts 4:11). The Lord Jesus shouted out to them that He knew that they realized who He

was: " Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am" (Jn. 7:28). His allusion to the memorial Name (" I am" ) suggests that He recognized that they knew His Divine origin and manifestation of His Father's Name. Christ was responding to their claim that they did not think He was Messiah (Jn. 7:27)- by saying 'You do know, deep inside, that I am He; but you won't face up to your conscience about it'. It was in this sense that Jesus frequently said in John's Gospel that the Jews did not know Him nor His Father. However, this does not mean that they did not recognize who He was. To " know" Christ in the Johanne sense is to believe in Him, not just to give Him cognizance. It would be a massive contradiction within the thinking of Jesus for Him to ask God to forgive the whole Jewish people *because* they didn't realize what they were doing. According to His parable of the men recognizing the heir and killing him, they did know, perfectly well, what they were doing,

If indeed Jesus was praying for the entire Jewish nation, His prayer went unanswered. He had said Himself that if the Jews did not repent and believe in Him, they would die in their sins; He said that an impressive three times (Jn. 8:21,24).

### **Prayer For A Minority**

It seems that Christ was in some way praying for those among the Jews who would later repent of what they had done. This suggestion must almost certainly have some truth about it because of the way Peter alludes to Christ's words: " Forgive them, for they know not what they do" . He seems to apply these words to the Jews, and uses them to encourage the Jews to repent and thereby take unto themselves the forgiveness which Christ's prayer had made possible: " And now, brethren, I wot that through (RV " in" ) ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers...repent ye *therefore*" (Acts 3:17,19). Paul makes a similar allusion in Acts 13:26,27: " Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham (Paul seems to be repeating Peter's style of 3:17)...they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers (cp. 3:17), because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him" .

There is a clear principle throughout God's self-revelation that ignorance does not atone for sin. " Father forgive them *for* they know not what they do" therefore does not mean that their ignorance plus Christ's prayer equalled forgiveness and therefore salvation. We have to conclude that He was saying 'They don't *now* know what they are doing, please forgive them on account of my death, they'll repent and realize later'. Despite Peter's allusion to Christ's prayer for their forgiveness, Peter still asks the Jews to repent so that they could be forgiven and saved. Therefore Christ's prayer for their forgiveness was not offered or answered in the sense that they would be forgiven without repentance. That forgiveness was only granted in prospect. They had to 'claim' it by their own repentance. However, it is still wondrously true that Christ understood that God was willing to grant forgiveness to people in prospect, even though they had not actually repented. If God is willing to do this, to forgive in hope of future repentance in response to such great grace, how much more should we behave likewise to each other <sup>(2)</sup>. And yet we struggle with this, even though we each have received such grace ourselves.

### **" Them" - Us?**

The death of Christ was fundamentally for the salvation of Israel <sup>(3)</sup>. His prayer was gloriously answered in that soon afterwards, 8,000 Jews were baptized (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Such



is the power of anguished, heartfelt prayer for others- even when it seems there is no chance it will be heard. And such is the power of prayer for a third party. The Lord's attitude was not that they simply had to decide. He prayed they would be converted. It only applies to us insofar as we unite ourselves with the Israel of God. That minority within Israel who were crucifying Christ in ignorance (" they know not what they do" ) were the same category into which we fall. Christ praying on the cross for men to be forgiven ought to send the mind back to Is. 53, which prophesied that on the cross, Christ would " justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" , be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken " for the transgression of my people" , and make " intercession for the transgressors" . These are all broadly parallel statements. " The transgressors" are primarily " my people" , Israel, who despised and rejected him (53:3). And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophesy that Christ would make " intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed " Father forgive them" . There seems no other real alternative.

And so we come to an awe-inspiring conclusion: Christ was lifted up on the cross, and immediately His mind was full of us, all those who would repent and become the seed of Christ, full of our need, of the huge weight of all our sins. And He knew that through His death all that sin would be forgiven. It was by the Lord's one act of righteousness, one act of obedience, that we are justified (Rom. 5:18,19). He was obedient to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8); and yet Heb. 5:8 and Phil. 2:8 RV imply that He only became obedient whilst He was actually on the cross. Was it that there, whilst hanging there, He more deeply perceived that really, this was indeed the only way to meet our need- and therefore He made that one-off act of obedience in death which Rom. 5:19 speaks about. And that supreme love for us, that willingness to die "for us", is still part of His wonderful character; for there He "loved us" [the love of Christ and the cross are so often connected ideas], and yet He still has that same "love of Christ" for us today (Rom. 8:35,37).

As soon as the cross was lifted up, despite the sudden searing pain, His mind was fixed upon our desperate need: " Father forgive them" . Each one of us who have now believed down through the subsequent years was forgiven then, in that moment, of all our sins we would ever commit. Through one act of righteousness [i.e. the cross], we were justified (Rom. 5:18 RV). There was such intensity of achievement in those moments of His death. Here on earth, on a mere speck of a planet in the outer suburbs of a galaxy that is only one of about a billion such galaxies in the observable universe, what happened on the cross determined the future of that universe. For all things both in heaven and in earth were reconciled by the blood of the cross. And yet throughout the Gospels Christ had taught that the Father would only forgive those who themselves live a forgiving life. Yet at that time we had not repented; " When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly...God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son" (Rom. 5:5-10).

Our Lord's prayer was heard; our sins, unrepented of, were forgiven, in prospect we were forgiven and saved. In the same way as Peter used the wonder of this to appeal to the Jews to repent, so we should heed the appeal. All our sins were forgiven as a result of that prayer, in prospect we were saved. God for the sake of that prayer of Christ forgave us all our sins then (Eph. 4:32), the whole concept of sin was ended in prospect (Dan. 9:24), one final sacrifice was offered for sins (Heb. 10:12). The result of this is that we should repent, search ourselves

and confess as many of our sins as possible, knowing they have been conquered. And we too should forgive each other in the same manner as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32), not waiting for repentance, but learning the spirit of Christ and the attitude of our Father.

The extreme seriousness of our position prior to our reconciliation with God is easy to underestimate. We were "enemies...sinners". We have seen that "Father forgive them" refers to both us and the ignorant Jews who were crucifying Christ. And yet in the first instance, the "them" referred to the Roman soldiers; *they* crucified Christ, they parted His garments; and it is in that context that Christ asked for "them" to be forgiven. There is a certain relevance of Christ's words to those ignorant soldiers. And yet we have seen that they really refer to us, to all those who will truly repent of their sins. It follows that those soldiers represent us, as the Jews who rejected and despised Christ in Is. 53 represent us too. Truly do we sing that "We held him as condemned by Heaven", albeit in ignorance. The roughness and ignorance of those soldiers typifies our life before baptism. If we continue sinning, we crucify again the son of God, this time not in ignorance. The consequences of that are almost too fearful to imagine.

### **A guilt offering**

Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if Christ felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). Indeed, Is. 53:10 NIV describes Christ's death as a "guilt offering". And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Christ as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".

Once we begin to appreciate these things, we see the intensity behind those words of Christ. "Father forgive them" was uttered with His mind on all our future sins, He foresaw them all, He felt them upon Him, He saw they could not be forgiven without repentance, and yet He asked the Father to forgive them as sins of ignorance, believing that we would repent in the future. No wonder Peter and Paul use these words of Christ as the basis of their appeal to Israel to repent! And if we appreciate them, we will be inspired to truly examine ourselves, to realize our secret sins, to search the word in order to reveal our sins to us, to ask God after the pattern of David to reveal our weakness to us, to truly confess our sins, knowing that each and every one of them was recognized by the Father and Son as Christ hung on the cross. Every one of them was a weight upon Christ, and every one of them was forgiven in the hope that we would later appreciate the wonder of such grace, and repent. This means that as with Israel in Acts 3, our repentance is what makes the cross of Christ powerful for us, it is what makes the victory of Christ all the greater if we accept it; for when we repent, "our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness", in the language of Romans.

### **Christ's awareness of us on the cross**

In some sense, then, Christ was aware of each of us and each of our sins as He hung there. "Forgive them" was wrung out of this deep appreciation. Just one word (in the Greek) expressed such intensity of appreciation of our need. It seems that as Christ hung on the cross

He had a vision of the faithful. How this was achieved is hard to imagine, but it is not beyond the realms of Divine possibility that somehow Christ was made aware of each and every one of us, and each of our sins. Consider the following hints concerning the Lord's vision of His ecclesia on the cross:

- " *When* thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed...he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11). " *When*" would suggest that Christ had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.

- Psalms 22 and 69 describe Christ on the cross foreseeing " the great congregation" gratefully and humbly eating in memory of Him (cp. the breaking of bread), serving Him, inheriting Zion and declaring His righteousness and His victory on the cross to others down the generations. Let us remember this as we break bread and witness to Him (Ps. 22:30,31).

- On the cross Christ saw all His bones, which represented the future members of His body (Ps. 22:17 cp. Eph. 5:30).

- The Lord prayed just before His passion in a way which would almost imply that He had some heightened awareness of the redeemed as a group: " ...for them also which shall believe in me...that they also may be one" .

- " For the joy that was set before him" Christ endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). " Set before" can imply a vision, as if Christ saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes Christ looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because " at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" . Christ is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

As we have said, the intensity of feeling behind those words of our Lord almost defies exhibition through the medium of human words or language. Heb. 5:1-7 describes Christ on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through " prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" . This must surely be a reference to " Father forgive them" . Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes Christ as our High Priest making intercession for us " with groanings" . " Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation.

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## Notes

(1) This issue is also discussed in *Joseph: the fullest type of Christ*.

(2) See *Repentance and forgiveness*.

(3) See "*Why hast thou forsaken me?*" later in this section

### **1-1-8-1 Naked Crucifixion?**

19 See 21. It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked.

Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment (Mt. 27:35)?

There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (1):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's...in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide.

The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

## Notes

(1) Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.

### 1-1-8-2 Mocking The Crucified Christ

20 " And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word " and" ; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry.

21 " Sitting down *they* watched *him* there" . Mark particularly has an abnormal number of pronouns throughout the record. The emphasis is on " he...him...his" ; also " they" occurs more than average. The contrast is being established between the crucified Christ and the world. If we are to identify with His cross, it is axiomatic that there must be a thorough separation from this world (Gal. 1:4).

Note the comments concerning chronology. Matthew and Mark discuss the placing of the placard out of sequence, in order to emphasize how they did the Son of God to death, and

then got on with splitting up His few clothes. The petty materialism of man was played out just a metre or two from the suffering Saviour, while He saw saying (repeatedly, the Greek could imply), " Father, forgive them" ; with all the pain of speech which the crucified position involved. There were four soldiers, and they each took a part of His clothing: His head covering, belt, inner coat, His sandals. Those Galilean sandals, that had walked so many miles. He went about doing good, and healing... They knelt on His chest and nailed Him, slung the mallets back into their packs, and straight away got on with arguing about who was going to keep those worn out shoes. One wonders whether the soldier wore them or sold them. Or kept them. And we must look at our petty materialism in the light of the cross, reflecting on the power of mammon: to eclipse the vision of the cross, to silence men from speaking of the wonder of the resurrection (Mt. 28:14)- to entice a man to betray the Lord of all grace (Mt. 26:15 implies Judas' motivation was financial, first and foremost). Long hours, demanding hours, striving for well paid careers...all so we can have a nice car, a house, not a flat, in a nice area, so we can wear nice fitting clothes, so we can eat food which tickles the taste buds, rather than food which gives the basic proteins and vitamins etc. We do all this. Almost all of us. At the foot of the cross. Ignoring what it really means. And even worse: we excuse ourselves rather than admit our guilt.

The records of the writing of the inscriptions may also be out of place in order to create the picture of all the people sitting watching the Lord Jesus, with that title over Him. The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

26 " Those that passed by" were not only comprised of casual passers-by who thought " Hey, there's a crucifixion, let's go and have a look" . Golgotha was a little way out of the city. The size of the crowd must have been considerable; " crowds came to the spectacle" (Lk. 23:48 Gk.). It seems more reasonable that the reference is to those who passed by, back and forth (the Greek could imply), 'passing along' (Mk. 15:29) in front of the cross, taunting the Lord, as if they were making a wave offering in front of the presence of God in the crucified Christ. The connection between Ps. 22:7 and Mt. 27:39 would suggest that these 'passers-by' were there with the express intent of taunting Him. Because His eyes were inevitably downward, it would have been difficult for the Lord not to look at them. Their words were exactly those of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:61), so presumably they came from there- the work colleagues of Joseph and Nicodemus.

" Thou that destroyest the temple..." would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. " ...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 (" He trusted in God..." ) served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations.

Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

27-29 This was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

30 " He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

31 All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

32 " If he desireth him" (RV). They were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God *likes* Him', is what they were really implying.

RV " He is the King of Israel..." - His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King.

" If...let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that

crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

36 The intellectuals in concentration camps were often mocked and hated by the other inmates until they came down to their level. It is, apparently, an almost natural reaction. It explains another concentration camp phenomenon- that victims often cooperate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims; the weak join with the strong to persecute others who are weak. This, on a psychological level, helps to explain why the later-repentant thief should speak like this. And yet the Lord bore with him, and His patience led to the man's conversion and salvation. They were men at the very limit of human experience. The self respect of Jesus would have been most unusual; the purpose of the crucifixion process was to drive this out. He knew Who He was, and where He was going. Josephus describes how those on trial with the threat of crucifixion hanging over them did all that they could to appeal for mercy. The thieves probably did this. This is why the Jews were so scandalized when the Lord refused to answer for Himself, and then calmly stated that He was the Messiah who would come to them in judgment at the last day (Mt. 26:64,65); He was speaking the very blasphemy which they were trying so unsuccessfully to convict Him of. We can be sure that they and the soldiers tried especially hard to drive the self-respect from Him: which in His case would have meant resigning His belief that He was the spotless Son of God.

This would explain why the soldiers mocked Him as they did, and why the onlooking Jews did so: unconsciously, they wanted to bring Him down to their level. The fact the Lord didn't descend to their level is yet another mark of the extent of His victory. It was the same temptation as 'Come down from the cross'; 'Come down to our level, the level of desperate men, just concentrating on hanging here and shifting the weight around between hands and feet, hands and feet, hands and feet...'. You know how it is when you are carrying a very heavy load. You just concentrate on carrying it. You pant and sweat and don't care if you bump into somebody or tread on a child's toy. Those men were on that level. The Lord was in the same physical situation, but somehow He rose above, He didn't descend to the animal, mindless level. Thank you, Lord, that for *my* sake You didn't.

*Note:* It has been suggested that Semitic languages employ a device called " plural of category" , whereby what one person does who belongs to a category is described using the plural. Thus " soldiers" may refer actually to only one soldier; and here " thieves" , it is suggested, is a plural of category and may only refer to one thief. I am unable to comment on the truth of this. I suspect it is a Catholic idea, used to justify their canonization of the 'repentant' thief.

1-1-9 " Woman behold thy son"



24 Unearthed victims of crucifixion seem to have been impaled on stakes about 10 feet high. The cross would not have been as high as 'Christian' art usually represents it. The feet of the Lord would only have been about 4 feet above ground. His mother and aunt stood by the cross- the tragedy of His mother being there needs no comment. She would have seen the blood coming from the feet. Her head would have been parallel with His knees. His face marred more than the sons of men (Is. 52:14), sore from where His beard had been pulled off (Is. 50:6), teeth missing and loose, making His speech sound strange, fresh and dried blood mixing...and His mother there to behold and hear it all. She must have thought back, and surely He did too; for He was only a man. Mother around the house as a child, mending clothes, getting food, explaining things, telling Him about Simeon's prophecy, of how a sword would break her heart as well as His. This isn't just emotional speculation. Ps. 22:9,10 emphasizes the Lord's thoughts for His mother and His babyhood with her: " Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou keptest me in safety (AVmg.- a reference to Herod's persecution) when I was on my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly" . The temptation would have been to go on and on. Was I too hard on her in Cana? How I must have stung her when I said " Behold *my mother* and my brethren" are these half hearted, superficially interested people (Mt. 12:49). She was the best best best mother I could have ever had. Like any man would think. And He was a man. Not a mere man, but a man. I wonder if He said those words of breakage, of severance, between Him and her, because these feelings welling up within Him were affecting His concentration on the Father.

" *But* there stood by the cross..." makes the connection between Mary and the clothes. It seems that initially, she wasn't there; He looked for comforters and found none (Ps. 69:20- or does this imply that the oft mentioned spiritual difference between the Lord and His mother meant that He didn't find comfort in her? Or she only came to the cross later?). His lovers, friends and kinsmen stood far off from Him (Ps. 38:11), perhaps in a literal sense, perhaps far away from understanding Him. If Mary wasn't initially at the cross, John's connection between the dividing of the clothes and her being there would suggest that she had made the clothes. In any case, the four women at the cross are surely set up against the four soldiers there- who gambled over the clothes. Perhaps the other women had also had some input into the Lord's clothing.

If indeed Mary and the few with her came from standing far off to stand by the cross, they were sharing the spirit of Joseph and Nicodemus: 'In the light of the cross, nothing, nothing, absolutely *nothing* really matters now. The shame, embarrassment nothing. We will stand for Him and His cause, come what may'.

I can only ponder the use of the imperfect in Jn. 19:25: 'There were standing' *may* imply that Mary and the women came and went; sometimes they were there by the cross, sometimes afar off. Did they retreat from grief, or from a sense of their inadequacy, or from being driven off by the hostile crowd or soldiers, only to make their way stubbornly back? Tacitus records that no spectators of a crucifixion were allowed to show any sign of grief; this was taken as a sign of compliance with the sin of the victim. He records how some were even crucified for showing grief at a crucifixion. This was especially so in the context of leaders of revolutionary movements, which was the reason why Jesus was crucified. This would explain why the women stood afar off, and sometimes in moments of self-control came closer. Thus the Lord looked for comforters and found none, according to the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms. And yet His mother was also at the foot of the cross sometimes. For her to be there, so close to Him as she undoubtedly wished to be, and yet not to show emotion, appearing to

the world to be another indifferent spectator; the torture of mind must be meditated upon. Any of these scenarios provides a link with the experience of all who would walk out against the wind of this world, and identify ourselves with the apparently hopeless cause of the crucified Christ. The RV of Jn. 19:25 brings out the tension between the soldiers standing there, and the fact that: "But there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother...". The "but..." signals, perhaps, the tension of the situation- for it was illegal to stand in sympathy by the cross of the victim. And there the soldiers were, specially in place to stop it happening, standing nearby...

John taking Mary to his own home *may* not mean that he took her away to his house in Jerusalem. In any case, John's physical home was in Galilee, not Jerusalem. " His own (home)" is used elsewhere to mean 'family' rather than a physical house. This would have involved Mary rejecting her other sons, and entering into John's family. Spiritual ties were to be closer than all other. This must be a powerful lesson, for it was taught in the Lord's final moments. Whether we understand that John took Mary away to his own home (and later returned, Jn. 19:35), or that they both remained there to the end with the understanding that Mary was not now in the family of Jesus, the point is that the Lord separated Himself from His mother. The fact He did this last was a sign of how close He felt to her. She was the last aspect of His humanity which He had clung to. And at the bitter bitter end, He knew that He must let go even, even, even of her. Jn. 19:28 speaks likewise as if the Lord's relationship with His mother was the last part of His humanity which He had to complete / fulfil / finish. For it was "after this", i.e. His words to His mother, that He knew that "all was now finished".

And yet another construction is possible. It would seem that John *did* have a house in Jerusalem. Mary was John's aunt, and so she was already in his 'house' in the sense of family. This might suggest that the Lord didn't mean John was to accept Mary into the family, as they were already related. It is reasonable to conjecture that perhaps He sent her away to John's house, for *her* benefit. He didn't want her to have to see the end [see section 52 for more comment on this]. For me, if I had been in His situation, I would have preferred to die with her there. At least there was the one and only human being who knew for sure, and He knew she knew for sure, that He was the Son of God. She was the one, on earth, that He could be certain of. She had pondered all these things for 34 years. And He knew it. But if He sent her away for *her* benefit, we have yet another example of the Lord rejecting a legitimate comfort; as He rejected the pain killer, the footrests (see 54), the opportunity to drink before He asked for it ...indeed, the cross itself was something which He chose when other forms of obedience to the Father's will may have been equally possible.

The thoughts presented here concerning Mary offer several possibilities, not each of which can be what really happened; not least concerning the question of for how long she stood by the cross. But this, to my mind, doesn't matter. Each man, yes, each and every one of us, must go through the process of the cross in his own mind, and thereby be inspired. These are only thoughts to help on the way. The whole record is designed, it seems, to provoke reverent meditation. One can only, for example, meditate in a vague way on what Mary's feelings will be when she rises from the sleep of death to see her son. As we will recognize Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, so surely she will have that sense that " this is my boy" . Reflecting upon the Lord's relationship with His mother as He died leads us a little deeper into His tension and ineffable sadness which the cross crystallized. His soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). " My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12

speaks of the fact that Christ's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality. Thus He jumped at His mother's request for wine as being a suggestion He should die there and then (Jn. 2:4). So many men reached their most intense at the end of their lives: Moses spoke Deuteronomy, Paul and Peter wrote their finest letters then. And the Lord was matchlessly superb at His end. He reached a peak of spirituality at the end, to the point where He showed us, covered in blood and spittle and human rejection as He was, what the very essence of God really was. He declared the Name of Yahweh in the final moments of His death.

A mother always feels a mother to her child. That's basic human fact. The way the Lord as it were ended that mother-child relationship with Mary thereby carries all the more pain with it. The way the Gospel records refer to Mary as the mother of others amongst her children, e.g. "Mary of James" (Lk. 24:10) shows the Gospel writers paid tribute and respect to this break that had been made. Perhaps this explains why the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, chose not to identify themselves as the brothers of Jesus- Jude calls himself the brother of James (Jude 1), and James identifies himself as a servant of Jesus (James 1:1). In this way they both reflected the way that human relationship to Jesus now meant nothing at all.

It's been observed by many that what a man needs most as he dies... is not to face death alone. To have someone with him. The way the Lord sent Mary and John away from Him at the very end is profound in its reflection of His total selflessness, His deep thought for others rather than Himself. It also reflects how He more than any other man faced the ultimate human realities and issues which death exposes. He wilfully faced them alone, the supreme example of human bravery in the face of death. And He faced them fully, with no human cushion or literal or psychological anesthesia to dilute the awful, crushing reality of it. Remember how He refused the painkiller. And through baptism and life in Him, we are asked to die with Him, to share something of His death, the type and nature of death which He had... in our daily lives. Little wonder we each seem to sense some essential, existential, quintessential... loneliness in our souls. Thus it must be for those who share in His death. I'm grateful to Cindy for a quote from a wise doctor, Kurt Eissler: "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him". How inadvertently profound that thought becomes when applied to the death of our Lord, and to us as we imagine ourselves standing by and watching Him there. "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him".

#### The Sayings From The Cross (2):

" Woman behold thy son"

We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Son of God, to truly begin to enter into them. The least we can do is to meditate upon their different facets, and begin to realize that if the cross really does come before the crown, then we can expect a life which reflects, in principle at least, the same basic agonies. The relationship between Christ and Mary brings home two crystal clear points: Firstly, the sheer human pain and pathos of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and those near Him; and secondly, the way in which He had to sacrifice His closest human relationship for the sake of His devotion to God.

#### **The Pain Of God**

There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39)

### **The Pain Of It All**

There is something ineffably, ineffably sad about the fact that the mother of Jesus was standing only a meter or so away from Him at the foot of the cross. Absolutely typical of the Biblical record, this fact is recorded by John almost in passing. This is in harmony with the way the whole crucifixion is described. Thus Jn. 19:17,18 seems to focus on the fact that Jesus bore His cross to a place called Golgotha; the fact that there they crucified Him is mentioned in an incidental sort of way. Mark likewise: " And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments..." (Mk. 15:24). In similar vein the agony of flogging is almost bypassed in Mt. 27:26: "and when he had scourged Jesus..."

Simeon had early prophesied Mary's feelings when he spoke of how her son would be " spoken against" and killed: " Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul *also*" (Lk. 2:35). This means that the piercing of Christ's soul was felt by His mother at the same time. And so we picture that woman in her 50s at the cross, with a lifetime behind her of meditating upon God's words, meditating upon the strange road her life had taken, a road travelled by no other woman, keeping *all* these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51; implying she didn't open up to anyone), a lifetime characterized by a deep fascination with her firstborn son, but also characterized by a frustrating lack of understanding of Him, and no doubt an increasing sense of distance from His real soul. Recall how when Mary asked Jesus for wine at the feast, He saw in her mention of wine a symbol of His blood. She asked for wine, on a human level; and He responded: 'Woman, what have I to do with you, can't you see that the time for me to give my blood isn't yet?'. They were just on quite different levels. It seems almost certain that Christ was crucified naked. If we crucify him afresh (Heb. 6:6), we put him to an " open" or naked (Gk.) shame. The association between shame and the crucifixion is stressed in Ps. 22 and Is. 53; and shame is elsewhere connected with nakedness.

We know that the Jews felt that Christ was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier; this is recorded to this day in the Mishnah. They had earlier taunted Him about this (Jn. 8:19). Translating into dynamic, modern English, it is not difficult to imagine the abuse they shouted at Him as He hung on the cross. Their mocking of His claim that God was His Father was doubtless related to this. And there can be no doubt that their scorn in this direction would have fallen upon Mary too. The sword that pierced Christ's soul on the cross was the sword of the abuse which was shouted at Him then (Ps. 42:10); and the piercing of Christ's soul, Simeon had said, was the piercing of Mary's soul too. In other words, they were both really cut, pierced, by this mocking of the virgin birth. Neither of them were hard and indifferent to it. And the fact they both stood together at the cross and faced it together must have drawn them closer, and made their parting all the harder. She alone knew beyond doubt that God was Christ's father, even though the Lord had needed to rebuke her for being so carried away with the humdrum of life that she once referred to Joseph as His father (Lk. 2:33). For everyone else, there must always have been that tendency to doubt. Ps. 22:9,10 were among Christ's thoughts as He hung there: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". If dying men do indeed think back to their childhood, His thoughts would have been with His mother.

She had sought Him *sorrowing* when He was 12, all her life she had been plagued by this problem of knowing He was righteous, the Son of God, her Saviour, and yet she didn't fully understand Him. How deeply would the pain of all this hung over her as she watched Him in His time of dying. Doubtless she had (on the law of averages) lost other children, but this one was something special. She was a woman a real mother, and her special love for Jesus would have been noticed by the others. This probably had something to do with the fact that all her other children had rejected Christ as a "stranger", i.e. a Gentile; perhaps they too believed that this Jesus was the result of mum's early fling with a passing Roman soldier (Ps. 69:8). Inevitably people would have commented to Mary: "He's a lovely boy, isn't he". And although one doesn't sense she was arrogant in any way, her motherly pride would have risen. For He was a lovely boy, ever growing in favour with men, rather than falling out of favour with some over the petty things of village life. Remember how we sense her motherly pride surfacing at the wedding in Cana. At the cross she would have recalled all this, recalled Him as a clinging 5 year old, being comforted by her in childhood illnesses, recalled making and mending His clothes- perhaps even the cloak the drunk soldiers were gambling over. And as she beheld Him there, covered in blood and spittle, annoyed by the endless flies, alone in the darkness, evidently thirsty, with her helpless to help beneath- surely her mind would have gone back 34 years to the words of the Angel: "He shall be great". "He shall be great". And then the mental panic to understand, the crying out within the soul, the pain of incomprehension of death.

There is a great sense of pathos in those words of Jesus: "Woman behold thy son". It sounded first of all as if Jesus was saying 'Well mum, look at me here'. But then she would have realized that this was not what He was saying. We can almost see Him nodding towards John. He was rejecting her as His mother in human terms, He was ceasing to be her son, He was trying to replace His sonship with that of an adopted son. The way He called her "Woman" rather than mother surely reflects the distance which there was between them, as He faced up to the fact that soon He would leave human nature, soon His human sonship would be ended. In passing, note how He addresses God at the end not as "Father" but "My God"- as if His sharing in our distance from God led Him to feel the same. Hence His awful loneliness and sense of having been forsaken or distanced from all those near to Him. "

Behold thy mother ...behold thy son" suggests Jesus was asking them to look at each other. Doubtless they were looking down at the ground at the time. We get the picture of them looking up and catching each others eye, then a brief silence, coming to understand what Jesus meant, and then from that hour, i.e. very soon afterwards, John *taking* Mary away. We are invited to imagine so much. The long, long discussions between them about Jesus, punctuated by long silences, as they kept that Passover, and as they lived together through the next years. Above all we see the pathos of them walking away, backs to Jesus, with Him perhaps watching them.

All this would have contributed to His sense of being forsaken. The disciples forsook Him (Mt. 26:56), His mother had now left Him, and so the words of Ps. 27:9,10 started to come true: " Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God...when my father and my mother forsake me" . All His scaffolding was being removed. He had leaned on His disciples (Lk. 22:28), He had naturally leaned on His mother. Now they had forsaken Him. And now His mother had forsaken Him. And so He pleaded with His true Father not to leave Him. And hence the agony, the deep agony of Mt. 27:46: " My God, my God, Why hast *thou* (this is where the emphasis should be) forsaken me?" . The disciples' desertion is a major theme, especially in Mark 15 (written by Peter, the most guilty?). The young man followed, but then ran away; Peter followed, but then denied (Mk. 14:51,54); all the disciples fled (:50); Joseph and Nicodemus denied Him (:64). By instinct, we humans want someone by our side in the hospital the night before the operation, in the nursing home as death looms near, or in any great moment of crisis. The Lord needed, desperately, His men with Him. Hence the hurt, undisguised, of "could you not watch with me one hour?" .

Col. 2:11-15 describe the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus as His 'circumcision'. The cross did something intimate and personal to Him. Through the process of His death, He 'put right off the body of his flesh' (RVmg.). He shed His humanity. The saying goodbye to His mother, the statement that she was no longer His mother but just a woman to Him, was, it would seem, the very last divesting of 'the body of his flesh'. It seems to me that such was His love of her, so strong was His human connection to her who gave Him His human connection, that the relationship with her was the hardest and in fact the final aspect of humanity which He 'put off' through the experience of crucifixion. And this is why, once He had done so, He died.

There cannot be any of us who are not touched by all this. We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. What can we expect but a sense of pathos in our lives, broken and sacrificed relationships, the loss of the dearest of human love. There seems to be a growing group of believers in their 20s -50s, some happily married, well blessed with the things of this life, who seem to preach a gospel of happy-clappy belief, of tapping each other under the chin and speaking of how much joy and happiness their religion gives them. And those who don't experience this are made to feel spiritually inferior. Yet that 'other' group are, world-wide, growing into the majority of the body of Christ. A real meditation upon the cross of our Lord and the frequent exhortations by Him to share in it places all this in perspective. We must suffer with Him if we are to be glorified with Him in His Kingdom. The joy and peace of Christ which is now available is the joy and peace which He had in His life, a deep deep joy and peace from knowing that we are on the road to salvation. Know yourselves, brethren and sisters. Search your lives. If we are truly, truly trying to share the cross of Christ, if we are beginning to know the meaning of self-sacrifice, of love unto the end, we will know the spirit of Christ on that cross, " the lonely cry, the anguish keen" . We

will be able to share His mind, to know the fellowship of His spirit, of touching spirits with Him. And in that is joy and peace beyond our ability to describe.

### **1-1-10 " Today you will be with me in Paradise"**

37 The thieves (and Barabbas) would have been tried along with Jesus; they would have been present at His trial. Roman law required that the death penalty be executed the same day as it was given. The crucifixion being quite early in the day, it seems almost certain that the four cases to be tried that day would all have been heard in the same room. The behaviour of the Lord must have really given those other three something to reflect on.

An interesting point comes out of the Greek text of Lk. 23:39: " One of the criminals who were *suspended* reviled him" (Diaglott). Ancient paintings show the thieves tied by cords to the crosses, not nailed as was Christ. *Hanging* on a tree became an idiom for crucifixion, even if nails were actually used (Dt. 21:23 cp. Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30; 10:39). If this were so, we see the development of a theme: that the whole ingenuity of man was pitted against the Father and Son. Christ was nailed, not tied; the tomb was sealed and guarded; the legal process was manipulated; the Lord was flogged as well as crucified (see the reconstruction offered above in the 'Background' section).

#### The Sayings From The Cross (3):

" Today you will be with me in Paradise"

It is all too easy for us to see the thief on the cross as a pawn in the game of the Lord's crucifixion. But there is real New Testament evidence that we are to see in Him our personal representative. Thus Paul challenges us to be " co- crucified" with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20 cp. 1 Cor. 11:1). To be crucified together with Christ immediately sends the imaginative mind to the thief on the cross- the one who was literally crucified together with Christ. It is doubtful if the Spirit in Paul would speak of 'co- crucifixion' without deliberate reference back to the thief. Our Lord matched the idea of the word " Kingdom" in the thief's plea with the word " paradise" . Occurring only three times in the New Testament, it is hard to resist the conclusion that in Rev. 2:7, our Lord's mind was back in the agonizing conversation with the thief: " To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" . It was to the thief on the cross, some years earlier, that Christ had made the same promise of paradise. It may be significant that Rev. 2:7 was specifically addressed to those who were zealous by nature, hating laxity, yet who had left their first love. The thief may well have been a 'zealot' who had once turned to Christ, but whose real faith had slipped away. But to any who overcome, the same promise of paradise is made.

It has often been pointed out that the brief words of the thief encompass all the basic beliefs of the One Faith. He believed in the sinfulness of man, the supreme righteousness of Christ, salvation by grace, the second coming and judgment seat of Christ, and the Kingdom. Yet not only did he believe those things as abstract principles. As he beheld, at close range, the sufferings of God's peerless son, the reality of those principles really came home to him. Perhaps he was a slave who had committed a relatively petty crime, but as a slave he had to be crucified. All prisoners and most condemned men feel keenly their relative innocence and the unfairness of it all. But with quite some pain he gasped: "...and we indeed justly". He came to deeply understand the basic principles, and appreciate their personal bearing to himself. He knew the basic principles of the true Gospel, but it was his co- crucifixion with

Christ that made him grasp hold of them for dear life. Job too went through the same process, thanks to his typical suffering together with Christ: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Job 42:5). And us? The thief, not to say Job, represents us. If we are truly co-crucified with Christ, the basic elements of our faith will not be just a dry doctrinal skeleton. The coming of the Kingdom, the doctrine of judgment and the atonement, these will be all we live for! For they were all the thief had to live for, during his hours of co-crucifixion. In passing, this surely means that we will regularly want to remind ourselves of those basic doctrines, e.g. by way of public lectures or re-reading basic preaching material.

It is possible that the thief had a really deep Bible knowledge. "Remember me when thou comest in thy Kingdom" is almost certainly reference to Gen. 40:14, where Joseph desperately and pathetically asks: "But think on me when it shall be well with thee...". Joseph went on to say "...here also have I done nothing that they should out me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). This is very much the spirit of "This man hath done nothing amiss...". It could be that when he asks to be remembered for good, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember thine handmaid". This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the trespass of thine handmaid...a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God: and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out" (1 Sam. 25:29-31). And David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord to the thief: "Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person" (1 Sam. 25:35). It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of the Lord, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he fain would have. And the Lord accepted this.

It is recorded in the other Gospels that both the thieves "railed on" Christ, joining in with the crowd to "cast the same in his teeth" (Mt. 27:44). We must see the words of the repentant thief in Lk. 23 against this background. There he was, knowing the truth, having fallen away, now facing his death. In his self-centredness, he grew bitter against the one he knew to be his saviour. Despite the difficulty and pain which speaking whilst crucified involved, he made the effort to lambaste his saviour, as well as he knew how. But as he watched the Lord's silent response, sensing the deep spiritual communion with the Father which was then happening, he experienced a wave of even greater anger and remorse- this time, against himself. 'I could have made it, I could have repented, but now it's too late. I've added insult to injury, I've blasphemed and mocked my only possible saviour, in this my hour of desperate need'. So he fell silent, whilst (we may infer) the other thief kept up his insults and selfish pleas for immediate salvation. And he watched the suffering saviour, literally from the corner of his eye. Remember, the thieves were crucified next to Jesus. Indeed one wonders whether the other thief had also once been a believer when he says "Art not thou the Christ?" (Lk. 23:39 RV).

Such was the holiness, the supreme righteousness of the Lord, that the thought grew within him: 'Perhaps even now, while I've got life, I could ask for forgiveness, and a place in the Kingdom?' We can be sure that he grappled within himself with this thought, before ever presenting it verbally to Jesus. He would have seen the Lord's demeanour under trial, and the beauty and graciousness of His character and essential being must have made a deep impact upon the thief. When he speaks about Jesus having "done nothing amiss", he is repeating what he had heard hours before (Mk. 14:56); and the Lord's confident words of Mt. 24:64 were still ringing in his ears when he spoke of wanting mercy when this crucified man came again in glory to establish His Kingdom (cp. Lk. 21:42). And yet this perceptive man had just



blasphemed Jesus with all the vicious vitriol he knew ("cast the same in his teeth" is the forerunner of 'a kick in the teeth'). It was supreme faith in and appreciation of the love and mercy of Christ which led him to make his request. I see the very fact he could make that request as a wonderful triumph of human faith over the weakness of human flesh when afflicted. That request was born out of a healthy fear of God. Before speaking to Jesus, he rebuked the other thief: "Dost not thou fear God...?" (Lk. 23:40). Appreciating the enormity of his sin, the repentant thief had come to fear God, to imagine the day of judgment and condemnation of sin. We dare to imagine the nervous tone of voice in which he then spoke to Jesus: "Lord, remember me (i.e. for good) when thou comest into thy Kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). He was pleading for acceptance at the day of judgment, provoked to do so by a fear of God's coming judgments. This was surely a spiritual pinnacle. The pain of his own sufferings, coupled with his close observation of the supreme holiness of Christ as he hung on the cross, had led him to appreciate his own sinfulness, and had inspired one of the greatest levels of faith in the mercy of Christ which mankind has reached. And so he received the ultimate assurance: You *will* be with me, in the Kingdom. The question of where the comma should be placed becomes irrelevant when we imagine how the Lord would have gasped for each word. There would, as it were, have been a comma between each word.

Day by day, we must imagine *even for a few moments* our Lord's vertical body as it hung there, that perfect mind within it, fighting to maintain that ultimate spirituality which He had achieved. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom". Perhaps we could silently pray those words day by day, night by night, for the next while. Perhaps we could unite with other believers in discussing and tackling a failing which we each have: the failure to meditate upon the sufferings of the Lord as much as we ought to. Never a day, a morning, an afternoon, should slip by without a thought for Christ's cross. "Gethsemane, can we forget?" . Yes, Lord, day after mindless, spiritually empty day.

The thief was confident, in faith, that he would be heard. But how he would have hung upon every one of the quiet words which the Lord muttered in response, travelling over the few metres which separated them. "Verily I say unto thee this day: with me shalt thou be in Paradise" (Rotherham). I believe that to have been the emphasis in His words <sup>(1)</sup>. 'Yes, I can really tell you, here and now, you will be in the Kingdom!'. Think of the spiritual ecstasy which would have come over the thief! God had caused him to triumph in Christ! He, the lowest sinner, had entered the highest rank of saints- those who have been directly assured that they will be in the Kingdom. Daniel, the disciples and Paul seem the only others in this category- along with the thief.

Crucifixion was a slow death. Mercifully, our Lord died abnormally quickly. Remember how Pilate "marvelled that he were already dead". Normally men lingered in agony for days before death. The thief lived a little longer. He would have seen Christ's death, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen"; the men taking the body from the cross. We can infer that he was still conscious when the soldiers broke his legs- if he was obviously dead, they would not have bothered. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already..." (Jn. 19:33) seems to imply this. The reason for breaking the legs was to stop the criminal having any chance of running away. Surely, amidst the waves of his pulsating pain, he would have marvelled at the way in which Christ was truly the lamb of God, seeing that "not a bone of him (was) broken". There he was, assured of the mercy of Christ at judgment day, hanging on the cross, in physical agony which it is hard for us to enter into. In some ways, he continues to be a type of us. Whether we are dying of cancer, crippled with arthritis, emotionally trapped in a painful relationship, chained to a demanding job, we too can have

every assurance of Christ's mercy. " To him that overcometh" , Christ has promised the paradise of the Kingdom, just as he did to the thief. Brethren and sisters, in the light of this let us truly be inspired to overcome. Effectively, we are waiting to die, however young we may be. Agonies of every kind afflict us. There is just no human escape.

But like the repentant thief, our mind must be full of the vision of our dying saviour, triumphing in His holiness, freely confessing our sin and the justice of God's condemnation of it, thrilling with the certainty of our Hope- of being in the Kingdom with Christ. Not for the repentant thief the increasing bitterness of the other man. As his bitterness grew, so the serenity and hope, and anticipation and joyful expectancy of the Kingdom rapidly increased for our crucified brother. The bitterness and disillusion of the world should not be ours, as the pain rages within and around us. Ours should be the strength and (somehow, amidst it all) *peace* of Christ's example. And the thief is alluded to later on in the NT as a symbol of us all. The Lord's promise to him that he would 'be with him' is the very language of 2 Cor. 5:8 and 1 Thess. 4:17 about us all.

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## Notes

(1) Always in the OT, "I say unto thee this day" was used as a Hebraism to bring home the utter solemnity of some great truth (e.g. Dt. 4:26,39; 8:19). It's worth noting that the comma is placed after 'today' in the Curetonian Syriac version of the New Testament; the Syriac versions would reflect better the original Aramaic in which the Lord likely spoke. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), pp. 181,182.

### **1-1-11 " Why hast thou forsaken me?"**

**38** Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because " I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day" , i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

**40** The Greek seems to mean " Why *didst* thou forsake me" , perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records " Eloi" ; Matthew " Eli" . Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say " Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi" ? Four times calling upon God?

### **The Sayings From The Cross (4):**

#### **" Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)**

We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example

of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross "knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?" . There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why hast thou forsaken me?" . We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion [\(1\)](#):

<b>14th Nissan</b>	<b>9p.m.</b>	<b>Last Supper</b>
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (" the third hour" )	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. (" sixth to the ninth hour" )	Darkness	
3p.m. (" the ninth hour" )	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died " at the ninth hour" . It was at the ninth hour that he cried " It is finished" and " Father into thy hands I commend my spirit" . Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said " My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at " *about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was " *about* the ninth hour" . What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, " It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross [\(2\)](#) , uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

### **Desire For Deliverance?**

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered <sup>(3)</sup>. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross <sup>(4)</sup>. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

### **Defining Forsaking**

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity<sup>(5)</sup>. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking

Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

### **God will not forsake His people if they are righteous**

" When thou art in tribulation...and shalt be obedient unto his voice...he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)

" The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)

" The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

" If thou wilt walk in my statutes...and keep all my commandments to walk in them...I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)

" Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest...for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance...all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)

" When the poor and needy seek water...I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

### **God will forsake His people if they sin**

" Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)

" Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations...I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)

" Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people...because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)

" I am against the (false) prophets...(therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)

" If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)

" This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land...and will forsake me...then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17)

Knowing all this, He cried out: " *Why* hast Thou forsaken me?" . He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. " *Why* (oh *why*) hast Thou forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned

(Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though " my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail" , so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassably rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of " *It is finished*" .

### **Bearing Israel's Sins**

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin-bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auchwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His

cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically-early in his prophecy he speaks of how "my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with "fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation of Israel", unto them was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel. Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:

*"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)*

*"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)*

*"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)*

*"God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)*

*The good news of Christ's birth was for "all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).*

*The Lord laid down His life "for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).*

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour... men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham...to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case, Mt. 20:26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The 'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

## **Our Representative**

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so

was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men " and with the stripes of the children of men" , i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not " *leave* (forsake) his soul in hell" . In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bare our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which



are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

### **Fear Of Forsaking**

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:

" Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my salvation*" (Ps. 27:9; cp. " *My God, Why hast thou forsaken me*" )

" Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)

" Hide not thy face from thy servant...hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection

" Forsake me not...*O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)

" I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)

" Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8)

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him.

Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet.

2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self...in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (6). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: " My God, why hast thou forsaken me" . But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud <sup>(7)</sup> . Thus He asked for a drink " that the Scripture might be fulfilled" , or finished, and then His words " It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, " It is finished" ; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

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## Notes

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading " three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', *in Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) See " *It is finished*" and " *Into thy hands I commend my spirit*" .

(3) See *Abraham and Isaac*.

(4) See *The Humanity of our Lord*.

(5) See *Psalm 22*.

(6) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

(7) See H.A.Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*.

41 They were confusing " Eliyahu" with " Eloi, Eloi" . With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms...this confusion isn't surprising.

### **1-1-12 " I thirst"**

**42** This wasn't just ingenious thinking on the spur of the moment. Victims lived for around two days on the crosses, but this was only due to a regular supply of liquid being handed up to them. One wonders if the person who organized the drink was one of the relatives of the thieves, or perhaps His own relatives. Surely His mother and aunt and Mary had come prepared to do all they could for Him in this final agony. They knew what the relatives of the crucified had to do. The thieves had probably received liquid already during the ordeal. But our sense must be that the Lord didn't. Perhaps His mother even suggested it, with an inward glance back to the sweet days of early childhood: " Do you want a drink? I can get you one" . But as He refused the painkiller, as He refused to push down on the footrests (see 54), so He refused to quench His thirst.

Note that the sponge was placed on a hyssop plant, which is only 50cm. long at the most. This is internal evidence that the cross was quite low, and the Lord's feet only a few feet above the ground.

#### The Sayings From The Cross (5):

##### " I thirst"

We have seen that the Lord Jesus began to quote Psalm 22 in His final moments on the cross, and He earnestly desired to complete the quotation <sup>(1)</sup>. He asked for something to wet His throat so He could complete the last few verses. This indicates not only His earnest desire to say out loud " It is finished" with all that meant <sup>(2)</sup>, but also the level of His thirst. Every word He spoke out loud was an expenditure of effort and saliva. He was intensely aware of this. He realized that unless He had more moisture, He just would not be able to speak out loud any more. And yet He so desperately wanted His last words to be heard and meditated upon. His sweat in the Garden had been dropping like blood drops; the nervous tension of bearing our sins sapped moisture from Him. There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that Christ felt as if He had been " poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He " poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12), as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical result of crucifixion.

The Psalms, especially 22 <sup>(3)</sup>, indicate the extent of His dehydration- largely due to the amount of prayer out loud which He did on the cross (" The words of my *roaring*" ). Heb. 5:7 speaks of His strong crying and tears (again an expenditure of moisture) while on the cross; and Rom. 8:26 alludes to this, saying that our Lord has the same intensity in His present mediation for us. The physical extent of His

thirst is expressed by that of Samson, when in an incident typical of Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, he nearly died of thirst in the midst of a spectacular victory (Jud. 15:18) <sup>(4)</sup>. A perusal of that incident will enable us to enter into the thirst of our Lord a little more.

The Messianic Psalms also speak of the great spiritual thirst of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings. The intensity of His physical thirst therefore reflected His spiritual thirst, His desire to be with the Father, His desire to finish His work and achieve our salvation. We are better able to imagine His physical thirst than His spiritual thirst. Yet we are surely intended to see in that physical thirst a cameo of His desire for spiritual victory, His thirsting after God's righteousness.

### **Christ's Spiritual Thirst**

" As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear <sup>(5)</sup> before God? My tears have been me meat...while they continually say unto me (on the cross), Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:1-3)

" O God...my God (cp. " My God, my God" )...my soul thirsteth after thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1)- cp. Christ as a root growing in a spiritually dry land on the cross (Is. 53:1)

" I stretch forth my hands unto thee (on the cross): my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land" (Ps. 143:6).

The thirsty land surrounding Christ on the cross represented spiritually barren Israel (Is. 53:1; Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as Christ really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins:

Thirst: A punishment for Israel's sins

*" Thou shalt serve thine enemies...in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things" (Dt. 28:48) <sup>(6)</sup>. This is so relevant to the cross.*

*" They shall not (any more) hunger or thirst" (Is. 49:10) occurs in the context of comforting Israel that they will no longer be punished for their sins.*

*" Ye are they that forsake the Lord...therefore...ye shall be hungry...ye shall be thirsty...ye shall be ashamed" (Is. 65:11,13). This too is exactly relevant to the cross.*

*" Let (Israel) put away her whoredoms...lest I...set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst" (Hos. 2:3).*

*" I will send a famine in the land, not a ...thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord...in that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Am. 8:11,13).*

This literal and spiritual thirst which was a punishment for Israel's sins came upon the Lord Jesus. He genuinely felt a thirst for God, He really felt forsaken, *as if* He had sinned, He truly came to know the feelings of the rejected sinner. And because of this He really is able to empathize (not just sympathize) with us in our weakness, to enter right into the feelings of those who have gone right away from God, as well as those who temporarily slip up in the way (Heb. 5:2).

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## Notes

(1) See "*Why hast thou forsaken me?*" .

(2) See "*It is finished*" .

(3) There are Messianic passages in Lamentations which also make the same point.

(5) Christ's thirst was to come and appear before God. Appearing before God is Priestly language. Now He appears in God's presence in order to make mediation for us (Heb. 9:24), and He will appear again as the High Priest appeared on the day of Atonement, bringing our salvation. This means that Christ thirsted not so much for His own personal salvation, but for ours; He looked forward to the joys for evermore at God's right hand (Ps. 16:11)- i.e. the offering up of our prayers. How this should motivate us to pray and confess our sins! This is what our Lord was looking forward to on the cross. This is what He thirsted for.

(6) This is an exact picture of Christ on the cross. And Paul likewise alluded to this language when describing his own sufferings for the sake of taking the Gospel to Israel (2 Cor. 11:27), as if he too felt that he was a sin-bearer for Israel as Christ had been. This is to be understood in the same way as his appropriating to Himself the prophecies concerning Christ as the light of the Gentiles.

## **1-1-13 " It is finished"**

**44** The difficulty of crying with a loud voice must be meditated upon. This is why He asked for the drink.

The Sayings From The Cross (6):

" It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)

It is apparent that all of Christ's last words on the cross were full of intense meaning. This was a final victory cry. The spirit of the New Testament is that the cross was a pinnacle of victory, not of temporal defeat. There is no way that Christ was just muttering the equivalent of 'Well, that's it then'. " It is finished" encompassed so much. That tiny word " it" , not even

present in the Greek or Aramaic which Jesus actually spoke, compasses so much; the whole purpose of God. " When Jesus *therefore* had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished" indicates that our Lord asked for a drink specifically so that He could say these words, and those that followed (" Into thy hands I commend my spirit" ). Considering the difficulty of speech as He hung there and His intense thirst, He evidently meant us to hear these words- and meditate upon them.

## **The Glory Of God**

So we ask the question: *What* was finished? The key to this question is in Jn. 17:4: " I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" . " The work" is therefore parallel with Christ's glorification of God. " It is finished" therefore reflects Christ's appreciation that He had now totally glorified His Father. But we need to ponder what exactly it means to glorify God. The glory of God refers to the characteristics intrinsic in God's Name; thus when Moses asked to see God's glory, the attributes of the Name were declared to him. Christ understood that in His death He would manifest God's Name / character to the full, although of course He had also manifested it in His life: " I have declared unto them (the believers, not the world) thy name, and *will declare it*" in His forthcoming death (Jn. 17:26).

It is a major theme of John's Gospel that God was glorified in the death of Christ (further discussion of this will be found in Study 3.10):

" Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" at the cross (Jn. 12:28)

" Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him (i.e. the achievement of God's glorification was internal to Jesus, within His mind, where characteristics are found). If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him" on the cross (Jn. 13:31,32)

" And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self (i.e. your fundamental being and character) with the glory which I had with thee...I have manifested thy name" (Jn. 17:5,6).

" I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it" on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Christ's perfect character is only appreciated by the believers, and therefore it is only to them that God's Name / glory / very own self is revealed by Christ's example. It was to us that God's glory was finally revealed in the death of Christ. To those who wanted to see it, there was almost a visible righteousness exuding from Christ in His time of dying. " Truly this man was the Son of God...Certainly this was a righteous man" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46) was the response of the Centurion who was " watching Jesus" ; and collating the Gospels, it seems he said this twice. " It is *finished*" implies that Christ's manifestation of the Father was progressive. He was " made *perfect*" by His sufferings, only becoming the author of our salvation when He had finally been perfected by them (Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9). This surely teaches that Christ died once He had reached a certain point of completeness of manifestation of the Father. If we accept this, we should not think of Christ just hanging on the cross waiting to die. He was actively developing His manifestation of the Father's characteristics, until finally He sensed He had arrived at that totality of reflection of the Father. Likewise in our carrying of the cross we are not just passively holding on until the Lord's return or our death. We

should be actively growing; for surely we only die once we have reached, or had the opportunity to reach, a certain point of spiritual completeness. This may well explain why some believers die young relatively soon after baptism; they reach their intended completeness, and are therefore taken away from the grief of this life. The perfection of Christ's manifestation of the Father was steadily progressing until at the point of death He completely manifested Him. Thus at Christ's most forlorn and humanly desperate point, utterly exhausted, with no beauty humanly that we should desire Him, utterly despised, rejected and at best misunderstood by every human being, the Lord Jesus at that point was supremely manifesting the Father; He was manifesting God's very own self at that point when He cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:5). It is axiomatic from this that the Gospel of God will be generally rejected by men. The Lord foresaw that His cross would be the final consummation of God's plan in that He at times almost spoke as if He saw His death as His glorification. Thus He speaks of the cross as a going to the Father (Jn. 16:16,17,28). The description of Him as the snake *lifted up* in the wilderness is in the context of Christ ascending to Heaven (Jn. 3:12-14), as if the lifting up of the snake was a reference to both the crucifixion and ascension of the Lord.

### " We ought..."

At the point Christ expired, He laid down His life. So close was the link between Father and Son at this point, so deeply was God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, that John could later comment: " Hereby perceive we the love of God, because *He* laid down His life for us: and we ought (in response) to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). The love of Christ and the cross are paralleled in 2 Cor. 5:14. To behold Christ there at the end, to imagine the sound of those words "It is finished", to begin to sense Christ's spiritual supremacy at that point, should deeply motivate us. Christ loved us with a love which was love "unto *the end*" (Jn. 13:1)- the same word translated "finished" in "It is finished". As Christ said that, His love for us was complete, it was love unto the end, love right up to and beyond the limits of the concept of love. And we are actually asked to imagine that love, the growth of it for us until it was finished, perfected in the laying down of His life- and respond to it.

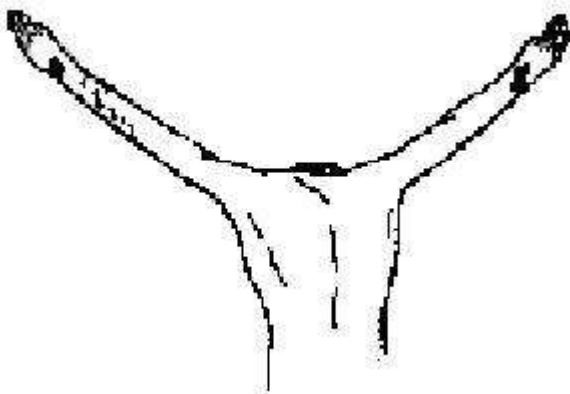
The Lord thought as much: "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it (in his forthcoming death, cp. Jn. 12:26): *that* the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). "In this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16). Herein was the definition of love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave His son for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10). By beholding the finished perfection of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of Christ will dwell in us, and the love of God will be deeply in our hearts. There is almost a mystical power in reflecting upon the example of the Lord Jesus on the cross; somehow by beholding His glory, His matchless display of God's righteousness at the end, we will start to reflect that glory in our very beings. "We all, with open (RV "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory (moral attributes, the peerless character) of the Lord (Jesus), are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit (mind and influence) of the Lord (Jesus)" (2 Cor. 3:18). Time and again it is stressed that the Lord did all this "for us". Jn. 10:14,15 link His knowing of us His sheep, and His giving His life for us. It was because He knew us, our sins, or kind of failures, who we are and who we would be, and fail to be...that He did it. And knowing our brethren, building understanding and relationship with them, is how and why we will be motivated to the same laying down of life for them.

## The Work Of God

But the work finished by the Lord Jesus was not just the faultless display of God's characteristics. The Son's manifestation of the Father was to the end that we might be saved (a point fundamental to an appreciation of the Gospel). The work that Christ ended when He cried "It is finished" was the execution of the whole will of God; for the work that He finished was God's will: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of...my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn. 4:32,34). The will of God is that we might be sanctified, counted as righteous, and ultimately given salvation (1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 10:10). "I came down from heaven...to do...the will of him that sent me...and this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Jn. 6:38-40). God's will is that we should "see", i.e. understand, the righteousness of Christ, and believe that this will be imputed to us, and thereby we can be saved. To have an appreciation of the righteousness of Christ is therefore something absolutely essential for us to develop.

To achieve that fullness of righteousness and salvation for us meant more to the Lord Jesus than physical food; His great physical hunger in John 4 was bypassed by the fact that He was bringing about the salvation of a fallen woman. He had a baptism, i.e. a death and resurrection, to be baptized with, and He was "straitened until it be *accomplished*" (Lk. 12:50), the same word translated "finished" in Jn. 19:30. He agonized throughout His life, looking ahead to that moment of spiritual completion. The more we appreciate this, the more we will be able to enter into His sense of relief: "It is finished / accomplished". And this too should characterize our lives; ever straining ahead to that distant point when at last we will attain that point of spiritual completeness. The incident with the Samaritan woman in John 4 was recognized by Jesus as but a cameo of His whole life; our salvation through His perfect manifestation of the Father was the end in view, it was this which was all consuming for Him. He was not motivated solely by a desire *firstly* for His own salvation, as some of our atonement theologians have wrongly implied. His meat and drink was to do the Father's work and will, which was to save us through imputing Christ's righteousness to us. This is what motivated His obedience, His perfection; it was our salvation which was the last thing in His human consciousness as He cried "*It is finished*". His attitude, both at the start of His ministry and in His approach to His death, was "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God...by the which will we are sanctified (counted righteous) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

"It is finished" - from the rear:





## Old Testament Allusions

" I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" , ultimately finished when Christ cried " It is finished" (Jn. 17:4; 19:30), alludes to several Old Testament passages. Daniel 9:24 had prophesied that Messiah's sacrifice would " finish transgression...make an end of sins...make reconciliation for iniquity...bring in everlasting righteousness...and to anoint the Most Holy" , as if a new sanctuary were being inaugurated. In prospect, the whole concept of sin was destroyed at the point of Christ's death, the devil (sin) was destroyed, the opportunity for us to have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to us was opened up. " It is finished" may well have been uttered with an appreciation of this passage (for surely Dan. 9 was in the mind of our dying Lord). In this case, Christ died with the final triumphant thought that our sinfulness had now been overcome. Surely this should inspire us to a fuller and more confident, joyful faith in this.

Ex. 40:33 is perhaps the clearest basis for the words of Jn. 17:4. This describes how Moses " reared up" the tabernacle, representing us (2 Cor. 6:16); " So Moses finished the work" God had given him to do. Dt. 31:24 likewise speaks of Moses finishing the work. The Hebrew for " reared up" is also used in the context of resurrection and glorification / exaltation. As our Lord sensed His final, ultimate achievement of the Father's glory in His own character, He could look ahead to our resurrection and glorification. He adopted God's timeless perspective, and died with the vision of our certain glorification in the Kingdom. This fits in with the way Psalms 22 and 69 (which evidently portray the thoughts of our dying Lord) conclude with visions of Christ's " seed" being glorified in the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which also speak of the temple (also representative of the ecclesia) being a *work* which was *finished* (e.g. 2 Chron. 5:1). In His moment of agonized triumph as He died, the Lord Jesus saw us as if we were perfect. Surely, surely this should inspire us to have the confidence that this is still how He sees us, both individually and collectively? The mystery of God will ultimately be " finished" in the Kingdom (Rev. 10:7); and yet on the cross Christ could see that effectively " It is finished" at that point, in that the way had now been made absolutely certain. So confident was the Lord in the power of His sacrifice, so great was His sense of purpose and achievement! And nothing has changed with Him until this day.

"It is finished" has some connection with the Lord loving His people "to the very end" (Jn. 13:1- *eis telos*). To the end or completion of what? Surely the Lord held in mind Moses' last speech before he died. Then, "Moses had finished writing all the words of this Law in a book, even to the very end (*LXX eis telos*)" (Dt. 31:24). It was Moses' law which was finished / completed when the Lord finally died. Again we marvel at the Lord's intellectual consciousness even in His death throes. The fact He had completed the Law was upmost in His mind. This alone should underline the importance of never going back to reliance upon that Law, be it in Sabbath keeping or general legalism of attitude.

## Progressive Revelation

Putting all this together, we see our Lord realizing that He had achieved the perfect reflection of the Father's glory, His character; He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do. He knew that the perfection of that manifestation which He had achieved would be imputed to us, and therefore He looked forward to us as if we were perfect, He foresaw our salvation, He saw us in the Kingdom. It is quite possible that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom <sup>(1)</sup>. It can be noted that Christ's working of the work of God is associated with His miracles. Each of them was part of the work which the Father had given

Him to finish (Jn. 5:36). The Lord's miracles were not motivated by a desire to do solve the need of this present evil world; they were " signs" which spoke of the Father's character; they were a progressive manifestation of the glory of the Father in order to deepen the faith of the disciples (Jn. 2:11). This is why each of them can be seen as deeply parabolic, teaching so much about the character / glory of the Father. Any temporal physical help which they provided was only an incidental by-product.

The progressive nature of Christ's manifestation of God's glory through the miracles is suggested by Jn. 2:11: " This *beginning* of miracles did Jesus...and manifested forth his glory" . Likewise Matthew's Gospel has at least four references to the fact that Christ " finished" or " ended" revealing God's words (Mt. 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 " It is finished" . His words were a manifestation of the Father's glory / character. Thus in Jn. 17 Christ associates His manifestation of the Father's Name / glory with His (progressive) giving of the Father's words to the disciples. Thus at the very end Christ must have felt that now He had reached the end of that progressive revelation, now He was manifesting the fullness of God, a God who *is* love- as He hung naked, covered in blood and spittle, totally misunderstood, deserted by His superficial disciples. At that point He was fully, fully, completely, manifesting the Father.

### Our Perfection

In His final physical agony, the mind of our Lord was full of thoughts of our salvation. Such was the extent of His devotion to us. It has taken us hundreds of English words to just begin to enter into the intensity of spiritual thinking which was going on in the mind of our Lord. And yet He asks us to share His cross, to run our whole life with endurance even as He endured on the cross (Heb. 12:1,2), to personally enter into His sufferings; to be likewise filled with an overpowering concern for the salvation of others and the reflection of God's character in our own. It seems that Paul was able to enter into the mind of the Lord Jesus in this. " This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9), your finishing, your rearing up as a perfect tabernacle; this was Paul's attitude to spiritually weak Corinth. " I have *finished* my course" (2 Tim. 4:7) uses the same word as in Jn. 19:30 (" It is *finished*" ). 2 Tim. 4 has a number of other allusions to Christ's final sufferings. As the Lord felt He had finished the work just before He actually had (Jn. 17:4), so did Paul in 2 Tim. 4; He felt He had entered into that sense of finishing which his Lord had on the cross. Our aim is to be perfected, to come to the full knowledge of Christ, " unto a perfect man (a finished man; the same word as in " It is *finished*" ), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12,13). As our Lord moved towards that point of ultimate spiritual completeness, so do we too. At last we will attain that perfection, at last we too will know the feeling of " It is finished" - as a result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

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### Notes

(1) See " *Father, forgive them*" .

### **1-1-14 " Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"**

**45** All crucified men bow their heads on death. The record of this therefore suggests that He lifted up His head to the Father, and then nodding His head towards His people, gave His

Spirit towards them- those who had walked out across the no mans land between the crowd and the soldiers, those who stood there declaring in front of all their allegiance to this crucified King. Yet the spirit of Christ is essentially the mind and disposition of Christ rather than an ability to perform miracles etc. The power to be like Him is passed to us through an inbreathing of His example on the cross. In this sense, the Lord's lifting up in glory on the cross enabled Him to impart His Spirit to us (Jn. 7:37-39). Notice that Christ gave up His last breath of His own volition- the withdrawal of a man's Spirit by God, as with the withdrawal of the Spirit gifts, is to be seen as God's judgment of man. Gen. 6:3 LXX and RVmg. implies this.

The note on chronology suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the Spirit. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. As He wasn't pushing down on the footrests (see 54), breathing was agonizingly difficult. I suggest He took one last great breath, with head uplifted, the nails tearing at that sensitive nerve in His hands as He did so, and then He felt His heart stop. In that last two seconds or so, He expired in the words " Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" . Thus He *gave* His life- for us. The centurion, when he saw *how* He died (Mk., NIV), believed. The display of self-mastery, of giving, of love so great, *so* free, was what made that man believe (perhaps he was Cornelius?). It has been observed that the phrase "He gave forth His spirit" is unique; death isn't described like that in contemporary literature. "Nowhere in antiquity is death described as the giving forth of one's spirit" (1).

(1) I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (New York: Alba House, 1989) p. 131.

#### The Sayings From The Cross (7):

" Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"

#### " Father"

These were the final words of the Lord Jesus. It must surely be significant that this final statement addresses God as " Father" , just as the first of His seven last sayings did (" Father forgive them" ). He used the same title in His agony in the garden (Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44). Putting those four passages together we can visualize the prostrate figure: " Father...Father...Father...Father" . Evidently the Fatherhood of God was something which the Lord found extremely appealing and comforting. We have seen that if we place the seven last sayings of Christ chronologically, we find that the number of words Christ uttered runs 12-9-4-3-1-1-8. We have suggested that this indicates that Christ found speaking increasingly difficult on the cross. This final cry therefore involved supreme effort, every word was meaningful, and surely our Lord intended us to closely meditate upon the implication of every valuable word He uttered here.

#### " My spirit"

There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus was not just saying something like 'Well, that's it, my life force is going back to you, Father'. We need to pause for a moment to consider exactly what we mean by the spirit of man. It is perfectly true that often, the spirit refers to the life force and / or the mind, and the soul refers to the physical body. However, this is not true in every case. We have discussed this problem elsewhere [\(1\)](#) in a study to which I would refer you. The conclusion of that study was that *sometimes* the soul basically means 'you /

me, the whole person in every sense'. The soul and spirit are therefore interchangeable in this sense. The spirit / mind *is* the fundamental person, the soul, in that sense. The spirit which returns to God does not *always* refer to merely the life force; it can refer to the mind and personality too. Likewise the Spirit of God is not just naked power, but power that expresses His Spirit / mind. When the Lord Jesus commended His Spirit to the Father, He was offering Him not just the life force which is in every animal and plant, but His character and personality too, the result of the supreme spiritual effort made throughout His life.

The Lord Jesus *commended* His spirit to the Father's hands. The Greek translated "commend" means literally to place beside, to lay down beside. The Lord Jesus had a sense that His character would not be forgotten by the Father, it would take its place beside the Father as it were, as He later would physically. This is not, of course, to give any support to the notion of disembodied spirits. Existence can only be in an animate, bodily sense. Yet the word "commend" in the Greek does suggest that Christ felt that the place He would soon take beside the Father was due to the fact that His spirit / mind had found acceptance with Him first. The Father's hands no doubt is an idiom for His care, His preservation (cp. Mt. 4:6). Christ was taking comfort in the fact that His character, those endless minutes of spiritual effort, of struggle to develop and preserve a spiritual mind, would surely not be forgotten, it would be preserved in the Father's hands.

### **" All live unto Him"**

It is possibly true that we have gone too far in reacting against the apostate dogma of the immortality of the soul. Whilst this is an evidently false doctrine, it is equally untrue that the Father forgets His children between the point they die and the resurrection. Therefore God thinks of Abraham as if he is still alive, speaking of " those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:16,17). God is the God of Abraham here and now, even though Abraham is dead and unconscious, because " he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all (His people) live unto him" (Lk. 20:36,37). Because the dead are unconscious, because our memories of them fade and distort, we tend to think subconsciously (and even doctrinally, according to some lectures on the state of the dead) that this is how God too sees the dead saints. But " all live unto him" , the souls under the altar cry out to Him for vengeance; in other words, His constant, detailed awareness of their characters provokes Him to act in world affairs even now (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Heavenly Jerusalem with which we are associated in Christ is composed of " the spirits (characters) of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). As we strive to develop a spiritual character now, our spirit becomes associated with those pleasing characters (" spirits" ) who reached a level of spiritual completion (" perfection" ) and were then absorbed into God's consciousness.

The hands of God are also connected with the Angels, the means by which God performs His actions. More detail of this has been provided elsewhere <sup>(2)</sup>. Moses' hands being upheld by the hands of others can be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus being sustained by Angelic hands on the cross, connecting with the Messianic prophecy of Gen. 49:24 concerning the hands of Messiah being strengthened for His mediation by the hands of God. Throughout Scripture, God's hands are associated with His creative work in the natural creation (e.g. Ps. 8:6; 95:5; Heb. 1:10)- work which was and is performed through the Angels. The Lord Jesus was aware of the Angels in His final agony; He was painfully aware that they were at His command to lessen the physical torment (Mt. 26:53). And yet He seems to have felt their absence when He complained that His God (His Angel?) had forsaken Him- or so He felt. Perhaps He felt that His spirit / mind was not being taken care of by them, that His mental being was being placed

beside the Father, in the company of the surrounding Angels. Our struggle to remain aware of Angelic presence in the midst of intense pain and trial should surely be inspired by this; in His very last words, our Lord was demonstrating His awareness of His relationship to the Angels, and His belief that although they seemed so distant from Him in His agony, yet surely He believed that ultimately they would take care of Him.

### **Laying Down Life**

There were several times in the Lord's ministry when He chose to escape from death. This adds significance to the fact that finally the Lord gave up His life rather than having it taken from Him. By His Divine power, He passed through the crowd who sought to throw Him over a cliff (Lk. 4:29). Several times the Lord withdrew from an area that opposed Him because He knew they sought to kill Him (Mk. 3:7; 7:24; 9:30; Jn. 4:1-3; 7:1-9; 10:40); and He almost goes into hiding from His persecutors for a while until the final reappearance in Jerusalem (Jn. 11:54). What all this means is that He could likewise have avoided His final death; but He chose not to, and in this sense He willingly gave His life rather than had it taken from Him. The death of human beings can be seen as a result of physical processes over which they have no control. They are killed, often against their will, or disease takes hold of them and eventually forces them to a point where they breathe their last. There is never a conscious giving up of the last breath as an act of the will. Death either occurs in a state of semi-consciousness or unexpectedly, in a moment. We usually, in the final analysis, cling to life at all costs, throwing our feeble best into the fight we have no chance to win. Truly did Dylan Thomas observe that men do not "go gentle into that good night" but "rage, rage against the dying of the light". The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was altogether different- and the death of the thieves next to Him would have highlighted this. It is so often emphasized that He *gave* His life for us:

*" Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" in itself suggests that the death of Christ was an act of the will*

*Christ gave His flesh for us (Jn. 6:51)*

*Moses and Elijah spoke of the cross as " the Exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31)- He would accomplish it to Himself, the Greek suggests.*

*The breaking of bread (a highly conscious act) recalls how Christ gave His body for us (Lk. 22:19)*

*Christ's death was the result of His obedience to God's command to die on a cross (Phil. 2:8)*

*Christ poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a wilful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.*

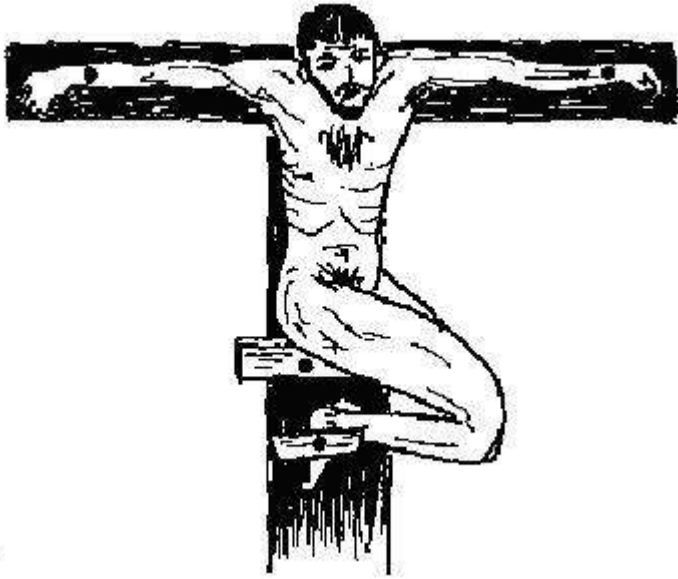
*" Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13)*

*The Lord was at great pains to emphasize this aspect of His death, saying the same thing time and again: " I lay down my life for the sheep...therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life...no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself...this commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:15-18).*

The death of Christ was therefore a conscious act of giving, it was not simply a result of being murdered by the Jews or Roman soldiers. No man took Christ's life from Him, He laid it down of Himself, i.e. of His own will. It is therefore apparent that Christ's death was not solely a physical result of being impaled on the stake. The fact He died abnormally quickly is proof enough of this. And it explains why the centurion when he saw how the Lord *so* cried out was by this fact persuaded that He was the Son of God (Mk. 15:39). That last outbreathing, that death as an act of the will, was something phenomenal. We are therefore driven to the conclusion that Christ was in a position to give His life at a certain point in time chosen by Himself. " He poured out his *soul* unto death" (Is. 53:12) suggests that the actual point of His death was a result of mental activity within the mind of the Lord Jesus. He was the servant who " *makes himself* an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10). Physically this would be explicable by the way in which His life of intense physical and mental trauma had resulted in Him coming to an early death, quite probably through heart-related problems. " My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Mt. 26:38) suggests that the mental agony in the garden almost killed the Lord Jesus. Such was the intensity of His mind in His final suffering for us. Such was His awareness of our need, of the problem of our sins, and the majesty of God's righteousness. In the physical agony of crucifixion, it was only His will to live which kept Him alive. He was therefore able to keep Himself alive until He had said what He wanted to, and then He was able to consciously give His life for our sins, to offer *Himself*, as both sacrifice and priest, to the Heavenly Sanctuary. This means that Christ did not just hang on the stake waiting to die, and the process of death was mercifully speeded up by the Father. Every moment there was necessary for the perfecting of His character, making Him perfect through suffering, and once He knew He had reached that point of total spiritual completeness, He was able to give up His life as a conscious act of love for us and sacrificial dedication to the Father. The strength of will power which enabled Him to give up His life force at a specific time is something to be marvelled at. Occasionally we glimpse it in His ministry; the way He sent the people away, walked through the crowds who wanted to kill Him (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 8:59; 10:39), spellbound His would-be arresters, " suffered no man to follow him" (Mk. 5:37)- His strength of will and personality shines through.

The Lord Jesus 'commended' His spirit to the Father. The Greek *para-tithemi* means literally to place or lay down beside. *Tithemi* is the same word translated " lay down" when we read of Christ laying down His life for us. It is the word used to describe the palsied man being laid down at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 5:18), or the laying of a foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11). It is also translated to bow down. The point at which Christ laid down His life, bowing down before the Father, was therefore when He commended His spirit to the Father. When Christ " *yielded up* the spirit" (Mt. 27:50), He was commending His spirit to God, laying down His life for us. The Greek for " yielded up" is *para-didomi*, to yield or give beside, and is evidently related in meaning to *para-tithemi*, to commend, to lay down beside.

Reconstruction of the death of Jehohanan outside the walls of Jerusalem, from archaeological remains:



### **Our example**

So the idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us therefore refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". And therefore, Paul goes on, fornication, covetousness, foolish talking etc. should not even be *named* amongst us, "but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3,4). That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which are earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later in the chapter: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

Another thought arises from Eph. 5:25,26. Christ *gave Himself* for us in that final breath, "*that* he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing (laver, baptismal bath) of water by the word". This is the language of Tit. 3:5 concerning baptism and spiritual regeneration. Is it

too much to believe that the Lord in His final moments had visions of men and women being baptized into His triumphant death, being regenerated by His Spirit / word, and thereby being saved?

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died...the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We perceive the humility of God, fantastic concept that that is. No wonder then that we should lay down our lives for each other. No wonder than that we *must* achieve a true humility in service to each other. Christ (and God, in Him) laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).



It seems likely that Peter was at the cross, and therefore his letters are packed with allusions to it. What he saw there had a lifelong impact upon him <sup>(3)</sup>. He makes at least two allusions to the words of Christ on the cross, and bids us enter into the spirit of it. " Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps...who...when he suffered, threatened not; but *committed himself* to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This is the same word as used about Christ commending His spirit to God in that final agony. *We really are bidden enter into His example and follow Him*. Christ overcame the temptation to react wrongly to His sufferings by *instead* committing Himself to God. This idea of laying Himself down for us was what enabled Him not to get bitter. The antidote to our own bitterness is likewise to enter into this spirit of laying down our lives.

1 Pet. 4:13-19 likewise invites us to enter into Christ's final sufferings: " Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings...let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer (cp. the two thieves next to Jesus on the cross)...yet if any man suffer as a Christian (i.e. with Christ), let him not be ashamed (as Christ " despised the shame" on the cross, Heb. 12:2)...wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God (as Christ did, Acts 2:23; Is. 53:10; Lk. 22:22) *commit* the keeping of their souls (same word as Christ *commending* His spirit to God) to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator" . *We really are bidden enter into His example and follow Him*. I want to stress this point. The sufferings of Christ are so deep that we can shy away from them, gaping in incomprehension at the records without grasping this sense that we really are invited to enter in to them. It has been suggested that since the Lord's last words were "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit", His first words on resurrecting would have been a continuation of the Psalm 31:5 which He had quoted: "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth". But this verse was the usual evening prayer of Jews in the first century. It could well be that the Lord had prayed those words every evening of His mortal life, and said the rest of the verse each time He awoke. In this we see yet again that the cross was a living out of patterns and attitudes which He had already developed during His life. It also needs to be noted that David didn't say Ps. 31:5 on his deathbed, but rather it was an expression of his desire to commit his soul to the Father in gratefulness and praise. There was something of this in the mind of Jesus at His end.

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## Notes

(1) See 'The Problem of Soul and Spirit' in *James And Other Studies*.

(2) See 'The Language of Angels' in *Angels*.

(3) See A.D.Norris, *Peter: Fisher of Men* and H.A.Whittaker *Studies in the Gospels*. Peter was " a witness of the sufferings of Christ" (1 Pet. 5:1).

We need to meditate upon that lifeless body. " A covenant is of force over dead [victims or sacrifices]...it is never held to be of force while he who is the appointed [sacrifice] is alive" (Heb. 10:17 Bullinger). Over that body the personal covenant to each of us (Gen. 17:7) came into real, living operation.

## 1-1-15 The Pierced Christ

47 That sinful city is called " the holy city" , even though this will only be Jerusalem's title in the Kingdom age, after her repentance (Is. 1:26). What imputation of righteousness! Again, we see how the record *breathes* the spirit of grace. The fact those mocking Jews died in their beds, that judgment didn't immediately come, that the repentant thief was saved and not made to apologize, that Joseph the secret doubter who voted for the Son of God's crucifixion should be spoken of so highly...there are so many examples of God's pure grace to man.

48 He said it twice: " This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him".

49 The people 'coming together to that sight' might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: " cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried.

Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

50 The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

There is great emphasis on people " beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross.

51 A connection of thought arises from the word " pierced" . Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is

one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: " They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*...and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate " commanded the body to be delivered" , implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as " honourable" , literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. " He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The phobia for cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare

record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description.

The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance.

The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

52 It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience. It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "They have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain...*they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre". The text records that they desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body.

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human

god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

53 The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

*Reconstruction of the crucifixion of Jehohanan, crucified outside Jerusalem in AD70. The position of the legs would have induced unbearable cramps.*

54 Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller (*The Bible As History* p. 356) explains: " There was often a small support attached called a " sedile" (seat). if the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body...when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the " crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed" . It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life...that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostals muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon

dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile...is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others... which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is...the end of punishment [i.e. death]?" (1). In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: " In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled" . The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death (see 38). Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: " My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me...my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (38:10; 73:26).

### **Physical Pain**

The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9 defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort.

### **Notes**

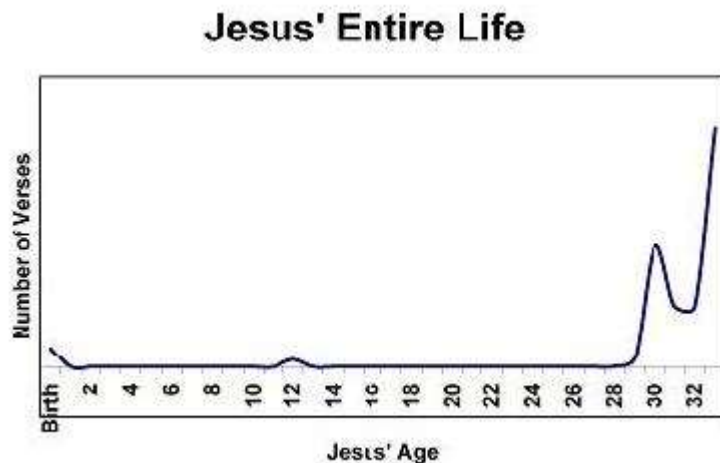
(1) Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

## **2 The Central Role Of The Crucifixion In The Gospels**

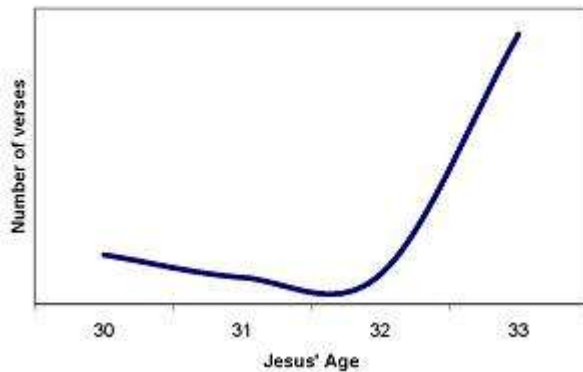
It has been noted that Matthew, Mark and Luke include a large body of material which appears to be common to all three writers. This has led to the suggestion that there was a common source, 'Q', which they drew from. However, that reconstructed body of material doesn't include the material about the crucifixion. I find that significant, in that this fact reveals how each writer so personally describes the cross; they were each uniquely, personally impacted by it, just as we are. The textual emphasis upon the crucifixion is surely evidence that we are intended to dwell upon it. M.R. Vincent has correctly stated that " There is no day in all Bible history narrated with the fullness of that day. If we possessed the whole life of Christ, written with the same detail, the record would occupy one hundred and eighty volumes as large as the whole Bible" <sup>(1)</sup>. It could also be pointed out that the intensity of textual attention to the Lord's ministry increases, overall; the final six months have far more detail recorded about them than the three previous years of ministry, the final week has more detail than any other week, and then the final hours have far more attention than any other incident in Scripture. Anyone who has read any amount of biography, or description of events

in others' lives, will realize the inevitable gap which there is between the reader and the person being described. Somehow the inspired Gospels bridge this gap. We see Jesus very real before us. The characters in human novels / accounts / biographies are as nothing compared to the immense stature which is given to the man Jesus in the crucifixion accounts, let alone to the central role of the crucifixion in the Gospel records. Somehow those records urgently transmit to us the essence of His personality. Without effort, without self-assertion, almost without direct claim, we are left awed with the reality that this man, through his death, demands my total response. All the Gospels present the crucifixion and resurrection as the climax of their presentation of the Gospel. Luke's record is studded with references to the Lord's progress on that final journey up to Jerusalem; events took place "as they went in the way" (Lk. 9:57-62), as if they were incidental to the main aim of the record, which was to describe the final coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and death (Lk. 13:22). It has been observed, truly enough: "Of the biographies I have read, few devote more than ten percent of their pages to the subject's death- including biographies of men like Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, who died violent and politically significant deaths. The Gospels, though, devote nearly a third of their length to the climactic last week of Jesus' life" <sup>(2)</sup>. "The cross is central in the structure of all four Gospels. They have well been described as 'Passion narratives with extended introductions'. They are not biographies. In each one the death and resurrection of Jesus take up such a disproportionate amount of space that it is quite clear that the author has no intention of giving an account of the life of our Lord. Everything is arranged to lead up to the climax- the cross"<sup>(3)</sup>. It is a quite mistaken view of the teaching of the Lord Jesus that it centred around brotherly love and the sermon on the mount. His most oft repeated image and demand was to carry His cross.

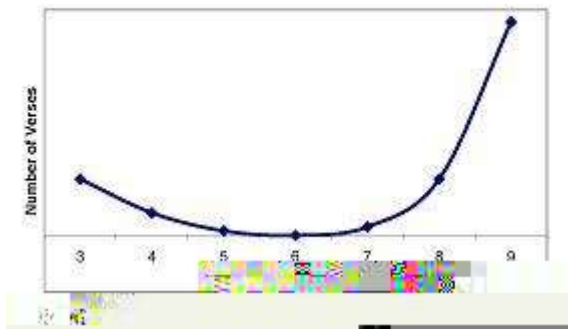
The following graphs attempt to express the centrality of the crucifixion record:



## Jesus' Ministry



## The day Jesus was crucified



The Acts record likewise goes on to emphasize the apostolic preaching of the cross of Christ; and the Epistles centre around the meaning of this great act of atonement. The two sacraments of the ecclesia, baptism and the breaking of bread, both focus upon the believer's appropriation to himself of the Lord's cross. It is plain enough that we each have a solemn responsibility before the Lord Jesus Christ to use these records to attempt to re-live and appreciate the physical reality of His sacrifice. For He paid dearly for you, and for me: and so we must come to appreciate that price. The records are in fact written in such a way as to encourage us to re-live the crucifixion process as it were in slow motion. The record of the trials likewise is written in a way which encourages us to imagine it and live it out in our imaginations in slow motion. Donald Senior has pointed out how John's account of the trial scenes alternate between what is happening "inside" and "outside" [\(4\)](#):

- (1) " Outside" - The Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate, Jn. 18:28-32
- (2) " Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 18:33-38
- (3) " Outside" - Pilate declares Jesus innocent, 18:38-40
- (4) " Inside" - The Roman soldiers scourge and mock Jesus, 19:1-3
- (5) " Outside" - Pilate again declares Jesus not guilty, 19:4-8
- (6) " Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 19:9-12



(7) " Outside" - Pilate delivers Jesus to crucifixion, 19:13-16.

Tragically He so often sought to explain to the disciples about the cross; and yet always they met His efforts either with silence, or with irrelevant changing of the subject, or even protest, in Peter's case. The tragic mismatch between the Lord's cross and the mind of the disciples is brought out in Mk. 10:32-40. Having set His face to go up to Jerusalem, the Lord "went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid". The words imply that He took the lead and walked forcefully a few paces ahead of them in a startling manner. "If anything in the Gospels has the stamp of real and live recollection upon it, it is this"<sup>(5)</sup>. His mind was evidently dwelling in His forthcoming death, in which He may well have foreseen that He would be crucified with sinners on His right and left. But then two of the disciples respond to His prediction of the cross by asking that *they* should sit on His right and left hand in glory over the others. Here we see, on the Gospel writers own admission, the paucity of their effort to grasp the real message of the cross. May it not be so with us. May we at least strive to enter into His struggle, and be moved to a true and unpretended humility by it.

The events of the crucifixion are an epitome of who the Lord most essentially was and is. His soul was made 'sin' in that He "poured out His soul unto death" (Is. 53:12). The Hebrew for "poured out" also means to make naked, to stretch out. The Lord bared His soul, who He essentially was, was displayed there for all to see; the wine was His blood which was Him, in the sense that the cross is who the son of God essentially was and is and shall ever be. "This is Jesus" was and is the title over the cross. There, for our redemption, He died (Heb. 9:15), He gave us *Himself* (1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14), His life (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45), His blood (1 Pet. 1:18,19; Eph. 1:7). His death, His life, His blood, these are all essentially *Himself*. The blood of Jesus speaks to us as if *He personally* speaks to us; He is personified as His blood (Heb. 12:24,25). This is the preaching (Gk. the word) of the cross. Paul makes the connection between the voice of Christ's blood and the earthquake that shook all things at the time of the Old Covenant's inauguration. The voice of that blood can shake *all things* with the exception of the Kingdom, which cannot be shaken. This is the power of the cross. Human words, platform speaking, magazine articles- all these are so limited, although our communal life is inevitably built around them. People just don't remember sermons. I doubt you can remember much of what you heard at the last ecclesial meeting you attended, let alone the meeting before that, and before that... This isn't a sin; it's just part of being human. But the point is, we need something to *shake* us, and this earth-shaking force is the voice of the cross. The link between the Lord's death and the true word / voice of God is again made in Jn. 6:51 cp. 63: the words of the Lord give life, whereas also His flesh "which I will give for the life of the world" on the cross would also be the source of life. The giving of His flesh was in essence His word to man; the word made flesh. This phrase, we have suggested elsewhere, also refers to the Lord's death rather than His birth.

Far back in Mosaic ritual, the voice of command was associated with the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat; the blood of the lamb was a command to respond (Ex. 25:22). Heb. 9:20 RV speaks of "the blood of the covenant which God commanded"; the book of the law was sprinkled with that blood to show the connection between the blood and the book. To eat His flesh and blood (in evident anticipation of His coming sacrifice and the memorial meeting) was to eat *Him* and His words (Jn. 6:53,54,63). His words were all epitomized in His offered flesh and blood. In His death and sacrifice (which "the blood of Jesus" represent), we see His very essence: He Himself. On the stake He poured out His soul unto death (Is. 53:12), and yet in His life He poured out His soul too (Ps. 42:4). The cross was an epitome of who He really

had been for those 33 years. To know Christ is to know His cross (Is. 53:11). Paul spoke of knowing His sufferings, knowing Him [an ellipsis for 'His cross?'] and His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). He poured out the wine, broke the bread, and told His men to do it *in memory* of Him- as if the life they then could remember was the essence of the cross which was to come.

The risen and exalted Lord is spoken of as being shamed, being crucified afresh, as agonizing in prayer for us just as He did on the cross (Rom. 8:24 cp. Heb. 5:7-9). On the cross, He made intercession for us (Is. 53:11,12); but now He ever liveth to make such intercession (Heb. 7:25). There He bore our sins; and yet now He still bears our sins (Is. 53:4-6. 11). Somehow, the cross is still there, just as the signs and wonders which God did in Egypt are there "even unto this day" (Jer. 32:20). The blood of Jesus cleanses us, in the present tense, from all our sins; the Lord Jesus loves us and frees us from our sins by His blood (1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). We are cleansed by an ever 'freshly slain' sacrifice (Heb. 10:20 Gk.). We are to go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, his 'having it cast in the teeth' (Gk.; Heb. 13:13). It's as if He is still there, outside the city gates, and we shoulder our crosses and His reproach as He walked the Via Dolorosa, and go out to be crucified next to Him, as we endure being fools for Christ's sake in our worldly decisions. It's a rather strange idea, at first consideration. But His sufferings are ongoing. The cross is still there- wherever we go, and however far we fall away from Him. We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small kindred between His cross and ours.

The Lord's teaching concerning the cross was frequently misunderstood. This man who healed children, who taught wonderful lessons from birds and flowers about the love of God, kept interjecting into His conversation this talk about the 'last walk' of a crucifixion victim. It just seemed so out of place, and the people feared to ask Him. I can dimly liken it to our listening to someone speak a language which we only partly know. We get the gist of the sentences, but every now and again, they may speak about a theme which uses language totally foreign to us. They may keep repeating a word which we don't know, and yet evidently the sense of the sentence hinges upon it. And we are afraid to ask, we think we more or less get the general direction of what they are saying. But we may find that we don't; that we have quite misunderstood the real theme of their words. And so it must have been with the disciples, when the Lord spoke about His cross and theirs.

### **Turning Away**

When He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

There is a connection between the fact that we would rather not dwell on the literal realities of the cross, and the fact that when we are faced with a choice between the easy and the difficult forms of serving Christ, we will take the easy way. We will lay down the cross. It is no excuse to say that we get too emotionally choked up to think about the cross. The women weeping for the man from Nazareth would later disobey His word, and therefore be condemned in the destruction of Jerusalem. The Lord was telling them not to excuse their lack of real faith and response to Him by the fact that they were so distraught at the physicality of His sufferings.

I have given these studies several times. Each time, I am tempted half way through to put my notes away in almost mid sentence, change the topic entirely, talk about something else. This reaction, which I think we all identify with, is not simply because of the emotion and gruesomeness of it all. It is because we realize that the cross implies a deep, painful response from us. This may also be why 'the central object of our meeting' at the breaking of bread usually gets relegated to at the most a minute or so; we must ensure that our preparation, our exhorting of ourselves, doesn't just amount to listening to a Bible study; it must be a personal facing up to some aspects of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord told the twelve that they must pick up their crosses and follow Him. When He said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

If we really think of the Lord's passion seriously, our thoughts will be punctuated with the realization: " I would not have done that. I would simply not have held on" . But in that He died for us all in Him, it is reckoned that we all died with Him the death of the cross (2 Cor. 5:14). We are graciously counted as having died with Him in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), and now we try to live this out in practice. And in appreciating this, inevitably our patience with our brethren will be the more thorough-going. Appreciation of the cross will create unity between us; a common sense of failure, and yet also a common appreciation of the utter grace which we have been invited to behold and actually taste of. " All the people that *came together* to that sight" (Lk. 23:48) uses a word which really means to bond together in close association. This is the effect of the cross. Those who stared in wonder, yearning for a deeper appreciation, were somehow bound together by their experience of the cross.

When Paul faced Corinth, the ecclesia whom he had loved and brought into being with great labour pains, yet now riven with carnality, fabricating the most malicious rumours against him, bitter at his spirituality...he determined to know nothing among them, saving Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). The antidote to ecclesial problems and selfishness is reflection upon the cross. By insisting on our rights, Paul says, we will make the weak brother stumble, " for whom Christ died" . 'Think of His cross and sacrifice', Paul is saying, 'and the sacrifice of self restraint *you* are asked to make is nothing at all'. And when he turned to the Galatians, turning away as they were to the flesh and to the doctrines of the world around them, he reminded them that it was impossible to turn away from the Truth with Jesus Christ evidently set forth, crucified among them (Gal. 3:1 NIV). It seems that Paul had gone through the process of crucifixion with them so realistically, that it was as if Christ had suffered before their eyes. If you have seen that, Paul says, and the vision remains with you, how can you turn away? And this is a powerful motivator for us too. The man who sees, really sees,

something of the Lord's agony, simply won't turn away, doctrinally or practically. But if we turn away from the consideration, the motivation will not be there to keep on responding. In this sense the crucifixion record *almost* has a mystical power in it, if it is properly apprehended. The Lord foresaw that if He were lifted up, He would *thereby* draw all men [men of all types, of all nations and languages] unto Him in truth (Jn. 12:32). And a brief reflection upon the effect of the cross in human lives will reveal that this has indeed been the case. The cross was an instrument of torture; yet it inspires men to write hymns of praise about it [e.g. "When I behold the wondrous cross..."]. Men have never written hymns of praise to the guillotine or hangman's rope. Nor have men made small relics of an electric chair and glanced towards them for inspiration at hard times.

The centrality of the cross is reflected in the way in which to live a life crucified with Jesus is set up as the ultimate aim of the Christian life. We are "becoming conformed [coming towards His *morphe*, His form and appearance] unto his death" (Phil. 3:10 RV). Slowly, our lives are working out towards that end; this is intended by God to be the final position we all reach by the time of our death or the Lord's return; that we will in some vague, feint way, have become conformed to the mind of Jesus as He was at *His* death. And then, our body will be "conformed" (same Greek word) to His at His coming in a physical sense (Phil. 3:21). And this is why we should count all things loss in order to come to know Christ (Phil. 3:8)- which the context suggests we are to read as knowing the spirit of His death. This is why this study of the cross is so vital and central to our lives.

The cross elicits a purely individual response in each reader or listener who encounters it. I find this a simple observable fact; and a powerful one. But we find this feature confirmed when we compare the records of the cross against the rest of the Gospel accounts. In the records of the miracles, parables, ethical teachings of Jesus etc., we find a certain continuity and similarity between the descriptions. It has been postulated by many scholars that there was some currently unknown 'source' of sayings, which they call 'Q' [*quelle*- source], from which Matthew and Luke drew their material (6). Whether that is the case or not doesn't affect my point- for the lay reader of the Gospels can simply compare them and observe a great similarity in phrasing between Matthew, Mark and Luke. But- and this is the issue in our context- the accounts of the crucifixion are all markedly different from each other. Not that they contradict- but each writer stressed different things. Thus each of them records a different aspect of what was written on the signboard over the Lord's body. Each of the Gospel writers was impressed by the crucifixion quite differently; and it is the same for us today.

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## Notes

- (1) M.R. Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).
- (2) Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1995) p. 185.
- (3) Leon Morris, *The Cross Of Jesus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994 ed) p. 2.
- (4) Donald Senior, *The Passion Of Jesus In The Gospel Of John* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1991) p. 69.

(5) James Denney, *The Death Of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997 ed.) p. 25.

(6) See J.M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg., eds., *The Critical Edition of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); C.M. Tuckett, *Q And The History Of Early Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996).

### 3. The Compulsion Of The Cross

#### 3-1 Joseph And Nicodemus

Reflection upon the cross must have a distinct mental impact upon us, if we reflect upon it in sincerity and truth. There is what I would call a crucifixion compulsion; a transforming power in the cross. His sacrifice *must* have an effect upon those who believe it: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves *with the same mind*...that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Pet. 4:1,2). So often the will of God is associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). As the Lord's life and death was devoted to the fulfilment of God's will and not His own, so we too will have that stamp upon us "forasmuch..." as our Lord did and died as He did. It is not as if the Lord Jesus has said to us: 'Would you like me to die for you on the cross, to gain your salvation?'. Because then we could say 'No, don't do it for me', and we would be free of obligation. But He has taken the initiative. He has already died for us, He suffered for me, He won my redemption. And He has called me to know this and respond to it. I *can't* say, with eyes even only half open to the cross, 'No, I don't want what You did for me. Take it away, no, I don't want it'. He has done it. He has called me. I can't say I don't want it. And for you too. We have not chosen Him of our own decision; He has chosen us, and asked us to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16). Reflected upon, this is one of the most tremendous imperatives which we have to a dedicated life of response to the principles of His cross: justifying the weak, showing a spirit of grace amidst hatred, imbibing the word, being concerned for the salvation of others amidst our own agonies, enduring apparently endless tribulation (notice, and circle in your Bible, all the occurrences of the word "and" in Mk. 15 A.V.)... that principle that *nothing else matters* apart from our response to His love, so great, so free. The whole horror, pain and tragedy of the cross was surely to show us that *He loved us far more than we have ever or will ever love Him*. And yet He asks us to accept His love, to respond to it, to love Him and in that love, show forth His character to others. With shame at the paucity and poverty of our own devotions, we can do little else but respond as fully and as best we can.

God forbid that for us, the cross should be a mere art form that we admire from afar. We are to be intimately connected with the spirit of the Lord as He hung there. In baptism, we are to be 'incorporated with him in a death like his' (Rom. 6:5). The Greek word *symphytoi* speaks of a symphony, in which we and the Lord in His time of dying are united together. Likewise Rom. 8:29 and Phil. 3:21 speak of being 'fused into the mould of his death'. He, as He was there, is to be our mould. The strange ability of the cross to elicit powerful response in practice is one way in which the blood of Christ sanctifies us. His sacrifice not only brings forgiveness for past sins, it is the inspiration to a sanctified future life. Heb. 9:19 brings out the link between blood and law-giving; the people were sprinkled with blood as they heard the Law read to them. The new covenant in Christ's blood results in the laws of God being written on our hearts, in our consciences (Heb. 8:10). Then Heb. 10:14-16 goes on to say the placing of the laws on our hearts in this way is in fact a "witness" to how His blood sanctifies

us. We can't be passive to His sacrifice; the conscience elicited by it, the writing on our hearts, is what propels us forward to live a sanctified life.

Through His death, the veil was torn open, so that we might enter into the Holiest "by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us...through the veil, that is to say [the sacrificing of] his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-22 Gk.). This assumes that the followers of Jesus are already in the position of the High Priest standing in the Holy Place, but through what He opened through the cross, each of us must now go through into the Most Holy. And what was the purpose of the High Priest's entry? To obtain forgiveness *for others, to mediate for them*, just as Jesus did on the cross. His cross compels us to not merely passively contemplate our own salvation, but to go deeper into the very presence of God in our ministry *for others*. Yet the High Priest had to cleanse himself meticulously; access had been limited to the Most Holy as a result of inadequate preparation by some in the past (Lev. 16:1,2). The Lord's death opened up the veil, for us to pass through with the utmost effort made by us in personal sanctification, in order to further God's glory in the salvation of others. We cannot simply refuse to enter, turn away from the torn veil. To do so is to turn away from what the cross has achieved, and to place ourselves outside its scope. We must go forward, go onwards into the presence of God to replicate in essence the Saviour's work, with the awed and humble spirit of the High Priest entering the Holiest on the day of atonement. He would surely have carefully analyzed his motives, as to *why* he was passing through that veil, and whether he was sufficiently personally sanctified for the work he was doing. He would have been comforted by knowing that his motives were solely for the glorification of his God in the redemption for his people which he was seeking to obtain.

### **Nothing Else Matters**

Joseph and Nicodemus were inspired with that sense which we possess all too fleetingly: that in the light of the Lord's death, *nothing else matters*. Paul felt the same, when he spoke of how for the sake of the "knowledge of Christ" (i.e. knowledge of His cross- Is. 53:11), he counted all things but loss (Phil. 3:8). They were both typified in some way by Reuben, who when confronted with the reality of murdering Joseph, spoke out unashamedly in front of his unspiritual brethren (Gen. 37:22; 42:22). Nicodemus had come to the Lord by night, scared to make the total commitment of coming out into the open. But the purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. The Lord's discourse that night three years ago had emphasized the need for every believer to come out into the light, not hide under the cover of darkness as Nicodemus was doing: "Men loved darkness...for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest" (Jn. 3:19-21). This must be read in the context of the fact that this discourse was spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus secretly, at night. It took three years and the personal experience of the cross to make Nicodemus realize the truth of all this. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were like Nicodemus. They made a great commitment to tell a stranger that they had believed in Jesus of Nazareth and His words about resurrection (Lk. 24:19-21). Remember how at that very time, the disciples locked themselves indoors for fear of the Jews. They said what they did and took the 'chance' they did, without believing Jesus would rise. They were motivated by the cross to simply stand up and be counted, with no hope of future reward.

Nicodemus and Joseph not only did something which placed them outside the religious and social elite of Israel. They humbled themselves in front of that cross. Joseph grovelled before Pilate for the body, he walked out into that no man's land between the crowd and the cross. Nicodemus bought 300 pounds of spices, far greater than the amount used at the most lavish royal burials of the time. The cost of this would have been colossal; equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars. And he did this on the spur of the moment; he bought it in the three hours between the Lord's death (3p.m.) and sunset (6p.m.). He didn't count the cost, thinking that OK, he'd given up his place in the society and economy, and would now have to live frugally on what he had for the rest of his days. No. Like the widow, he gave what he had, his capital, which many would have more 'prudently' kept for the rainy days ahead. To realize such a huge sum he must have run around in those hours, selling all he had for ridiculous prices (something similar to scenes in *Schindler's List*). The holiday was coming on, and nobody was really in the mood for business. His wife, family, friends, colleagues...would have considered crazy, But all the time, beating in his brain, would have been the sense: 'Now, nothing, *nothing else* really matters at all'. It's been observed: "If the aloe and myrrh were in dried or powdered form, a whole row of sacks would be necessary to carry this weight, and Nicodemus must have had assistance to be able to transport the load. The transport would have been even more difficult if the substance was dissolved in wine, vinegar or oil"<sup>(1)</sup>. Remember the Feast was coming on. To marshal such labour would have been so difficult and attracted so much attention and consternation. The Roman *litra* or pound was about 12 ounces, so 100 pounds (Jn. 19:39) would have been about 75 imperial pounds. Such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb, forming a mound which would smother the corpse. Such was their love. It was common for kings to have such large amounts of spices (e.g. Jer. 34:5). Those men were showing their belief that Jesus truly was Lord and King for them. To believe Jesus is Lord and King is not something which we can painlessly or cheaply believe. It demands our all. And there is no reason to think that Joseph 'got away with it'. The *Acts of Pilate* 12 reports that the Jews became so hostile when they heard that Joseph had asked for Jesus' body that they imprisoned him. It should be noted that Joseph didn't do what he did for hope of a future reward. The cross itself was enough to motivate him to give all purely for love of the Lord Jesus; not for any future hope. It could be that the reference to how he "waited for the Kingdom of God" when he begged for the body (Mk. 15:43) suggests that he had lost hope for the future Kingdom at that time, he had earlier waited for it, but now he simply lived life for love of Jesus. And this should be our attitude if we are for some reason denied the Kingdom ahead; that, simply, we love Jesus, and would give our lives for Him all the same, Kingdom or no Kingdom.

We who are baptized into both the death *and burial* of the Lord have a like senseless grace and love lavished upon us too (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12). In passing, the question arises as to *why* Nicodemus bought such a huge amount of spices. Perhaps it is the nature of true devotion to behave in a humanly senseless way. Alternatively, the use of spices was to keep the body from decaying. It could be that he vaguely understood the promise of Ps. 16:10, that the Lord's body would not see corruption (cp. Jn. 11:39), and thought that by his own extreme efforts he could bring this about. Despite his misunderstanding of that passage, his lack of faith and comprehension of the resurrection, all the same his devotion was accepted.

There is significant extra-Biblical information about Nicodemus. Josephus mentions him as a distinguished man in *Wars of the Jews* II, 20 and IV, 3,9. He is mentioned in the Talmud [*Gittin* 56a] as Nakdimon ben Gurion, one of the three richest nobles in Jerusalem. The Talmud also mentions a story about his daughter [*Ketuboth* 66a]. It relates that one day when Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was riding out of Jerusalem, he spoke to a poor young beggar

woman, and discovered that she was Nicodemus' daughter. He recalled that her father had lost his fortune, and had not practiced deeds of charity. This rather confirms our picture of Nicodemus. He did indeed lose his fortune, and his previous mean spiritedness was radically transformed by his experience of the outgiven life and love of Jesus. In the light of that, he gave away all. And the powerful impact of the cross of Christ can likewise banish all carefully calculated meanness from our hearts too, and concretely result in real generosity.

The NT emphasizes the power of the cross, and the horrendous fact that we are really asked to share in His sufferings (e.g. Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:1,13; Rev. 2:10). The Acts record seems to bring out how the Lord's people shared in the Lord's mortal experiences (e.g. Acts 4:7 = Mt. 21:23,24). The early converts were "pricked" (Acts 2:37), using the same word as in Jn. 19:34 for the piercing of the Lord's side. Paul speaks of how in his refusing of payment from Corinth, "I made myself servant unto all", just as the Lord was on the cross. In accommodating himself to his audience, "to the weak became I as weak", just as the Lord was crucified through weakness. In our preaching and in our ecclesial lives, we articulate elements of the Lord's cross in our attitude to others.

The cross was Yahweh making bare His arm in the eyes of the world; the figure is of a man rolling up his sleeves and flexing his muscles (Is. 52:10). The glorious strength of God's grace and desire to save was shown fully in the nakedness of the cross. There can be no doubt that spiritual life is not *only* exuberant joy and praise. It is a carrying of the cross; or an attempt at it. The lives of cross-carriers will reflect seriousness and dedication, not light-hearted devotion to religion on a hobbyist level. The Lord died as He did so that we might live righteously (1 Pet. 2:24); the account of the crucifixion is written as it is so that we might be inspired to a true faith (Jn. 19:35). There is almost a mystic power in the contemplation of the Lord's death. It reveals the inner thoughts of many hearts (Lk. 2:35). Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet He saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Heb. 2:9 seems to describe Christ *in His time of dying* as "crowned with glory and honour". Living water was to come out of the smitten rock. When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. He paralleled His 'smiting' on the cross with His glorification (Jn. 7:38). And He elsewhere seems to link 'glory' with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19). The Hebrew idea of 'glory' means that which is lifted up; and thus His references to His death as a lifting up suggested that He saw His death as His glory. And we with Isaiah and with John and the Lord Himself should find in the glory and terror of the cross the vision which will endlessly inspire our ministry. Ps. 96:10 in some LXX versions reads: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigned from the tree". What would have looked like the utter, pathetic humiliation of the Man from Nazareth was in fact His glorification, His moment of triumph and victory; just as the pathetic death of a poor saint may be their glorious triumph over their mortality. And He there was and is our King. And this has implications for us; we were constituted a people over whom God reigns by the cross (Rev. 1:5 Gk.). Because of His utter victory there, He becomes our all controlling Lord, King and Master. We are no longer free to do what we want. This is why baptism into His death is an acceptance of His Lordship, of His will being the command of our lives.



The point has been made that the sight of the crucifixion process divided people into the only two categories which exist in God's sight:

- The repentant thief and the bitter one
- The soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed
- The Sanhedrin members who believed and those who wouldn't
- The women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought
- The people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

This is why recollection of the Lord's agony is to be associated with serious self-examination and humbled, zealous response (1 Cor. 11:28,29). And this is where our study must lead us. James and John pestered the Lord to give them glory in His Kingdom. He didn't refuse their request; He simply turned the question round to them: 'Can you really carry my cross? Don't be so obsessed with getting salvation out of me. Concentrate instead on carrying my cross, being baptized with my baptism, and then the corollary of that- sharing my resurrection- will follow in its own time'.

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## Notes

(1) H. Kersten and E.R. Gruber *The Jesus Conspiracy* (Shaftesbury UK: Element Books, 1992).

### 3-2 The Compulsion Of The Cross

There is a sense of compulsion associated with the cross. The Greek word *dei*, translated "must" or "ought", is repeatedly used by the Lord in reference to His death. He spoke of that death as the coming of His hour, as if always and in all things He felt a compulsion that He must die as He was to. Listing the references chronologically gives an impressive list:

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders" (Mt. 16:21).

"And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and [*must*] be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:21-22).

"And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he *must suffer* many things, and be set at nought" (Mark

9:12). These last three references all occurred within a day of each other, if not a few hours. The Lord at least three times was emphasizing how He *must* die the death of the cross.

“Nevertheless *I must* walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for *it cannot be* that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)

“But first [i.e. most importantly, not just chronologically] *must he* suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation" (Luke 17:25).

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man *must be lifted up?* who is this Son of man?" (John 12:32-34). When the Lord spoke of “*If I be lifted up*”, there was no doubt about it. The idiom was correctly understood by the people as meaning: “I absolutely *must*”. And for them this was a contradiction in terms: a “son of man” Messiah who *must* be crucified.

“Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover *must* be killed" (Luke 22:7).

“As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also *I must* bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:15-17). Embedded in the context of prediction of the cross, the Lord described that act as being how He *must* bring His sheep unto Himself.

“But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that *thus it must be?*... For I say unto you, that this that is written *must yet be accomplished* in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me *have an end*" (Matt 26:54; Luke 22:37).

“I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures *must be fulfilled*" (Mark 14:49). Again, three times in say 30 minutes, the Lord has stressed the compulsion of the cross.

After He rose, the Angels pointed out this sense to His men: “...remember *how* [the Greek sense is: ‘with what urgency’] he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6-7). Like us, they heard and saw the compulsion, that Messianic *must*, but didn't really appreciate it. The Lord was no fatalist, simply reflecting that what was to be ‘must’ be. Rather He meant that it ‘must’ be and therefore He strove to fulfil it. There was no fatalistic compulsion about the cross- for He need not have gone through with it. But He ‘must’ do so for the sake of that indescribable compulsion to save us, to glorify Yahweh's Name, which He felt within Him. He reminded the two on the way to Emmaus: “*Ought* [s.w. ‘must’] *not* Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). And consider Heb. 2:17: “Wherefore in all things it *behoved him* to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people". It was in His death that the Lord's blood acted as a reconciliation for the sins of the people- an evident reference to the ritual of the day of atonement, which the same writer shows spoke so eloquently of the cross. And yet he was “behoved” to do this, it was an obligation He felt intrinsic within His very being. The same word occurs later: “And by reason hereof he *ought*, as for the people, so also for himself, to

offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ..." (Heb 5:3-5).

This sense of compulsion was also found in the Lord's whole life of service, leading up to the cross as it did:

"Wist ye not that *I must be* about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49)

"And he said unto them, *I must preach* the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43)

"He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must needs* go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely.

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

### **Our Compulsion**

That same 'must' applies to our response to what He has done:

"But new wine *must* be put into new bottles; and both are preserved" (Luke 5:38)- otherwise the new wine of the Gospel will burst apart our lives.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

We must put off our tabernacle in death, there must be heresies in the ecclesia, there must be a day when we come to judgment, we must be baptized, we must give account of our lives at judgment, and some must enter the promised rest. In all stages of our lives, this Divine compulsion operates.

He extends the sense of compulsion which He experienced to all of us: "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things *must* be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and *thus it behoved* Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:44-47). The same *must* which led Him to His passion is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did, must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I Jn 3:16).

We must carry the cross if we are to know His salvation. Yet we can be caught up in the spirit of a world which seeks obsessively to save its life rather than give up life. Through popping

pills, exercise, healthy living...we can seek to extend our days. We use insurance to seek to cushion us against the harder knocks of life. We seek our lives to be as free as possible from hard work. And none of these things is wrong in themselves. It is quite right that we should make use of these things in the Lord's service. But we can be caught up in the spirit of life and thinking of which they are part, and *this* is the danger. For the spirit and desire that gave rise to them is that which is exactly the opposite of the sense of *must* which the Lord possessed. He knew that He *must* suffer, He *must* crucify His flesh. And so *must* we. This is a solemn and eternal compulsion. Yet we live in a world which believes that we *must not* suffer anything negative, and we *must* seek to save our lives rather than give them out for others.

We can have the sense of that compulsion, and yet flunk out of it, as Peter did: "Peter said unto him, Though I *should* [s.w. translated 'must'- he isn't saying 'even in the case I have to...']; he knew that 'I *must*...' die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matt 26:35). Peter knew he must pick up the Lord's cross, he knew he must share it. But he sidestepped it when it came to real sacrifice. Even in his actual death, he was carried whither he would not- even though he knew he *must* die the death of the cross. The same idea is to be found in Rom. 8:26, where we read that we don't seem to have within us to pray as we *ought*, i.e. as we [s.w.] 'must'. It's not that we just don't know what to pray about; we don't pray as we ought to / must, and yet our gracious Mediator makes intercession with unutterable groans. And the older Paul can lament his failures to preach as he "ought", as he *must*, and therefore he appeals for prayer that he will witness to the Gospel as every believer of it *must* (Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:4).

We have rightly understood that the cross of Christ was not to appease an angry God. His blood, as red liquid, did not mystically take away the wrath of an offended Deity. Seeing then that God could have brought about our salvation in any way, why was the death of the cross chosen? Surely it was because through this method, our response would be evoked. Our repentance and our living of a new life, modelled on the death of the Lord, is elicited by the cross in a way no other method of atonement would have achieved. We must, therefore, let the cross have its power in us; for otherwise, Christ is dead in vain for us.

### **3-3 Constrained By The Love Of Christ**

The love of Christ in the cross is to have a continual inspiration upon us- endless love, countless moments of re-inspiration, are to come to us daily *because of the cross*. This is how central it is to daily life. The crucifixion prophecy "The reproaches of them that reproached You fell upon me" is quoted in Rom. 15:3 about Christ's crucifixion; but on this basis Paul appeals to *us* to please not ourselves, but to edify our neighbour; and thus the prophecies about Christ's sufferings for us were written for *our* learning and encouragement (Rom. 15:2,4,5). This works out as being the case insofar as we are to see in His sufferings a direct, personal compulsion to *us* to respond in selfless service of others. The connexion between Him there on that piece of wood and us today, struggling to live life in selfless service, is absolutely live, concrete and powerful.

We are to love each in an ongoing way, as Christ loved us in His death in that once-off act (Jn. 15:12,17). The combination of the present and aorist tenses of *agapan* ['to love'] in these verses proves the point. Thus our obedience *to* Christ in loving each other is exemplified by the obedience *of* Christ (Jn. 15:10). Quite simply, something done 2000 years ago really does affect us *now*. There is a powerful link across the centuries, from the darkness of the cross to the lives we live today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. "By his knowledge", by knowing Christ as He was

there, we are made righteous (Is. 53:11). As Israel stood before Moses, they promised: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do". When Moses then sprinkled the blood of the covenant upon them- and this incident is quoted in Hebrews as prophetic of the Lord's blood- they said the same but more strongly: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do *and be obedient*" (Ex. 24:3,7). It was as if their connection with the blood inspired obedience. Likewise the communication of God's requirements was made from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat (Ex. 25:22)- another foretaste of the blood of Christ. Quite simply, we can't face the cross of Christ and not feel impelled towards obedience to that which God asks of us.

The image of soldiers in their time of dying has often been used afterwards as a motivation for a nation: "Earn this" is the message their faces give. And it is no more true than in the death of the Lord. "The love of Christ", an idea elsewhere used of His death (Jn. 13:1; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 8:32,34,35; Eph. 5:2,25; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5 cp. 1 Jn. 4:10), *constrains us*; it doesn't force us, but rather shuts us up unto one way, as in a narrow, walled path. We cannot sit passively before the cross of the Lord. That "love of Christ" there passes our human knowledge, and yet our hearts can be opened, as Paul prayed, that we might know the length, breadth and height of it. The crucified Son of God was the full representation of God. The love of Christ was shown in His cross; and through the Spirit's enlightenment we can *know* the height, length, breadth of that love (Eph. 3:18,19). But this passage in Ephesians is building on Job 11:7-9: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea". The purpose of the connection is to show that through appreciating the love of Christ, unknowable to the unenlightened mind, we see the Almighty unto perfection, in a way which the Old Testament believers were unable to do. It was as high as Heaven, and what could they do? And yet it must be confessed that we do not in practice attain to such fullness of knowledge and vision. We look to the Kingdom, one of the excellencies of which will be the full grasp of the Almighty unto perfection, as manifest in the death of His Son. All we *now* know is that that cross was the fullness of God, it was "the Almighty unto perfection". But then, we shall know, we shall find it out. And yet, paradoxically, in some sense even now we can *know* "the love of Christ" [a phrase often used about the cross] that *passes* human knowledge. Speaking of His upcoming death, the Lord warned that where he was going, the disciples could not then follow; but they would, afterwards. This doesn't necessarily mean they too were to die the death of the cross. Rather could it mean that they later would enter into what His death really meant; then they would see with some understanding, rather than run away from the vision of the cross. And for us, one of the Kingdom's riches will likewise be that we shall then understand that final climactic act the more fully. Yet we begin that discovery now.

Nothing, whatever, can separate us from the love of Christ towards us in His death (Rom. 8:35). His cross is therefore the constant rallying point of our faith, in whatever difficulty we live through. The resolve and strength we so need in our spiritual path can come only through a personal contemplation of the cross. Do we seek strength to endure unjust treatment and the grace to submit cheerfully to the loss of what we feel is rightfully ours? Be it discrimination in the workplace, persecution from the Government, perceived abuse or degradation by our partner or family...? Let the cross be our endless inspiration: "For it is better, if the will of God be so [a reference to the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane being our struggle], that ye suffer for well doing...for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:17,18). Remember how under persecution, the faithful love not their lives unto death because of their experience of the blood of the lamb shed for them (Rev. 12:11).

Or do we live in the loneliness of old age or serious illness, fearing death and the uncertainty of our brief future? Again, the cross of Jesus is our rallying point. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:8-10). Because we are in Christ, His death was not an isolated historical event. We also are weak with Him (2 Cor. 13:4 RV), such is the identity between us and Him. When Paul reflected upon his own sickness [which the RVmg. calls his stake / cross in the flesh], he could say in all sober truth that he gloried in his weakness, because his identity with the weakness of Christ crucified also thereby identified him with the strength and power of the risen Lord (2 Cor. 11:9).

Do we feel that life is just pointless, an endless round of childcare, working all day doing in essence the same job for 30 years, a trudging through an endless tunnel until our mortality catches up on us? We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ from the "vain way of life handed down from the fathers" (1 Pet. 1:18), from the frustration of this present life. The word used for "vain" is that used by the LXX for the 'vanity' of life as described in Ecclesiastes, and for idol worship in Lev. 17:7 and Jer. 8:19. We have been redeemed from it all! Not for us the life of endlessly chasing the rainbow's end, slavishly worshipping the idols of ever bigger homes, smarter technology...we were redeemed from the vanity of life "under the sun" by the precious blood of Christ. We were bought out of this slavery, even if in the flesh we go through its motions. Knowing this, we the redeemed, the bought out from vanity, shouldn't spend our hours in front of the television or doing endless crosswords, or frittering away the time of life as the world does. James foresaw that a man could appear to be religious, and yet have a religion that was "vain" (James 1:26)- because he didn't appreciate that the cross has bought him out of vanity. His death was *so that* He might deliver us from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4); because of the Lord's crucifixion, Paul saw himself as crucified unto the world, and the world unto him (Gal. 6:14). The Lord Jesus looked out across the no man's land between the stake and the crowd; He faced the world which crucified Him. We simply *cannot* side with them. To not separate from them is to make the cross in vain for us; for He died to deliver us out of this present world. The pull of the world is insidious; and only sober reflection upon the cross will finally deliver us from it. It's a terrifying thought, that we can make the power of the cross invalid. It really is so, for Paul warned that preaching the Gospel with wisdom of words would make "the cross of Christ...of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17). The effect of the cross, the power of it to save, is limited in its extent by our manner of preaching of it. And we can make "Christ", i.e. His cross, of "none effect" by trusting to our works rather than accepting the gracious salvation which He achieved (Gal. 5:4).

Do we feel simply not appreciated? As a hassled and harried mother, as a hard working dad who toils to provide for the family he rarely sees, as the person who feels their ideas and abilities are always trashed...? The tragedy of the Lord's death was that when He died, there was nobody to recount His life, as there usually was at a funeral (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). The greatest life that was ever lived was so misunderstood and unappreciated and hated and hurriedly buried, that there was nobody even to give Him an appreciative funeral speech. In our struggle to feel appreciated, we share both His and His Father's sufferings and pain. The cross was the ultimate example of a Man being misjudged and misunderstood and condemned unjustly. When we feel like that, and the nature of our high speed, superficially judging society means that it seems to happen more in this generation than any other [and with deeper consequences]... then we know we are sharing the sufferings of the Lord.

Are we just caught up in our daily work, slave to the corporations who employ us? 1 Cor. 7:23 begs us not to become the slaves of men, because Christ bought us with His blood. Young people especially need to be influenced by this as they chose their career path and employers. Through the cross of Christ, the world is crucified to us (Gal. 6:14 RV).

Do we struggle to live the life of true love, to endure people, even our brethren; are we simply tired of people, and living the life of love towards them? Does the past exist within us as a constant fountain of bitterness and regret? "Let all bitterness, and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake [the sake of His cross] hath forgiven you...walk in love, *as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us*" (Eph. 4:31-5:2). His cross affects our whole life, our deepest thought and action, to the extent that we can say with Paul, in the silence of our own deepest and most personal reflection: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Do we find a true unity with our brethren impossible? He died *that* He might gather together into one all God's children (Jn. 11:52). Before His cross, before serious and extended personal meditation upon it, all our personal differences will disappear. A divided ecclesia is therefore one which is not centred upon the cross. Whether or not we must live our ecclesial experience in such a context, the barriers which exist within us personally really *can* be brought down by the humbling experience of the cross, and the way in which we are forced to see how that death was not only for us personally. The wonder of it was and is in its universal and so widely-inclusive nature.

Is humility almost impossible for us, lifted up as we may be by our own sense of worth and achievement? Is a true service of *all* our brethren almost impossible for us to contemplate? Consider Mt. 20:26-28: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister...your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". This is our pattern- to give out, with no expectation of appreciation or response. And the cross of Christ alone can inspire us in this.

Do we struggle with some secret vice, in the grip of habitual sin? The cross convicts of sin, for we are impelled by it to follow Christ in going forth "without the camp" (Heb. 13:13), following the path of the leper who had to go forth without the camp (Lev. 13:46). He "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that *we might die to sin* [Gk.] and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). He died for our sins, there all our weakness met their death in His death- so close was the association between Him and our sins. Our response to that is to put those sins to death in *our* bodies, as He put them to death in His on the tree. Speaking of the cross, the Lord said that for our sakes He sanctified Himself [as a priest making an offering], that we might be sanctified in truth (Jn. 17:19). Quite simply, if we behold and believe the cross, we will respond. He mused that if He didn't allow Himself to fall to the ground and die, no fruit could be brought forth (Jn. 12:24). The fact He did means that we will bring forth fruit. It could be that the reference in Jn. 7 to the Holy Spirit being given at the Lord's death (His 'glory'), as symbolized by the water flowing from His side, means that due to the cross we have the inspiration to a holy, spiritual way of life. It is not so that His death released some mystical influence which would change men and women whether or not they will it; rather is it that His example there inspires those who are open to it. We have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and yet therefore we must be reconciled to God, and take the message of reconciliation to others. What has been achieved there in prospect we

have to make real for us, by appropriating it to ourselves in repentance, baptism and a life of ongoing repentance (2 Cor. 5:18-20 cp. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).

Perhaps we feel that our preaching somehow lacks a sense of power and compulsion of others. Try explicitly telling them about the cross. The apostles recounted the fact of the cross and on this basis appealed for people to be baptized into that death and resurrection. There is an impelling power, an imperative, in the wonder and shame of it all. Joseph saw the Lord's dead body and was compelled to offer for that body to be laid where *his* dead body should have laid. In essence, he lived out the message of baptism. He wanted to identify his body with that of the Lord. He realized that the man Christ Jesus was truly his representative. And so he wanted to identify with Him. And properly presented, this will be the power of response to the preaching of the cross today. "Through one act of righteousness [the cross] the free gift came unto all men to justification of life" (Rom. 5:18)- yet "all men" only receive that justification if they hear this good news and believe it. This is why we must take the Gospel "unto all men" (surely an allusion to the great commission)- so that, in that sense, the wondrous cross of Christ will have been the more 'worthwhile'. Through our preaching, yet more of those "all men" who were potentially enabled to live for ever will indeed do so. This is why the Acts record so frequently connects the preaching of the cross with men's belief. Negatively, men do not believe if they reject the "report" of the crucifixion (Jn. 12:38,39).

Do we admit that we just don't preach as we should, failing to engage people with the Gospel because we assume 'nobody's interested'? 1 Tim. 2:1-6 has something for us. The Lord's death on the cross was a ransom payment "for all men"; and in this context, Paul urges that because God therefore wishes "all men to be saved" we should therefore pray "for all men, [even] for kings and those in authority". If the Lord's death truly was for all, in that He was representative there of all men, He there "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9)... then we should pray for "all men" quite literally to be saved, knowing that God is willing that "all men be saved". And Paul makes this point in the context of appealing for us to pray for all men, even Kings. This means that we should pray for even those we consider most unlikely- that they might be saved. For the cross of Christ has potentially saved them- if they will accept it. Thus Paul comments in 1 Tim. 2:6 that the cross was "a ransom for all, to be testified". The testifying or witnessing to it is to be done by our preaching. Notice how Paul draws a dynamic parallel between praying for all men and witnessing to all men (1 Tim. 2:1 cp. 6). Preaching- when it is truly inspired by the cross- can never be a prayer-less exercise, a mere presentation of information. It will be done prayerfully, thoughtfully targeted at specific individuals whom we're praying will accept the message.

Do we struggle to be truly generous to the Lord's cause, and to turn our words and vague feelings of commitment into action? Corinth too were talkers, boasting of their plans to give material support to the poor brethren in Jerusalem, but doing nothing concrete. Paul sought to shake them into action by reminding them of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). Corinth had few wealthy members, but Paul knew that the cross of Christ would inspire in them a generous spirit to those even poorer than they. The richer should be made poor by what the Lord did, Paul is saying- not harmlessly giving of their pocket money. For He gave in ways that hurt Him, ways that were real, meaningful and thereby effective and powerful.

Do we struggle with the ultimate fairness of God? For all we have written about the problem of suffering, it seems to me that no intellectual answer is enough when one personally experiences real tragedy. The sending of Jesus to die in the way that He did was surely one



form of God's response to it. In the death of the cross, God showed His entering into our suffering and sense of loss and hurt.

Do we fear that we lack a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus? Do we read of Him, but rarely if ever *feel* Him? Reflection upon His cross should elicit in us an up welling of pure gratitude towards Him, an awkwardness as we realize that this Man loved us more than we love Him...and yet within our sense of debt to Him, of ineffable, unpayable debt, of real debt, a debt infinite and never to be forgotten, we will have the basis for personal response to Him as a person, to a knowing of Him and a loving of Him, and a serving of Him in response. If we feel and know this, we cannot but preach the cross of Christ.

But do we feel ashamed that we just don't witness as we ought to? There is no doubt that the cross and baptism into that death was central to the preaching message of the early brethren. Knowing it, believing it, meant that it just had to be preached. The completeness and reality of the redemption achieved is expressed in Hebrews with a sense of finality, and we ought not to let that slip from our presentation of the Gospel either. There in the cross, the justice and mercy of God are brought together in the ultimate way. There in the cross is the appeal. Paul spoke of "the preaching of the cross", the word / message which *is* the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Some of the early missionaries reported how they could never get any response to their message until they explained the cross; and so, with our true doctrinal understanding of it, it is my belief that the cross is what has the power of conversion. A man cannot face it and not have a deep impression of the absoluteness of the issues involved in faith and unbelief, in choosing to accept or reject the work of the struggling, sweating, gasping Man who hung on the stake. It truly is a question of believe or perish. Baptism into that death and resurrection is essential for salvation. Of course we must not bully or intimidate people into faith, but on the other hand, a preaching of the cross cannot help but have something compulsive and urgent and passionate about it. For we appeal to men on God's behalf to accept the work of the cross as efficacious for them. I submit that much of our preaching somehow fails in urgency and entreaty. We seem to be in places too expository, or too attractive with the peripherals, seeking to please men...or be offering good advice, very good advice indeed, background Bible knowledge, how to read the Bible effectively....all of which may be all well and good, but we should be preaching good news, not good advice. The message of the cross is of a grace and real salvation which is almost too good to believe. It isn't Bible background or archaeology or Russia invading Israel. It is the Man who had our nature hanging there perfect, full of love, a light in this dark world....and as far as we perceive the wonder of it all, as far as this breaks in upon us, so far we will hold it forth to this world. The Lord wasn't preaching good *ideas*; He was preaching good *news*. The cross means that we have a faith to live by all our days; not just a faith to die by, a comfort in our time of dying, as we face the endgame.

The cross alone can shake people out of their indifference, and force them to make some election in this world, instead of sliding dully forward as in a dream. Life is a business we are all apt to mismanage; either living recklessly from day to day, or suffering ourselves to be gulled out of our moments by the inanities of custom. There is something stupefying in the recurrence of unimportant things. And it is only through the provocations of the Lord and His cross that we are lead to take an outlook beyond daily concerns, and comprehend the narrow limits, and great possibilities of our existence. It is the power of the Lord and His cross to induce such moments of clear insight. He, there, is the declared enemy of all living by reflex action. He, there, can electrify His readers and viewers into an instant unflagging activity of service. Those who ignore the challenge of the cross turn to their "own way" (Is. 53:6)- the

Hebrew means a custom, habitual way of life. This is what stops us responding to the radical challenge of the cross- our basic conservatism, our love of what we know and are used to. Yet the cross can shake us from this.

Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial" <sup>(1)</sup>. Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds<sup>(2)</sup>. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour... and endless savage ferocity"<sup>(3)</sup>. Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it'. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

Do we feel so hurt by others that we find forgiveness impossible, sensing an ever-encroaching bitterness always getting closer to gripping our whole lives? All around this sad world, there seems an endless round of revenge being danced out. The knock someone receives is paid back by them on someone else, and often this ends up in another person being made a scapegoat, someone incapable of defending themselves, who must take all the knocks when they can't pay them back. People subconsciously are obeying a compelling law- to get even. To pay back the hard words the postman gave you with hard words to the girl in the supermarket, and then to scapegoat [say] a child at church for messing up the church service... But the point is, the Lord Jesus is set up as the one and only scapegoat for human sin. On the cross He was the ultimate One who took all the knocks without paying back. For those who truly believe this to the point of feeling it deep within them, they are freed from the law of revenge- and thus they become free to live life spontaneously, for fun, to not be ashamed of fulfilling life's natural needs. The cycle of revenge and paying back has to be resolved in sacrifice- many societies have shown that. I was a few times in far northern

Russia, and it was fascinating to hear the traditions of the Chukchi people. In the past, they say, when a big crime was committed and the criminal convicted, an *innocent* person had to be sacrificed. The study of primitive societies reveals this basic human need for a scapegoat. There was a psychological value to the Mosaic rite of the scapegoat (Lev. 16:10). All the sins, all the grudges that called for revenge, were to be placed upon that animal, and it was released into the desert. They could watch it scampering away into the bush. This is how we are to understand the placing of human sin- yes, the sins committed against you this day by others- upon the Lord as He hung on the cross. And we must remember that "Vengeance is *mine* [not ours, not the state's], and requital" (Dt. 32:35). That taking of vengeance, that requital, was worked out by God on the cross. There the Lord Jesus was clothed with the 'garments of vengeance' (Is. 59:17); the day of the crucifixion was "the day of vengeance" (Is. 63:4). This is one reason why God doesn't operate a tit-for-tat requital of our sins upon our heads- because He dealt with sin and His vengeance for it in the cross, not by any other way. Hence David calls Yahweh the "God of revenge", the one *alone* to whom vengeance belongs (Ps. 94:1,3). Our response to all this is to believe that truly vengeance is God and therefore we will *not* avenge ourselves (Rom. 12:19). I take this to apply to all the micro-level 'takings of vengeance' which we so easily do in our words, body language, attitudes etc., in response to the hurt received from others. The cross alone enables us to break the cycle.

Finally, and, I think, most relevantly. Do we, as men and women all too taken up with our lives, raising families, earning money, caught up with being speaking brethren, Arranging Brothers... lost in the absorption of our daily work, as computer programmers, drivers, factory workers, housewives, business executives...do we in our heart of hearts feel that we just don't have the faith to believe that truly we are forgiven, and will be saved? I know I am talking to the heart of every reader here. Are we like that? I am, and I suspect most of us are. Not that this makes me feel any better about my own inadequacy of faith. Again, let the cross of Christ be our inspiration. For there, "when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly". He gave His life there, in the way that He gave it, without any consideration for our personal merits. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". The Lord gave His all for us, the totally unworthy. And with abounding and matchless logic, Paul continues: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood [i.e. no longer being so worthless and undeserving, but counted as so much better through the atonement He achieved], we *shall be saved from wrath* through him". In this knowledge we can truly have as an helmet the hope of sure salvation. If God gave His Son, and *so* gave His Son, how much more shall He not with Him freely give us all things?

The knowledge and experience of the love of Christ is the end result of all our Bible searching. There's a well known story about the great theologian Karl Barth, who probably penned more words of theology than any other writer in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Towards the end of his life, he gave a lecture and invited questions. He was asked something to the effect: 'After a lifetime of theological study, what's your single greatest theological insight?'. After a pause he replied, to a hushed audience: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'. To know that love of Christ, with the full assurance of salvation which it involves, is the end result of all our questioning, our study, our Bible searching, our hunting through concordances, listening to talks, reading studies.

(1) Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 301-2, Loeb edition, vol. 10, translated by F.H. Colson (London: Heinemann, 1962).

(2) Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.63, Loeb edition, Vol. 9, translated by L. H. Feldman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965).

(3) Pilate's conscience-less brutality was especially noted by Philo; he speaks of his "insults, robberies, the outrages and wanton injustices, the executions without trial, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty... his vindictiveness and furious temper" - as cited in N.T. Wright, *Jesus And The Victory Of God* (London: S.P.C.K, 2004) p. 545. The whole issue of the differences between the Gospel accounts of Pilate at the trial of Jesus and the historical reality are discussed well in James M. Robinson, *The Problem Of History In Mark* (London: SCM, 1957) and T.J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions In Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

#### 4. God Manifestation In The Cross

##### **God And The Cross**

There is good reason to understand that in those wretched hours of crucifixion, God was especially manifested to the world. There was a matchless, never to be surpassed partnership between Father and Son on the cross. God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). There the Lord Jesus manifested and declared the Father's Name, His essential character, to the full (Jn. 12:28; 13:31,32; 17:5,6,26). The Lord's references to 'going to the Father' referred to His coming crucifixion. That was where the Father was, on the cross. In the very moment of His death the observing Centurion gasped, twice: " *Truly* this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46). There was something so evidently Godly in that death. God was so near.

There are a number of incidental reasons for seeing the cross as the ultimate declaration of God Himself.

- It is possible to argue that " Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH. This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were covering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

## **The Hebrew Inscription Over The Cross**

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhy

The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name...When the trial is over...the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, 1995 ed., p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness...this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example. This also explains why, as suggested above, Pilate tried to have the last laugh over the Jews by writing the Lord's 'crime' over His body in such a way which spelt out the name 'Yahweh'.

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.

- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, " as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.
- It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient "land of Moriah" (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1). The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means 'in this mount I have seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh. When Abraham 'saw the place [of Isaac's intended sacrifice] afar off" (Gen. 22:4), there is more to those words than a literal description. Heb. 11:13 alludes here in saying that Abraham saw the fulfilment of "the promises" "afar off". The Lord in Jn. 8:56 says that Abraham saw His day or time [usually a reference to His sacrifice]. And yet that place of offering was called by Abraham 'Jehovah Jireh', 'Jehovah will be seen'. Note the theme of *seeing*. In some shadowy way, Abraham understood something of the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; and yet he speaks of it as the time when Yahweh Himself will be 'seen', so intense would the manifestation of God be in the death of His Son.
- Paul saw the cross of Christ as parallel with "the things of the Spirit of God", the wisdom of God, what eye has not seen nor ear heard, but what is revealed unto the believer and not to the world (1 Cor. 1:18,23,24; 2:7-13). The cross of Christ was the supreme expression of the Spirit of God, and it's true meaning is incomprehensible to the world. In the cross, according to Paul's allusion back to Isaiah, God bowed the Heavens and came down. He did wonderful things which we looked not for. The thick darkness there is to be associated with a theophany presence of God Himself.
- The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.
- Consider the implications of 2 Cor. 5:20: "On behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ: be ye reconciled to God [because] him who knew no sin he made to be a sin [a sin offering?] on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him". *Because* of the cross, the atonement which God wrought in Christ's offering, we beseech men to be reconciled to God. Appreciating the cross and the nature of the atonement should be the basis of our appeal to men. And indeed, such an appeal is *God* appealing to men and women, in that there on the cross "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". The blood and spittle covered body of the Lord lifted up was and is the appeal, the *beseeking* of God Himself to men. And this is the message that we are honoured to preach on His behalf; we preach the appeal of God through the cross.
- "Behold, the hour [s.w. "time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (Jn. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross (see *The Cross In John's Gospel* for justification of this).
- Both Jew and Gentile were gathered together against the Lord (God) and His Christ on the cross (Acts 4:26). Peter thus makes a connection between the Father and Son on the cross. Those who reproached Jesus there reproached the Father (Ps. 69:9).

- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
- There are several NT passages which make an explicit link between God and Jesus in the context of the salvation of men. Phrases such as "God our Saviour, Jesus..." are relatively common in the pastorals (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3,4; 2:10 cp. 13 and see also Jude 24; 2 Pet. 1:1). Acts 20:28 even speaks as if God's blood was shed on the cross; through 'His' blood the church was purchased; and yet Paul told the very same Ephesian audience that it was through the blood of Jesus that the church was purchased (Eph. 1:6,7); such was the extent of God manifestation on the cross. These and many other passages quoted by trinitarians evidently don't mean that 'Jesus = God' in the way they take them to mean. But what they *are* saying is that there was an intense unity between the Father and Son in the work of salvation achieved on the cross.
- Just before His death, the Saviour spoke of going to the Father, and coming again in resurrection (Jn. 13:36,37 cp. 14:28; 16:16,17; 17:11). He somehow saw the cross as a being with God, a going to Him there ('going to the Father' in these Johannean passages is hard to apply to His ascent to Heaven after the resurrection). Note in passing that when in this context He speaks of *us* coming to the Father, He refers to our taking up of His cross, and in this coming to the essence of God (Jn. 14:6 cp. 4, 13:36).
- The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. "There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)...look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men. The Hebrew word *nasa* translated "forgive" is also translated 'bear' as in 'bearing / carrying iniquity' (1). When God forgave, He bore / carried sin; and the idea of carrying sin is obviously brought into visual, graphic meaning in the literal carrying of the cross by the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the Hebrew word *nes*, translated "pole" in the record of the bronze snake being lifted up on a "pole", is the noun for which *nasa* is the verb. The essence of cross carrying had therefore been performed by God for millenia, every time He forgave human sin. It's understandable, therefore, that He had a special manifestation in the final sufferings and death of His Son.
- "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19) seems to be a comment on the death, rather than the nature, of the Lord Jesus. It is in the context of the statement that Christ died for all men (2 Cor. 5:14). In that death, God was especially in Christ. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: "I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25).
- The mention that Jesus stood before Pilate "in a place that is called the Pavement" (Jn. 19:13) reminds us of Ex. 24:10, where Yahweh was enthroned in glory on another 'pavement' when the old covenant was made with Israel. The New Covenant was inaugurated with something similar. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) would have been easily perceived as an allusion to the way that Yahweh Himself as it were dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat (2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1). And yet the Lord Jesus in His death was the "[place of] propitiation" (Heb. 2:17), the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat...of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). In the cross, God met with man and communed with us, commanding us the life we ought to lead through all the unspoken, unarticulated imperatives which there are within the blood of His

Son. There in the person of Jesus nailed to the tree do we find the focus of God's glory and self-revelation, and to this place we may come to seek redemption.

- The High Priest on the day of Atonement sprinkled the blood eastwards, on the mercy seat. He would therefore have had to walk round to God's side of the mercy seat and sprinkle the blood back the way he had come. This would have given the picture of the blood coming out from the presence of God Himself; as if *He* was the sacrifice. Acts 20:28 seems to teach (in the AV) that God purchased the church with *His* own blood. His manifestation in His Son was especially intense.
- Heb. 9:17 is hard to interpret: "A testament is of force where there hath been death: for doth it ever avail while he that made it liveth?" (RV). The difficulty is that the testament or covenant was made by God; but it comes into operative force through the death of the person who made it. But it was Jesus and not God who died. The reasoning only seems to make sense if we understand that God was very intensely identified with Christ in the death of the cross.
- The final chapters of Revelation so often parallel God and "the lamb" (e.g. Rev. 22:3). The Father was so deeply united with the Son in His time of sacrificial offering.
- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.
- We are justified by many things, all of which are in some way parallel with each other: the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9), grace and the redemption which there is in His blood (Rom. 3:24), our faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16), the name of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11), by our confession of sin (Ps. 51:4; Lk. 18:14). All these things revolve around the death of the Lord Jesus, the shedding of His blood. This becomes parallel with the name of Jesus, "Christ"- because the cross presents us with the very essence of the person of the Lord Jesus. But it is also parallel with the spirit or mind / essence of God. Because in that naked, bleeding, derided body and person, in that shed blood, there was the essence of all that God was to us, is to us, and ever shall be for us. It was the cross above all which revealed to us the essence of God Almighty. And it is the cross, the blood of Jesus, which elicits in us the confession of sin which is vital for our justification.

There are links between the concept of 'truth' and the cross. In Ps. 60:4 God's Truth is displayed on the banner (s.w. "pole" , on which the snake was lifted up). John struggled with words, even under inspiration, to get over to us the tremendous truth and reality of what he witnessed at the cross (Jn. 19:35). God is the ultimate Truth, and the cross was the ultimate declaration of His Truth. I would even suggest a chronological progression in Jn. 1:14:

"The word was made flesh"- His birth

"And dwelt among us"- His life



“And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth”- His death on the cross. Christ’s glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). John thus begins his Gospel with the statement that he saw the Lord’s death. However, it is also so that John “saw his glory” at the transfiguration; and yet even there, “they saw his glory” (Lk. 9:32) as “they spake of his decease which he should accomplish”. His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John’s many allusions to Moses’ experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son has *declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked, we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John’s tenses) displayed to us in the cross. Mark how the naked man, covered in blood and spittle, was there declaring God’s glory. Aaron the High Priest bore the judgment for Israel’s sins, in another anticipation of the cross, whilst arrayed in garments of glory and beauty (Ex. 28:30). And so was the naked Lord arrayed, for those with spiritual sight. Thus the word was manifested in glory through the cross; and thus 1 Cor. 2:1,2 links the crucified Christ with “the testimony of God”.

### **God Himself**

John’s references to the hour coming nearly always refer to the crucifixion. Jn. 16:25 must be interpreted in this context: “The hour comes, when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall show you plainly of the Father”. The plain showing forth of the Father was in the naked body of His crucified Son; there, all the theory which Jesus had taught was exemplified in stark, plain terms. The Father was ultimately revealed. Isa 64:1-4 had foretold: “Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence...For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him”. This latter verse is quoted in 1 Cor. 2 about how the “foolishness” of the cross is not accepted by the wise of this world. Only the humble and spiritually perceptive eye of faith realized that there in the naked shame of Golgotha, God Himself had rent the heavens and come down, as all the faithful had somehow, in some sense foreseen and yearned for. There, in the battered body of Jesus, was God revealed to men.

Several Old Testament anticipations of the crucifixion involve a time of great darkness when God Himself 'came down', in a way reminiscent of the theophany on Sinai. There God Himself in person in some form 'came down' to earth. Moses saw His back parts, but not His face; for no man can see the face of God and live. He saw the face of the Angel and spoke to him as a man speaks with his friend. Moses seeing the back parts of God could even mean that God Himself came down to earth. If He did this at the institution of the Old Covenant: how much more at the death of His very own Son? The reference in Heb. 11:27 to Moses as having endured seeing the invisible may lend support to this idea that Moses did in fact see the God who cannot be seen by men. I submit that He was there, almost physically, at the cross. The blood of the covenant was shed before Him, in His presence, just as countless sacrifices in the tabernacle had foreshadowed for centuries beforehand. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because that He (God) laid down His life for us (1 Jn. 3:16 AV). Zech. 12:10 speaks as if it was God who was pierced on the cross (note the pronouns in the context)- not

that He Himself was the one who died, but so intense was His manifestation in His Son. This was the extent of God manifestation in Christ. But beyond the concept of God manifestation, God Himself came down to behold and be witness at the death of His Son. The immeasurably huge physical distance between Heaven and earth may be there purely to show to us the wonder, the pure wonder, of the 'coming down' of God in the cross of Christ. This was *how far* He came down; the physical distance represents the spiritual distance. Look up at the stars one night, and consider the wonder of it all.

### 1 Timothy 3:16

1 Tim. 3:16 seems to have been a well known confessional formula in the first century church; perhaps it was recited by the candidate in the water before being baptized. It can be read as a chronological description of the Lord's death and resurrection:

1. " God was manifested in the flesh" in the Lord's *crucifixion*, not just His *life*. The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (s.w. 1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26).
2. " Justified in the Spirit" - the resurrection (Rom. 1:4)
3. " Seen of Angels" - at the tomb (Mt. 28:2)
4. 'Preached unto the Gentiles for belief in the world' (Gk.)- cp. Mk. 16:15,16
5. " Received up into glory" - what happened straight after the commission to preach the Gospel world-wide.

This chronological approach suggests that " God was manifest in the flesh" refers to the Father's especial manifestation in His Son's crucified human nature during those hours of final suffering- rather than just to His birth. There on Calvary, Almighty God Himself was supremely revealed. He, *God Himself*, was despised and rejected by men; *His* love and self-sacrifice were so cruelly spurned; *He* was spat upon and made the song of the drunkards (Ps. 69:12). The same word for "manifest" occurs in other passages which relate it to the crucifixion:

- Heb. 9:26: "For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he *appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself".

- 1 Pet. 1:19-20: "...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world [as the sacrificial lamb slain from the foundation of the world, Rev. 13:8], but was *manifest* in these last times for you".

- 1 Jn. 3:5-8: "And ye know that he was *manifested* to take away our sins [on the cross]; and in him is no sin...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil", which He did through His death (Heb. 2:14-18).

It may be added in passing that the same word is also used about the final manifesting of the Lord Jesus at His return (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). This explains the link between the cross and His return; who He was then will be who He will be when He comes in

judgment. And this explains why the breaking of bread, with its focus upon the cross, is a foretaste of our appearing before Him then.

The crucified Son of God was the full representation of God. The love of Christ was shown in His cross; and through the Spirit's enlightenment we can *know* the height, length, breadth of that love (Eph. 3:18,19). But this passage in Ephesians is building on Job 11:7-9: " Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea" . The purpose of the connection is to show that through appreciating the love of Christ, unknowable to the unenlightened mind, we see the Almighty unto perfection, in a way which the Old Testament believers were unable to do. It was as high as Heaven, and what could they do? And yet it must be confessed that we do not in practice attain to such fullness of knowledge and vision. We look to the Kingdom, one of the excellencies of which will be the full grasp of the Almighty unto perfection, as manifest in the death of His Son. All we *now* know is that that cross was the fullness of God, it was " the Almighty unto perfection" . But then, we shall know, we shall find it out.

### **The Form Of God**

Philippians 2:6-9 describes the progressive humiliation of the Lord Jesus on the cross (not in His birth, as Trinitarian theology has mistakenly supposed. Note the allusions back to Isaiah 53). *There* He was supremely " in the form of God" , but notwithstanding this He took even further the form of a servant. In that blood and spittle covered humility and service, we see the very form and essence of God. My understanding of Phil. 2:8 is that being in the form of God, being the Son of God and having equality with God are parallel statements. The Lord understood being 'equal with God' as some kind of idiom for His Divine Sonship (Jn. 5:18; 10:33; 19:7). He was in God's form, as His Son, and He therefore didn't consider equality with God something to be snatched; He had it already, in that He was the Son of God. In other words, " He considered it not robbery to be equal with God" is to be read as a description of the exaltedness of His position as Son of God; not as meaning that it never even occurred to Him to try to be equal with God. He was equal with God in the sense that He and the Father were one, spiritually, and on account of the fact that Jesus was the begotten Son of the Father.

This interpretation depends upon understanding 'being equal with God' as an idiom for being the Son of God; it doesn't, of course, mean that 'Jesus is God' in the Trinitarian sense. There, on the cross, the Lord Jesus was the form of God, equal with God in that sense, the only begotten Son. And yet on the cross His form was marred more than that of any man, He finally had no form that could be desired (Is. 52:14; 53:2). And yet this was the form of God. *He* was contorted and marred more than ever, there was no beauty in *Him* that men should desire Him, in those hours in which His Son suffered there. The Lord Jesus then had the form of God, although in His mind He had taken the form of a servant. The Lord made Himself a servant in His mind; He looked not on His own things, but on those of others (Phil. 2:4,7). This is the context of Philippians 2; that we should have the *mind* of Christ, who disregarded His own status as Son of God and humbled Himself, even to death on the cross <sup>(1)</sup>, so that we might share His status. His example really is ours, Paul is saying (which precludes this passage describing any 'incarnation' at the birth of Christ). The Lord had spoken about the crucial need for a man to humble himself if he is to be exalted (Lk. 14:11); and this is evidently in Paul's mind when he writes of Christ humbling Himself and then being exalted. He saw that the Lord lived out on the cross what He had asked of us all. If that example must

be ours, we can't quit just because we feel rejected and misunderstood and not appreciated by our brethren. *For this is the very essence of the cross we are asked to share.*

### The Serving Master

The Lord *taking upon himself* the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) is to be connected with how at the Last Supper, He *took* (s.w.) a towel and girded Himself for service (Jn. 13:4). The connection between the Last Supper and Phil. 2, which describes the Lord's death on the cross, would suggest that the Lord's washing the disciples' feet was an epitome of His whole sacrifice on the cross. The passage describing the Last Supper begins with the statement that the Lord "loved us unto the end" (Jn. 13:1). This is an evident description of the cross itself; and yet His service of His followers at the Last Supper was therefore an epitome of the cross. As that Supper was "prepared" (Mt. 26:17,19), so the Lord on the cross "prepared" a place for us in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1 s.w.). As the observing disciples didn't understand what the Lord was doing by washing their feet, so they didn't understand the way to the cross (Jn. 13:7 cp. 36). There is thus a parallel between the feet washing and His death. But in both cases, the Lord Jesus promised them that there was coming a time when they would understand His washing of their feet; and then they would know the way to the cross, and follow Him.

John describes the Lord *laying aside* His clothes in order to wash the feet of His followers with the same word he frequently employs to describe how Christ of His own volition *laid down* His life on the cross, as an act of the will (Jn. 10:11,15,17,18); and how later His sacrificed body was *laid aside* (19:41,42; 20:2,13,15). As the Lord laid Himself down for us, epitomized by that deft laying aside of His clothes, so, John reasons, we must likewise purposefully lay down our lives for our brethren (1 Jn. 3:16). As He did at the last supper, so He bids us do for each other. John uses the same word for Christ's "garments" in his records of both the last supper and the crucifixion (13:4,12 cp. 19:23). It could be noted that the man at the supper without garments was seen by the Lord as a symbol of the unworthy (Mt. 22:11 cp. Lk. 14:16,17). He humbled Himself to the level of a sinner; He created the story of the sinful man who could not lift up His eyes to Heaven to illustrate what He meant by a man humbling himself so that he might be exalted (Lk. 18:14). And He humbled Himself (Phil. 2:9), He took upon Himself the form of a servant and of a sinner, both in the last supper and the final crucifixion which it epitomized. As the Lord Jesus laid aside His garments and then washed the disciples' feet with only a towel around His waist, so at the crucifixion He laid aside His clothes and perhaps with a like nakedness, served us unto the end: the betrayers and the indifferent and the cautiously believing alike. Throughout the record of the Last Supper, there is ample evidence on the Lord's awareness of Judas' betrayal (Jn. 13:10,11,18,21,25). The account in 1 Cor. 11:23 likewise stresses how the Supper was performed with the Lord's full awareness of Judas' betrayal. It is perhaps therefore inevitable that we in some ways struggle with the problems of rejection, of betrayal, of being misunderstood and not appreciated by our brethren. For these were all essential parts of the Lord's passion, which He asks us to share with Him.

The Lord Jesus "humbled himself", and was later "highly exalted" (Phil. 2:9), practising His earlier teaching that he who would humble himself and take the lowest seat at the meal would be exalted higher (Mt. 23:11,12; Lk. 14:10,11). The Lord Jesus at the Last Supper humbled Himself from the seat of honour which He had and took not only the lowest seat, but even lower than that: He washed their feet as the servant who didn't even have a place at the meal. And both James and Peter saw the Lord's humbling Himself at that supper and His subsequent exaltation as a direct pattern for us to copy (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). Paul takes

things one stage even further. He speaks of how he humbled himself, so that *his hopelessly weak and ungrateful brethren* might be exalted (2 Cor. 11:7). He is evidently alluding to the Gospel passages which speak of how we must humble ourselves so that *we* may be exalted (Mt. 23:11,12; Lk. 14:10,11). But Paul sees *his* exaltation, which his humbling would enable, as being identical to *theirs*. He doesn't say: 'I humbled myself so that I may be exalted'. He speaks of how he humbled himself so that *they* might be exalted.

## Notes

(1) This point is exemplified and developed in Graham Jackman, *The Language Of The Cross* (Lulu, 2008) p. 21.

## 5. The Cross In The Parables

It is clear enough that the parables are indeed the self-revelation of the Lord Jesus. It is noticeable that there is a relative absence of direct comment upon His future sacrifice. It's as if it would have been altogether too simplistic for the Lord of Heaven and earth to repeatedly tell us details of His supreme work. He was more interested in revealing His attitude to us than in giving us insight into the agonies of His final sacrifice- agonies which He surely knew we would never fully grasp, this side of the Kingdom.

### Belief In Victory

One reason for this was that the Lord was absolutely sure that He would be victorious on the cross; His parables speak of our responsibilities and blessings on account of what He knew He would achieve for us. Thus the Master in the parable is able to remonstrate with the unforgiving servant: " I forgave thee all that debt" (Mt. 18:32). The Lord's assumption was that He would attain our forgiveness on account of successfully enduring the cross. Yet He triumphed through His faith; although He was all too aware of the human possibility of failure, He believed He wouldn't fail, He made use of the constant encouragement of the word to this end. He described Himself as the Lord of the servants, and also as the King (e.g. Mt. 18:23 cp. 31- there are other similar parables)- even before His cross. He had such confidence that He would be crowned as a result of His future cross. The tenses in Greek can be used very exactly (unlike Hebrew); it was quite within the ability of the Lord to build into His parables the concept of future Kingship. He could have implied 'When I'm King, I'll judge like this'. But instead He saw Himself as already having overcome. " Be of good cheer, I have (already)overcome the world...now I go my way to him that sent me (bypassing the cross in His words)...I have glorified thee...I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 16:33,5; 17:4); these are only a few samples of the Lord's remarkable confidence that He would overcome. This confidence is reflected in the parables. He was practising His own preaching concerning believing that we have already received what we ask for. No doubt His words recorded in Jn. 15-17 and the parables which reflected this confidence came back to Him as He struggled to quell His crisis of doubt in Gethsemane.

### The Samaritan Saviour

Yet there are a few insights into how the Lord saw His cross. The parable of the good Samaritan explains how Christ took compassion on the stricken spiritual state of us His people, picked us up, made Himself vulnerable to attack by placing the man on His donkey, and caused us to be fully healed. The Samaritan was less vulnerable than the robbed man, on

account of having a donkey. But he made himself even more vulnerable than the robbed man had been, in order to take him to the inn. The picture of the wounded man straddled over the donkey and the Samaritan walking patiently alongside shows what easy prey they would have been. The whole process of the man's redemption by this Samaritan is an account of the cross of Christ (not least the pouring in of wine and oil). The implication is that through seeking to save us, Christ made Himself more vulnerable than He would have been if He sought only His own salvation. And the Samaritan's speed of progress was more than halved; he had to walk rather than ride, keeping the wounded man balanced on the donkey. This parable seems to reveal that Christ realized at least in some abstract sense that His concern for us in some ways made it more difficult for Him; although the reality was that the motivation for His victory was largely due to His sense of responsibility for us.

The idea of him taking care for the man is expressed in the language of Ex. 21:19, which says that if a man wounds another, " he shall pay...and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed" . This somewhat odd allusion (at first sight) surely indicates that the Lord took upon Himself the full blame for our stricken condition, presumably in the sense that as the second Adam He took upon Himself the guilt of Adam. This is why there are so many connections between His death and the effects of Adam's sin (e.g. the crown of *thorns*, the Garden etc.). The way Christ compared Himself to a Samaritan, half Jew and half Gentile, shows that especially on the cross, this is how He felt. He was mindful of both Jewish and Gentile aspects of His future body as He died. The Jews (and His own brothers, Ps. 69:8) treated Him as half Gentile (from a Roman soldier, the Midrash claims).

### **The Saviour Shepherd**

Jn. 10:12 implies that Christ, the good shepherd, saw the wolf coming. He didn't flee, but fought with this ferocious beast until the death. He says that if He had not done this, the sheep would be scattered. The struggle between Christ and the devil / flesh was therefore at its most intense on the cross, in His time of dying. The cross was not only a continuation of His struggle with the (Biblical) devil. It was an especially intensified struggle; and the Lord foresaw this fight coming. There is an element of unreality in this story that serves to make two powerful points. Firstly, no normal shepherd would give his life in protecting his sheep. The near fanaticism of this shepherd is also found in Am. 8:4, which describes the Lord as taking out of the mouth of the lion the legs or piece of ear which remains of the slain sheep; such is the shepherd's desperate love for the animal that now is not. The love of Christ for us on the cross, the intensity and passion of it, is quite outside any human experience. Hence the command to copy His love is a new commandment. And secondly, wolves don't normally act in the way the story says. They will only fight like this when they are cornered, and they aren't *so* vicious. But the point the Lord is making is crucial to us: the devil, the power of sin in our natures, is far more powerful than we think, and the struggle against it on the cross was far far harder than we would think.

And there's a more tragic point. In the short term, the sheep *were* scattered by the wolf, even though Christ died so this wouldn't happen. And Christ knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to the faith

were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain.

## **Giving All**

As the King of the Kingdom, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" can in some ways be applied to the Lord personally. Having spoken of how "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), the Lord goes straight on to speak of how "the Kingdom of Heaven" is like a man who gives all that he has so that he can buy or redeem a field in which He perceives treasure. The same man is also likened to a merchant who sells all that he has in order to buy a pearl of great price. In the utter bankruptcy, the selling all to obtain or redeem one thing, we surely see a parable of the cross, through which death the Lord Jesus redeemed the field of the world, and the pearl of great price [to Him]. Perhaps Paul had his eye on these parables when he spoke of how in the cross, the Lord Jesus who had been rich became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). That pearl, that treasure hidden within the field of the world, then becomes symbolic of us. It was of "great price" (Mt. 13:46)- and Paul again may have this in mind when he warns that we "are bought with a price" and should therefore serve the Lord who bought us and not anyone else (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Thus we see not only the cost of our redemption, the utter self-emptying of the Lord in His time of dying; but also a picture of how valuable we are to Him. We also see some outline explanation of the way in which the Lord's death redeemed "the world", and yet we are His special treasure hidden within it. In one sense we as His treasure is still hidden within this world; in another sense of course we are to be as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. We should be concerned at the danger of hiding our light under a bucket; but in another sense, our relationship to the Lord is such that it is by its wonderful nature 'hidden' from the world in which we currently lie. The strange feature of Mt. 13:44- that the man (in this interpretation, the Lord Jesus) 'hides' the treasure- perhaps becomes understandable in terms of Col. 2:3, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as having all God's treasures 'hidden' in Himself. The 'man' bought the field "for joy thereof" (Mt. 13:44); and despite all the pressure of the crucifixion process, the Lord Jesus could still speak at that time of "my joy" in our redemption (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). Just as the merchant man was "seeking" pearls and 'found' one of great price, so the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus, 'seeks' [same Greek word] fruit on the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), 'seeks' the lost coin until it is found (Lk. 15:8), 'seeks' and saves that which was lost (Lk. 19:10) and 'seeks' His sheep until He finds them (Mt. 18:12). The 'finding' of the lost sheep, the pearl of great price, in some sense happened in the Lord's death. Hence He pictures Himself as the shepherd carrying the redeemed sheep on His shoulders with head bowed forward- exactly the posture of a man carrying a crossbar on his shoulders.

## **The Binding Of Satan**

Of especial interest is the parable of the strong man being bound, because through this parable the Lord outlines what He felt His victory on the cross would mean for us. And surely we ought to be all ears in response to that.

The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross <sup>(1)</sup>. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "spoiled principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament

writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments...for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body.

Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

### **The Spoils Of Satan**

The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should.

The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ <sup>(2)</sup>. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ



really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

### **Lone Hero**

It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us.

In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death.

### **The Humiliation Of The Cross**

So often, the parables [as well as the Lord's teaching generally] appear to be Him almost talking to Himself. The Lord spoke of how it was His Father's plan to cut down the Jewish fig tree; but He asked His Father if it could remain for another year, until He had dug around it and spread dung by it (Lk. 13:8)- and *then* it could be destroyed, if there was still no fruit. The Lord Jesus was thinking here of His crucifixion- for this was the reason for the final cutting down of the Jewish fig tree. To dig was the work of a slave- recall how the disgraced steward felt ashamed to dig (Lk. 16:3). And to spread dung was the work of the very lowest slave. And yet this was how the Lord foresaw His death- becoming as the lowest slave. Yet His hope in doing this was that Israel would bear spiritual fruit. This, then, is to be the motivational effect upon us of meditating upon the Lord's ultimate servanthood in His death- spiritual fruit in *our* lives just *has* to be elicited by it, lest we too will be cut down.

### **The Lord's Gifts**

There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17),

confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

Grasping this extensive theme helps explain the deep sense of paradox which is central to all serious self-examination. We are counted righteous, we are given spiritual gifts of righteousness now, and our self-examination reveals this to us; but we are expected to develop them (according to the parable of the pounds). Yet we also see that we are pathetically bound by our Satan, somehow held back from that life of righteousness which we would fain achieve. All these things were deeply foreseen and appreciated by the Lord when He constructed this parable of binding Satan. Christ in His own life has overcome Satan, and has graciously shared the various aspects of righteousness with the whole of His body. This is the very idea of the body of Christ; between us, over time, we will approximate to the perfect reflection of our Lord. We have each been given different aspects to develop, different parts of His personality. This explains the difference in emphasis which can be observed within the different parts of the present body, and also in the history of the body over time.

When we as a community finally grow up into Him, "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), the whole process of Christ-manifestation (and thereby God manifestation) will be complete. This means that the speed of spiritual development in the latter day body of Christ will determine the exact date of the Lord's return. We are (hopefully and prayerfully) just adding the final touches to the full reflection of the Lord's body. The aspects of Christ which we as a community need to develop in these last days are presumably aspects which earlier generations were unable or not called to achieve. For example, it was simply impossible for earlier generations to do much to achieve the unity of the body. Now, with the possibility of the whole world-wide family being in close contact with each other, with the breakdown of distance and language barriers, it is a real possibility that the body should be one in a manner which was simply impossible to previous generations.

It seems to me, from what knowledge I have of myself and of our community, that many of these things which Christ died to achieve are tragically rejected, at best viewed suspiciously, by 21st century believers. The idea of gifts of righteousness, of being *given* something spiritual for nothing, of each only reflecting *aspects* of Christ rather than complete personal perfection, of striving for unity in the body...all this is almost anathema to some. Yet it's anathema to our very natures, it's against the grain of each of us. Yet I submit, I trust with at least some genuine humility, that the things discussed in the above paragraphs are all utterly fundamental to the cross of Christ; He died in order to achieve these very things.

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## Notes

(1) The idea of binding the strong man must surely look back to Samson. The language can't just be accidentally similar (cp. Jud. 16:21). This means that the Lord saw Samson as the very

epitome of Satan, even though ultimately he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32). Thus the Spirit doesn't forget a man's weakness, even though ultimately he may be counted righteous.

(2) See *The Personal Lord in From Milk To Meat*.

## 6. The Implications Of The Atonement

John stresses how he had 'seen' the Lord's crucifixion (Jn. 19:35), and he later says that anyone who has truly 'seen' Jesus will not commit sin (1 Jn. 3:6). Holding the vision of Him there as He was, really 'seeing' and perceiving Him, will hold us back from sinning. This is the power of the cross.

The Lord Jesus shared all our temptations; He was a man of our nature, He didn't pre-exist.

Therefore in the daily round of life, He will be a living reality, like David we will behold the Lord Jesus before our face all the day. We will really believe that forgiveness is possible through the work of such a representative; and the reality of his example will mean the more to us, as a living inspiration to rise above our lower nature. Appreciating the doctrines of the atonement enables us to pray acceptably; " we have boldness and access with confidence by *the Faith*" - not just 'by faith', but as a result of *the Faith* (Eph. 3:12). Hebrews so often uses the word " therefore" ; *because of* the facts of the atonement, we can *therefore* come boldly before God's throne in prayer, with a true heart and clear conscience (Heb. 4:16). This " boldness" which the atonement has enabled will be reflected in our being 'bold' in our witness (2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4); our experience of imputed righteousness will lead us to have a confidence exuding through our whole being. This is surely why 'boldness' was such a characteristic and watchword of the early church (Acts 4:13,29,31; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; Heb. 10:19; 1 Jn. 4:17). The connection between the atonement and faith in prayer is also brought out in 2 Cor. 1:20 RSV: "For all the promises of God in him are yea. That is, we utter the Amen through him". The promises of God were confirmed through the Lord's death, and the fact that He died as the seed of Abraham, having taken upon Him Abraham's plural seed in representation (Rom. 15:8,9). Because of this, "we utter the Amen through [on account of being in] Him". We can heartily say 'Amen', so be it, to our prayers on account of our faith and understanding of His atoning work.

The fact the Lord didn't personally pre-exist needs some meditation. It seems evident that there must have been some kind of previous creation(s), e.g. for

the creation of the Angels. God existed from infinity, and yet only 4,000 years ago did He have His only and His *begotten* Son. And that Son was a human being in order to save humans- only a few million of us (if that), who lived in a 6,000 year time span. In the spectre of infinite time and space, this is wondrous. That the Only Son of God should die for a very few of us here, we who crawled on the surface of this tiny planet for such a fleeting moment of time. He died so that God could work out our salvation; and the love of God for us is likened to a young man marrying a virgin (Is. 62:5). Almighty God, who existed from eternity, is likened to a first timer, with all the intensity and joyful expectation and lack of disillusion. And more than this. He died for *me*, in the shameful way that He did. Our hearts and minds, with all their powers, are in the boundless prospect lost.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

1 Jn. strongly links belief in Christ as the Son of God with a life of true love. They had heard from "the beginning" of their contact with the Gospel that Christ was the Son of God; and yet also the need to love one another. The "message" which they had heard from the beginning was that Christ was the Son of God (1 Jn. 2:24); and yet it was also that we should love one another (1 Jn. 3:11). This is why in the context of teaching the need for love, John warns against false teaching regarding the nature of Christ as Son of God (1 Jn. 2:22,23; 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 7-11). "The word...from the beginning" was the 'logos' of Christ (Jn. 1:1-3); and yet in John's maturer thought in his letters, the word from the beginning was that we should love each other (1 Jn. 2:7; 3:11). This is the essence of belief in Christ: love for each other. "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (3:23). "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" [i.e. your brother]. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us...whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him" (4:12,15). But why is there this link between love, and belief in Jesus of Nazareth being the begotten Son of God?

Theologically, it could be said that if we accept Him as God's Son, then we must likewise accept all God's other sons, begotten as they are by His Spirit. But practically, are we not being taught to see the *pure wonder* of the way in which *Almighty God had a Son* and gave that Son, so freely and so painfully, for us...? The *pure wonder* of God having a Son of our nature, a

child and then a man who showed us the essence of God displayed in human flesh and temptation; and then giving Him to us... If we see this, we will naturally show love to our brethren. So it isn't just a case of thinking yes, we believe Christ was Son of God, not God the Son- and period. No. There's infinitely more to it than this. This faith and understanding can tear down every barrier between men, and provide the inspiration for a life of true, self-sacrificial love. The true *wonder* of it all simply must be meditated upon. That God's very own son should begin so small, as an ovum, "a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager".

Because Jesus was the *only* Son of God, therefore He is *full* of the Father's grace and truth. Jn. 1:14 makes this connection between fullness and only Sonship. Because of the wonder of this, we should therefore hear Him, respecting and thereby obeying His word simply because of our appreciation of who He is and was- the Son of God (Lk. 9:35).

Quite simply, to *truly* believe in Jesus as Son of God means that we will have a sure Hope of passing beyond the gates of the grace into the Kingdom (Mt. 16:16 cp. 18).

Jesus never sinned

The extent to which this man from Nazareth, who sneezed and slept and thirsted as we do, was really God manifest in the flesh...this needs sustained personal meditation. That from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew really came forth the words of Almighty God; to the extent that it had to be said that never man spake like this man; and He Himself could assure us that heaven and earth would pass, but not His words (note the links with Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12)...that this man died for us...rose again, ascended....and now works His saving work for us, hour by hour. Mark records how a man once in an offhand way addressed the Lord Jesus as "good master". The Lord's response was to say that if the man *really* accepted Him as 'good' he ought to share His cross, and sell what he had and give to the poor. The real extent of Jesus' goodness will move us to deep personal response, if we truly perceive it.

Jesus is the Christ

If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe

that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1). "But and if ye should suffer for righteousness sake...fear not their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man" (1 Pet. 3:14). *Knowing and having* Christ as Lord of our hearts will practically enable us to overcome tribulation, and will lead to a suitably humble witness in response. The Gospel is "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4 RSV). 2 Cor. 2:14-17 invites us to see the Lord Jesus after His victory- which can only refer to His victorious death on the cross- leading a victory parade, in which we are the triumphant soldiers, carrying with us burning incense. This represents our preaching of the Gospel, as part of our participation in the joyful glory of the Lord's victory on the cross. And yet that incense is used as a double symbol- both of us the preachers, who hold the aroma, and yet we are also the aroma itself. We are the witness. But the motivation for it all is our part in the victory procession of the Lord, going on as it does down through the ages, as He as it were comes home from the cross.

The Lord Jesus died and rose again, and was made Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)

The fact Jesus is Lord has vital practical import for us. In Rom. 14:7-9, Paul speaks of the need not to live unto ourselves, but to rather live in a way which is sensitive to the conscience and needs of others. Why? "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living". Because He is our Lord we therefore don't live for ourselves, but for Christ our Lord and all those in Him. When Paul exalts that Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, this isn't just some literary flourish. It is embedded within a context of telling the believers to quit materialism, indeed to flee from its snare. 1 Tim. 6:6-14 concern this; and then there is the passage about Christ's exaltation (:15,16), and then a continued plea to share riches rather than build them up (:17-19). Because He is Lord of all, we should quit our materialism and sense of self-ownership. For we are His, and all we have is for His service too. And the principle of His being Lord

affects every aspect of our spirituality. Dennis Gillet truly observed [in *The Genius Of Discipleship*]: "Mastery is gained by crowning the Master as Lord and King". Because Jesus is Lord and Master, and because He is our representative in every way, therefore all that He did and was becomes an imperative for us to follow. Thus: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:13,14). They called Him "Lord and Master", but *wouldn't* wash each other's feet. Like us so often, they had the right doctrinal knowledge, but it meant nothing to them in practice. To know Him as Lord is to wash each others' feet, naked but for a loincloth, with all the subtle anticipations of the cross which there are in this incident. "Wherefore [because of the exaltation of Jesus] [be obedient and] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [i.e. in humility]" (Phil. 2:12). And so it is with appreciating God's greatness; the deeper our realization of it, the higher our response. Thus Solomon built a "great" house for Yahweh, "for great is our God above all gods" (2 Chron. 2:5). Israel prayed to God but without meaning, "though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7). They theoretically knew Him as "the most High" but in their hearts they failed to exalt Him. And so their prayers remained as empty words.

James 2:1 (Gk.) gives the Lord Jesus the title of "the glory" (as also in Lk. 2:32; Eph. 1:17). And James makes the point that we cannot believe in the Lord Jesus as the Lord of glory and have respect of persons. This may seem a strange connection at first sight. But perhaps the sense is that if we see the *height* and surpassing extent of *His* glory, all others will pale into insignificance, and therefore we will be biased for or against nobody and nothing because of the way they are all as nothing before the brightness of the glory of the Lord we follow.

There's one more especially noteworthy thing which the sheer *height* of the Lord's exaltation leads us to. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...wherefore...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:9-12). These words are alluding to Is. 45:23,24: "...unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". We all

find humility difficult. But before the height of His exaltation, a height which came as a result of the depth of the degradation of the cross, we should bow our knees in an unfeigned humility and realization of our sinfulness, and thankful recognition of the fact that through Him we are counted righteous.

As with many aspects of doctrine, it is often difficult for us to appreciate how radically revolutionary they were in the first century context; and in essence they should lose none of their radicalness with us. David Bosch observes <sup>(1)</sup> : “Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords- the most revolutionary political demonstration imaginable in the Roman Empire”. Philip Yancey likewise: “As the church spread throughout the Roman empire, its followers took up the slogan “Christ is Lord”, a direct affront to Roman authorities who required all citizens to take the oath ‘Caesar [the state] is Lord’” (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 246). It hurt, it cost, to recognize Him as Lord. And so it should with us. Men and women died for this; and we likewise give our lives in response to that very same knowledge. There is a tendency, which the Lord Himself brought to our attention, of calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. To know Him as Lord in truth is axiomatically to be obedient to Him (Lk. 6:46).

Faith is also inculcated by an appreciation of the height of His exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, “leprosy was regarded as a “stroke” only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it” (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper of Mk. 1:40 lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: “If thou wilt, *thou canst* [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean”.



The ascended Christ was highly exalted and given the Name above every Name, so that for those who believed this, they would bow in service at the Name of Jesus.

Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3).

Because "all power is given unto me...go ye *therefore* and teach all nations" (Mt. 28:18,19). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all (see "Into all the world" for more on this, especially the way 1 Tim. 3:16 alludes to the preaching commission as having already been fulfilled the moment it was uttered, so strong is the imperative). There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6).

The greatness of Christ clearly influenced Mark's witness; he began his preachings of the Gospel (of which his Gospel is but a transcript) by quoting Isaiah's words about how a highway was to be prepared "for our God" and applying them to the Lord Jesus, whom he saw as God manifest in flesh. Appreciating height of who Jesus was and is, clearly motivated his preaching. And it should ours too. This is why Paul in the face of every discouragement could preach that "there *is* another king, one Jesus" (Acts 17:7). This was the core of his message; not so much that there *will be* a coming King in Jerusalem, but that

Through His resurrection, forgiveness of sins became possible for all men.

there *is* right now a King at God's right hand, who demands our total allegiance.

If we believe this, we will preach it world-wide. He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people. Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood (Is. 52:15); and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds.

His resurrection is an imperative to preach. When Peter is asked why he continues preaching when it is forbidden, he responds by saying that he is obeying God's command, in that Christ had been raised (Acts 5:29-32). There was no specific command from God to witness (although there was from Christ); from the structure of Peter's argument he is surely saying that the fact God raised Christ is *de facto* a command from God to witness to it which must be obeyed.

Peter knew Jesus had risen, and he had met him and been "glad" when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. But "when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea" (Jn. 21:7), and then meets the Lord and as it were they settle the score relating to his denials. Again by a fire, the three fold "lovest thou me?" probed Peter's denials, and the threefold commission to "feed my sheep" confirmed his total re-enstatement to grace. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn't. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point that we *don't really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.

Because the Lord's resurrection enabled forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17), Peter therefore on this basis makes an appeal for repentance and appropriation of the Lord's work for men through baptism into His death and resurrection (Acts 2:31-38; 3:15,19 "therefore"). And Paul likewise: "He, whom God raised again...through [on account of] this man [and His resurrection] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:37,38). Because of the Name the Lord has been given, salvation has been enabled (Acts 4:12 cp. Phil. 2:9). "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26); "the God of our fathers raised up Jesus...exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give (i.e. inspire) repentance to Israel, and forgiveness" (Acts 5:30,31). The fact of the Lord's resurrection has obtained forgiveness of sins for all who will identify themselves with it through baptism into Him; and this is why it is thereby an imperative to preach it, if we believe in it. The disciples were told to go and preach of the resurrection of Christ, and *therefore* of the required responses this entails: repentance, acceptance of forgiveness and baptism (Lk. 24:46). Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13). We who were dead in sins were "quickened together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). If we believe in Christ's resurrection, we will therefore repent, confess our sins and know His forgiveness. Thus believing in His raising and making confession of sin are bracketed together in Rom. 10:9,10, as both being essential in gaining salvation. Because He rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can't wilfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord's glorification means for us should therefore

inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

Paul exhorts that prayers be made "for all men", just because "Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all", and He thereby is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:1-6). Because of what He enabled for all, we should pray for all, that somehow circumstances might be allowed which enable all men's salvation in Jesus to indeed spread to all men.

The Lord's blood was shed for our redemption.

Christ died the dreadful death He did *for us*

If we understand something of the 'mechanics' of the atonement, and grasp something of the fact that they were outworked in a real, historical man, we will see that the final realization of the redemption achieved at the cross will be when Christ comes back. Having expounded the Lord's cross for several chapters, Paul concludes: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). Here we see two fundamental first principles linked: If we understand something of the atonement, we will earnestly look for the second coming, when the redemption achieved on the cross will be brought unto us (cp. 1 Pet. 1:13). An enthusiasm for the second coming, spurred by a realization that the bringing of salvation then is an outworking of the cross, will lead to a loose hold on the things of this life.

Paul had a debt to preach to all men (Rom. 1:14). But a debt implies he had been given something; and it was not from "all men", but rather from Christ. Because the Lord gave us the riches of His self-sacrifice, we thereby are indebted *to Him*; and yet this debt has been transmuted into a debt to preach to all humanity. Our obligation to the Lord for His death for us issues in an obligation to preach that message to others.

Consider the implications of 2 Cor. 5:20: "On behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ: be ye reconciled to God [because] him who knew no sin he made to be a sin [a sin offering?] on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him". *Because* of the cross, the atonement which God wrought in Christ's offering, we beseech men to be reconciled to God. Appreciating the cross and the nature of the atonement should be the basis of our appeal to men. And indeed, such an appeal is *God* appealing to men and women, in that there on the cross "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". The blood and spittle covered body of the Lord lifted up was and is the appeal, the *beseeking* of God Himself to men. And this is the message that we are honoured to preach on His behalf; we preach the appeal of God through the cross.

The reality of the Lord's crucifixion was the basis of Peter's appeal for men to repent: "Repent ye therefore [and he spoke not only to those who had crucified the Lord], and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:17-19). And think through the reasoning of 1 Cor. 1:13: "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?". The fact Jesus was crucified for us means that we should be baptized into that Name, and also be undivided.

Therefore, "husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it...so ought men to love their wives" (Eph. 5:25). The Greek for "gave himself" is mainly used of the Lord Jesus giving up the spirit to the Father. We have shown elsewhere in this volume ("The death of the cross") that His death was as an act of the will, He gave up His life rather than it being taken away from Him. This matchless peak of self-control and self-giving for us must somehow be replicated in the humdrum of daily domestic relationships. He carried our sins "*that* we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes (Gk. Weals- Peter saw them) ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). Because of the suffering entailed in the putting to death of our sins by the Lord's cross, we should respond in likewise mortifying them.

To put it mildly, our experience of His death for us should lead us to be generous spirited in all ways. In appealing for financial

generosity to poorer brethren, Paul sought to inspire the Corinthians with the picture of Christ crucified: "For ye know the grace [gift / giving] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor [Gk. a pauper], that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). In the light of this, we should not just be generous from the abundance of what we have; we should become as paupers in our giving. The Lord's giving wasn't financial; it was emotional and spiritual. And so, Paul says, both materially and in these ways, we should likewise respond to our brethren, poorer materially or spiritually than we are. "The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:14 Philips; it "urges us on", NRSV).

By God's grace, the Lord tasted death *for* (Gk. *huper*) *every man*, as our representative: "in tasting death he should stand for all" (NEB). In His death He experienced the essence of the life-struggle and death of every man. The fact the Lord did this *for us* means that we respond *for Him*. "To you it is given *in the behalf of* (Gk. *huper*) Christ, not only to believe on Him [in theory], but to suffer *for his sake* (Gk. *huper*)" (Phil. 1:29). He suffered *for us* as our representative, and we suffer *for Him* in response. This was and is the two-way imperative of the fact the Lord was our representative. He died *for all* that we should die to self and live *for Him* (2 Cor. 5:14,15). "His own self bare our sins [as our representative] in his own body [note the link "*our sins*" and "*his own body*"] that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24,25). We died with Him, there on His cross; and so His resurrection life is now ours. He is totally active for us now; His life now is *for us*, and as we live His life, we should be 100% *for Him* in our living. He gave His life *for us*, and we must lay down our lives *for Him* (1 Jn. 3:16).

2 Cor. 5:14-21 urges us to preach the salvation in Christ to all men, because He died for us, as our representative. He died *for*

[the sake of] all (5:14,15), He was made sin *for* our sake (5:21); and therefore we are ambassadors *for* [s.w.] His sake (5:20). Because He was our representative, so we must be His representatives in witnessing Him to the world. This is why the preaching of Acts was consistently motivated by the Lord's death and resurrection for the preachers. Phil. 2:9 in the AV says that the Lord Jesus has a name "above" every name. Yet His Name surely cannot be "above" that of Yahweh. The Greek for "above" is usually translated "for [the sake of]", and I would suggest we read Phil. 2:9 as saying that the name of Jesus is for [the sake of] every name, in that every man and woman was potentially comprehended in His all-representative sacrifice. By baptism into the name of Jesus, they confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There was and is no other name given under Heaven by which men can be saved; "every name" under the whole Heaven must take on the name of Jesus in baptism. This is why Acts associates His exaltation (Acts 2:33; 5:31) and His new name (Acts 2:21,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,18,30; 5:40) with an appeal for men and women to be baptized into that Name. Realizing the meaning of the Name of Jesus and the height of His exaltation meant that they realized how "all men" could have their part in a sacrifice which represented "all men". And thus they were motivated to preach to "all men". And thus Paul's whole preaching ministry was a bearing of the Name of Jesus before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

Human nature / the flesh cannot be atoned for, or a sacrifice offered for it; it must be cut off.

So we can't keep living the fleshly life thinking that somehow we will be atoned for. We must at least seek to put to death the flesh; not just get forgiveness for the same sins and carry on doing them. Even if this is in practice our experience, there must be a dominant desire to cut off the flesh and a counting of ourselves as dead to sin. We should do this because Christ bore our sins and by the cross healed our spiritual weakness in prospect; we respond to the death of sin which He achieved by cutting off our flesh (1 Pet. 2:24).

In the light of ten chapters of detailed exposition of the meaning of the blood of

Christ, *therefore let us...*, Paul triumphantly drives home (Heb. 10:19-25):

- Let us enter boldly "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus". This is only possible through a deep knowledge of sin forgiven. Our prayer life should be a positive and upbuilding experience: "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience". Reflection on the atonement, believing it all, will result in a positive and unashamed faith.

- "Let us hold fast...without wavering". If the belief of the cross is imprinted upon our minds, reflected upon not for a few fleeting minutes on Sundays but often throughout each day, we won't waver. The natural tendency to blow hot and cold in our spiritual endeavours will be vanquished beneath an unceasing wonder at what was achieved. It is only sustained reflection upon the cross which can, in an almost mystical way, impart an unceasing verve of inspiration.

- "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching". Again the doctrine of the atonement and that of the second coming are linked. As we realize more and more clearly that very soon the final outworking of the cross will be achieved in the actual physical granting of redemption to us, so we will be inspired to more and more earnestly seek the welfare of our brethren. If we believe in the atonement, we will naturally seek to break bread. Whether it means summoning the courage to meet with those we naturally would rather not meet with, bringing the wine to the meeting, we will be motivated to rise up and serve in these ways by the eternal and personal truth of the cross.

As the blood of the ram had to be put on the ear, thumb and toe (Lev. 8:23), so the blood of Christ's atonement should affect every aspect of our lives; our hearing [ie our



perception], our doing and walking...

The basis of our salvation is that we are justified, counted by righteous, by our faith and baptism into the representative sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. His righteousness is thereby counted to us.

If *God* is our justifier, where is he that condemns us, or lays any guilt to our charge (Rom. 8:33,34)? And yet in family life, in ecclesial relationships...we are so so quick to feel and hurt from the possible insinuations of others against us. We seek to justify ourselves, to correct gossip and misrepresentation, to "take up" an issue to clear our name. We all tend to be far too sensitive about what others may be implying about us. All this reflects a sad lack of appreciation of the wonder of the fact that we are justified *by God*, and in His eyes- which is surely the ultimately important perspective- we are without fault before the throne of grace, covered in the imputed and peerless righteousness of the Lord. Paul, misrepresented and slandered more than most brethren, came to conclude: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me [right now] is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4). The judge is the justifier, according to this argument. Paul is not justified by himself or by other men, because they are not his judge. The fact that God alone is judge through Christ [another first principle] means that nobody can ultimately justify us or condemn us. The false claims of others can do nothing to ultimately damage us, and our own efforts at self-justification are in effect a denial of the fact that the Lord is the judge, not us, and therefore He alone can and will justify.

These thoughts are meshed with another first principle in Jn. 5:44, where the RVmg. has the Lord telling the Jews that they sought glory "one of another" because they didn't seek the glory that comes from the one God. Because there is only one God, there is only one glory, one Name of God, one standard of spirituality, one judge, one justifier. Whilst men seek glory and approbation and acceptance and justification from other men, they are denying the principle of one God. If there is only one God, we should seek His honour and justification, to the *total* exclusion of that of men. Hosea had revealed this truth earlier: "I am the Lord thy God...and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me...neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee [i.e. thee alone] the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hos. 13:4; 14:3). Because God alone can give salvation and mercy, therefore there is no space for

Despite being saddled with our nature, the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for *me*, for my justification and salvation. His life and death were a surrender of all to the cause of my redemption, to God's glory.

worshipping or seeking for the approbation of anything or anyone else; for the receipt of mercy and salvation are the only ultimate things worth seeking. There is only one God who can give them, and therefore we should seek for His acceptance alone.

And so I too must surrender all, I will willingly strive to do this, for the glorious wonder of knowing this Man who died for me to enable such great salvation. He died and rose so that He might be made Lord of His people (Rom. 14:9); if we believe in His resurrection and subsequent Lordship, He will be the Lord of our lives, Lord of every motion of our hearts. We are yet in our sins, if Christ be not risen (1 Cor. 15:17). But He has risen, and therefore we are no longer dominated by our moral weakness. Because baptism united us with His resurrection, we are no longer in our sins (Col. 2:13). Therefore the baptized believer will not "continue in sin" if he really understand and believes this (Rom. 6:1 and context). Ours is the life of freedom with Him, for He was and is our representative [note that He represents us now, in His freedom and eternal life, just as much as He did in His death].

We died and rose with Christ, if we truly believe in His representation of us and our connection with Him, then His freedom and sense of conquest will be ours; as the man guilty of blood was to see in the death of the High Priest a representation of his own necessary death, and thereafter was freed from the limitations of the city of refuge (Num. 35:32,33). Because Christ really did rise again, and we have a part in that, we must *therefore* abstain from sin, quit bad company and labour with the risen, active Lord (1 Cor. 15:34,58). The representative nature of the Lord's death means that we are pledged to live out His self-crucifixion as far as we can; to re-live the crucifixion process in our imagination, to come to that point where we *know* we wouldn't have gone through with it, and to grasp with real wonder and gratitude the salvation of the cross. " As one has died for all, then all have died, and that He died for all in order to have the living live no longer for themselves but for Him who died and rose for them" (2 Cor. 5:14,15 Moffatt). It has been powerfully commented: " To know oneself to have been involved in the sacrificial death of Christ, on account of its representational character, is to see oneself committed to a sacrificial life, to a re-enactment in oneself of the cross" (W.F. Barling, *The Letters To Corinth*). Such is the power of a true,

lived-out baptism. If we have really died and resurrected with the Lord, we will be dead unto the things of this world (Col. 2:20; 3:1). This is why Paul could say that the greatest proof that Christ had risen from the dead was the change in character which had occurred within him (Acts 26:8 ff.). This was "the power of his resurrection"; and it works within us too. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth aren't just facts we know; if they are truly believed, there is within them the power of ultimate transformation.

## **7. The Importance Of The Breaking Of Bread**

Quite rightly, the breaking of bread is at the centre of our Christian lives. But because there *is* something very special about that meeting, there can be a tendency to regard it and the bread and wine as having some kind of mystical aura about them. This results in the meeting not being as meaningful and helpful to us as it should be. Yet at the other extreme, over familiarity with it can result in our not according it the vital importance which we should. In this study we want to analyze the basic aspects of the breaking of bread. The food which the Lord provided was His body and life, given above all upon the cross. He urges His hearers to labour to possess this, because this is the food that will abide in / into [Gk. eis] the life eternal (Jn. 6:27- 'endures unto' is a poor translation). The essence of having and 'eating' of the Lord's sacrifice now, is what eternal life is to be all about. No wonder He invited us to understand that we will repeat the breaking of bread service [which symbolizes this whole theme of eating of Him] in His future Kingdom. Absorbing Him, His sacrifice, the food which is Him, begins now... and in so doing, we are eating of the food / bread that will abide into the life eternal. He surely had in mind too the manna stored in the ark, which was eaten in the wilderness and yet abode / endured into Israel's life in the promised land. And that bread, of course, was symbolic of Him; it is the "hidden manna" which His followers will eat in the future Kingdom (Rev. 2:17). Eph. 1:17,18 puts it another way, by paralleling "the knowledge of [Christ]" with "knowing what is the hope of his calling... the riches of the glory of his inheritance". The blessed hope of our calling is not simply a life of bliss in ideal conditions, but more specifically it is the hope of 'knowing Christ' as person eternally, in all the glorious fullness of that experience.

It's easy to underestimate how much the breaking of bread means to the Lord. He lamented that His betrayer was one who had dipped in the dish with Him at the last supper (Mk. 14:20). There was no way that this was meant to be an indication to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer- for they all ate the supper and dipped in the same dish. Hence His point was surely to foreground the awful fact that *it was a brother who had broken bread with Him* who would now betray Him. Ps. 41:9 laments that it was one who "ate of my bread" who betrayed Him. This is why the challenge "Lord, is it I?" echoes down to every communion service. It was 'with desire that He desired' [a real emphasis] to ate the passover with His men (Lk. 22:15). He so wants us to break bread with Him; He so wants us to try to understand the cross. It seems He asked the Father that His disciples should be with Him at the cross- "I will that where I am, there they may also be" (Jn. 17:24 RV- hence John's emphasis that they really did behold Him there). He so wishes for us to at least try to stand with Him there and enter into it all.

### **A Memorial Meeting**

Our understanding of it is greatly helped by appreciating that the breaking of bread is the New Covenant's equivalent of the Passover feast. The Passover meal was in order to *remember* the great

salvation which God had wrought for all Israel at the Red Sea. Egypt, representing the power of sin, was gloriously vanquished there. Yet the faithful Israelite of all ages was to also proclaim that "This is done because of that which the Lord did unto *me* when *I* came forth out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:8). Our memorial meeting has this same two fold structure; remembering the deliverance which God wrought for us personally, as well as for the whole community of the redeemed. This is why at the breaking of bread there ought to be an awareness of personal fellowship with God, and also with each other, and with those who have gone before. The equivalent of our Red Sea experience is baptism (1 Cor. 10:1). It is not unreasonable to conclude that in our very personal meditations at the breaking of bread, we should think back to our own baptism, our deliverance from the bondage of our personal sins and weaknesses. Paul speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor. 10:16), probably using "blessing" in its Biblical sense of 'forgiveness' (e.g. Acts 3:25,26). Whilst there is, therefore, an awareness of our own sins and salvation from them at the memorial meeting, there is not any specific mediation of forgiveness to us through the bread and wine. In prospect, we were saved at baptism, through our Lord's work on the cross. In prospect, all our sins were forgiven then. We must be careful to avoid the Catholic notion that the bread and wine do themselves possess some power of atonement. They are the appointed aids to help us *remember* what has already been achieved. And this is why the early brethren could break bread with joy- not as part of a guilt trip prompted by the worrying remembrance of the standard set for us in Jesus (Acts 2:46).

Because we are *remembering* our great salvation, the memorial meeting need not be a place for guilt tripping. Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat<sup>(1)</sup>. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our passover.

## **Self Examination**

You may like to underline two phrases in your Bible in Matthew 26. "As they did eat..." they began to keep asking Him [Gk.] "Lord, is it I?" (Mt. 26:21)... and as they were eating Jesus took bread..." (Mt. 26:26). The whole meeting, according to the Greek tenses, involved the disciples asking "Lord, is it I?" - and as they were eating the Lord shared bread and wine with them in the manner with which we are familiar at our communion service. In other words, the entire gathering was shot through with a spirit of urgent self-examination and recognition of their own possibility of failure and betrayal of the Lord. For all the joyful assurance which the communion speaks of, that assurance and joy is rooted in this other aspect- of self-examination with the knowledge that failure and betrayal of the Lord is a real possibility. The importance of self examination at the breaking of bread is indirectly hinted at in Jn. 13:10: "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet". This is surely a reference to how Num. 19:19 prescribed that a Levite was required to take a plunge bath in order to be clean. The Lord is therefore saying that *all* His people, when they partake of His feast, are to present themselves as cleansed Levites. He understood His people as *all* being part of a priesthood. Additionally, we need to bear in mind that the Lord spoke those words just before the breaking of bread, in response to how Peter did not want to participate in the Lord's meal if it meant the Lord washing him. Surely the Lord was saying that baptism is a one time event- he has been thus bathed does not need to wash again, or be re-baptized. But, he does need to

periodically wash his feet, which I would take to be a reference to the breaking of bread which Peter seemed to want to avoid. Thus whilst forgiveness is not mystically mediated through the bread and wine, there is all the same a very distinct connection between the memorial meeting and forgiveness, just as there is between baptism and forgiveness. To not break bread is to walk away from that forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, just as to refuse baptism is to do the same.

Once this is understood, the command to examine ourselves at the breaking of bread will not result in a frantic listing of a few sins from the past week, somehow hoping that taking the bread and wine will absolve us from them. " If we would judge ourselves (at the breaking of bread), we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31) in the sense of being condemned. Our self-examination must be so intense that we appreciate that we ought to be condemned; if we achieve that level of self-knowledge now, we will not be condemned at the judgment. In the context of the self-examination command in 1 Cor. 11, Paul is speaking of the need to completely focus our attention on the sacrifice of Christ. Yet this command must have its basis in the directive for Israel to search their house for leaven before eating the Passover (Ex. 12:19). " Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven...of malice and wickedness" (1 Cor. 5:8). The disciples' question at the first breaking of bread, "Lord, is it I?" is another prototype of the command to examine ourselves at the feast (Mt. 26:22). Combining Paul's command to examine ourselves that we are really focusing upon our Lord's sacrifice, and the Exodus allusion which implies that we should examine our own lives for wickedness, we conclude that if we properly reflect upon Christ and His victory for us, then we will inevitably be aware of our own specific failures which Christ really has vanquished. But this will come as a by-product of truly grasping the fullness of the Lord's victory. The Passover was to be a public proclamation to the surrounding world of what God had done for Israel. Likewise our feast 'shows forth' (Greek: publicly declares) the Lord's death. Our memorial meeting should therefore include a degree of openly declaring to others what spiritual deliverances the Lord has wrought for us. This is surely the sort of talk that should fill up the half hour between ending the service and leaving the hall.

If we really *know* Christ, if we *love* that salvation which He has achieved, then we will want to break bread, often. " If ye love me, keep my commandments" . There can be no doubt that the bread and wine do make our Lord come so real to us once again. The more an Israelite believed that he really had been redeemed from Egypt, the more he would want to keep the Passover. Likewise, our attitude to the breaking of bread is a reflection of our confidence in salvation and forgiveness. Physical isolation, Sunday School duties, unco-operative family members, none of these things will stop the confident believer from breaking bread, alone if necessary.

### **The Vital Importance Of Breaking Bread**

It is noteworthy that God's offer of deliverance from Egypt was conditional on a number of things. One of these was that Israel would keep the Passover to remember the great salvation God was going to achieve for them. So often in the record it is stressed: " Ye shall observe this thing...for ever...ye shall keep this service" . For this reason, it is necessary to explain before baptism (cp. the Passover salvation) that we must keep the breaking of bread service. God's eagerness for them to remember shines through the written word. The description of the memorial service as being a 'proclamation' of the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:26 RV) is an allusion to the second of the four cups taken at the Jewish Passover: " the cup of proclamation" . This was drunk after the reading of Psalms 113 and 114, which proclaimed Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Therefore our breaking bread is our proclamation that we really believe that we have been saved out of this world, and are on the wilderness path to the Kingdom. God forbid, really, that our breaking bread should

come down to mere ritual and habit. It is a very personal proclamation of our own salvation- as well as that of the whole body of believers.

So important was it, that he that " forbearth to keep the Passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people...that man shall bear his sin" (Num. 9:13). It seems from Num. 9:10 and the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah's Passovers, that it was more important to keep the Passover even if not everything was being done exactly in order, even if there was a sense of unworthiness, than to not do it at all. This should be borne in mind when some feel 'unworthy' to take the emblems, or where there are genuine problems in obtaining wine. Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, "the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers<sup>(2)</sup>. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

" Even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people...that man shall bear his sin" is the language of Ex. 12:15 concerning the man who ate leavened rather than unleavened bread, and of Gen. 17:14: " The uncircumcised man (who refuses to be circumcised)...shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" . Circumcision was the Old Covenant's equivalent of baptism. To not break bread over a prolonged period therefore shows that a person is no longer in covenant with God. It was due to an incorrect attitude to the memorial meeting that many at Corinth were struck down " weak and sickly...and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30), presumably referring to the power the apostles had to smite apostate believers with physical discomfort and death. Such was the importance accorded to that meeting by them. The sensitive Bible student will see the connection between the bread and wine offered with the daily burnt offering under the Law, and the breaking of bread service. The connection was surely intended to teach that the spirit of the memorial service is to go with us morning and evening in daily life. There is surely no believer who has not privately lamented the fact that they experience an almost inevitable loss of intensity after the climax of the breaking of bread.

The breaking of bread is described as eating at " the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21). This was Old Testament language for the altar (Ez. 41:22). By eating from it we are partaking of the altar, the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 9:13; 10:18; Heb. 13:10). If we don't partake of it, we declare ourselves to have no part in Him. Yet the very fact we partake of it, is a statement that we have pledged ourselves to separation from this present world; for it is not possible to eat at the Lord's table, and also that of this world (1 Cor. 10:21). The Passover, as the prototype breaking of bread, featured bitter herbs to remind Israel of their bitter experience in Egypt (Ex. 1:14). The breaking of bread should likewise focus our attention on the fact that return to the world is a return to bondage and bitterness, not freedom.

Whilst forgiveness itself is not mediated in any metaphysical sense by the memorial meeting, it is nonetheless a vital part of the life of the forgiven believer. When Peter didn't want to break bread, the Lord reminded him that he who has been baptized / washed is indeed clean, but needs periodic feet-washing. This, surely, was a reference to the breaking of bread (Jn. 13:10). The same word for 'wash' is found in Jn. 15:2, where we read of how the Father washes / purifies periodically the vine branches. Could this not be some reference to the effect the breaking of bread should have upon us?

## The Breaking Of Bread Meeting: A Caveat

Not assembling ourselves together is of course not a good thing. If we love our brethren, we will seek to be physically with them. There can be no doubt that we must struggle with our natural selfishness, our desire to go it alone. But is this actually what Heb. 10:25 is talking about? A glance at the context shows that forsaking the assembly is paralleled with the wilful sin which shall exclude us from God's salvation:

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith	Without wavering [going back to Judaism, according to the context in Hebrews]
Let us consider one another to provoke unto love	Not forsaking the assembly-of-ourselves
Exhorting one another	Unlike the "some" who, according to how Hebrews uses that Greek word, have turned away from Christianity
Wilful sin, with no more access to the Lord's sacrifice	
Certain condemnation- "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation"	
Despising the Law	
Treading under foot the Son of God and reviling the blood of the covenant- what had to be done by Christians who 'repented' of their conversion and returned to the synagogue, the sort of blasphemy that Saul was making Christian converts commit.	

Now are those awful things in the right hand column above really a description of someone who fervently believes in the Lord Jesus, but for whatever reason, doesn't 'make it out to meeting' on Sundays? Those terms seem to speak about a wilful rejection of the Lord Jesus. And this of course is the very background against which Hebrews was written. It was a letter to Hebrew Christians who were beginning to bow to Jewish pressure and renounce their faith in Christ, and return to Judaism. "The assembling of ourselves together" can actually be read as a noun- not a verb. Those who 'forsook' 'the assembly together of us' would then refer to those who totally rejected Christianity. The same word "forsaking" occurs in 2 Pet. 2:15, also in a Jewish context, about those who "forsake the right way". So I suggest that forsaking the assembly refers more to turning away from Christ and returning to apostasy, than to simply not turning up at church as often as we might. The writer laments that "some" were indeed forsaking the assembly (Heb. 10:25). But that Greek word translated "some" recurs in Hebrews to describe those "some" who had forsaken the ecclesia and turned back to Judaism: "Take heed...lest there be in *some* [AV "any"] of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (and returning to Judaism- Heb. 3:12)... lest *some* [AV "any"] of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13)... for *some*, when they had heard, did provoke [referring to the earlier Hebrews in the wilderness who turned away from the hope of the Kingdom- Heb. 3:16]... *some* of you should seem to fail [like the condemned Hebrews in the wilderness- Heb. 4:1]... lest *some* fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). In fact, right after the reference to the "some" who forsake the assembly, Heb. 10:28 speaks of "*some* [AV "he"- but the same Greek word in all these places for "some"] that despised Moses' law".

Clearly, those Hebrews in the wilderness who turned away from the spirit of Christ in Moses and the hope of the Kingdom, are being held up as warnings to that same "some" in the first century Hebrew ecclesia who were turning back from the Hope of the Kingdom. Now let me get it right. I'm not in any way saying that we needn't bother about our ecclesial attendance. Far from it! But I also feel it's not right to insist that if someone doesn't attend an ecclesia, for whatever reason, they are therefore guilty of the wilful sin and certain fiery condemnation of which Hebrews 10 speaks for those who forsake the assembly. In fact, the passage has almost been abused like that- as if to say: 'If you don't turn up on Sunday, if you quit meeting with us, then, you've quit on God and His Son'. This simply isn't the case.

There are some who find attendance at the memorial meeting difficult for whatever reason. Yet there is only one loaf, one cup, and all those truly baptized into the one body are partaker in it, so Paul explains. Even disfellowship can never be any more than a local issue between you and one ecclesia; whenever you partake the one loaf and one cup, you're in fellowship with the entire body of Jesus- even if some of them tell you that you're not. An ecclesia can part company with you, you can with them, but nothing can separate us from the body and blood and love of Jesus. They cannot tell you that you are no longer a part of the body of Jesus. Also, it's worth paying attention to Matthew 18, a passage invariably invoked by these types. If your brother sins against you, you can go to him, then get the church involved, and then, the Lord says to the person sinned against, let him be unto THEE as a Gentile / publican. I am such a fuddy duddy I am still reading from the AV and RV. About the only advantage of those versions is the way 'thee' signifies a 'you singular' as opposed to 'ye / you' which in KJ English meant 'you plural'. Modern English no longer makes a distinction. So, let such a person be unto THEE- you singular, not your ecclesia- as a Gentile and Publican. And what was Jesus' attitude to them? To mix with them, eat with them in table fellowship, and try to win them.

Also. Mt 18 continues. Peter asks " And how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" . Jesus replies, 70 x 7. i.e. to an unlimited extent. It's as if He's saying that yes you can go through the procedure of sorting it out with your brother and rejecting him from your personal company. But, the higher level, is to simply forgive him. It's like adultery under the Law. There were several options for the husband. Do a trial of jealousy and make her infertile. Stone her. Divorce her. Or, just forgive her. We surely all ought to be aiming for the higher level. Those who quote Matthew 18 as a reason for withdrawal are in my view living on a lower spiritual level than those who forgive 70 x 7. But the gracious Lord doubtless shall accept them too in the last day.

## **Coming Together**

And so for these reasons and others, brethren and sisters walk miles through the blazing African sun, travel for hours in sub zero temperatures in Eastern Europe, drive hundreds of kilometers along North American highways- to meet together for the memorial service. But again, Why? Why not just break bread at home? The answer to this lies in the fact that the breaking of bread (as the Passover) is intended to recall the salvation which was achieved for the whole body of Christ- which includes us personally. We should be aware of this if we have to break bread alone. It is understandable, therefore, that those in 'isolation' often try to break bread at the same time as their brethren are doing so elsewhere. " The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread (Greek 'loaf'), and one body" - of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16,17). The bread represents the body of Christ; but it is hammered home time and again in the New Testament that the *believers* are the body of Christ. By partaking of Christ's body, we are sharing with each other. Paul drives home this point with an Old Testament allusion: " Behold Israel



after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18). We are the living sacrifices, offered on the Christ altar (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:10). By being placed upon the altar, the sacrifice was counted as the altar. As Christ hung on the cross, all believers were counted as being in Him; Christ and the believers were, in this sense, indivisible on the cross. And they still are- hence the figure of us being the very *body*, the very *being*, of Christ. To personally share in fellowship with Him therefore *must* involve intense fellowship with other members of Christ's body. We must 'discern' the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29), and also "judge (same word as 'discern') ourselves" at the memorial meeting (1 Cor. 11:31). We discern the Lord's body, and thereby discern ourselves too- because we are part of His body. This further shows that our self-examination at the breaking of bread is both of Christ and also of ourselves (both individually *and* collectively, as the body of Christ?).

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20) surely promises a special closeness of Christ when we are physically gathered together. All those who have made real effort to gather together for the memorial meeting will know the truth of this. Our community increasingly features many in semi-isolation; this promise of special spiritual blessing in meeting together is something which they can and surely *do* know the truth of. The close fellowship which was engendered by the Passover feast, as Israel huddled together in family units around the slain lamb, the focus of their love and gratitude to God, explains why Israel were repeatedly warned not to share that meal with those not in covenant with God. To argue that our fellowship is *only* with God leads to a woolly attitude towards breaking bread with those in the apostasy; yet this runs counter to the teaching of the Passover type.

The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. In like manner He was made known to the disciples "in the breaking of bread" (Lk. 24:35), perhaps because it was usual for the host to say the blessing before the meal, and yet Jesus the stranger, the guest, presumed to lead the prayer. Joachim Jeremias cites evidence that "By the time of Jesus, individual cups were used at the Passover meal" <sup>(3)</sup>, and yet Mk. 14:23 implies that He used only one cup, which was passed around amongst those at the last supper: "He took the cup [RV "a cup"]...he gave it to them: and they all drank of *it* [singular]". They didn't take up their own cups and drink- the Lord gave them His cup, just as He passes on to all in Him a participation in His "cup" of suffering and final joy. Reflect how deftly and determinedly the Lord must have "received the cup" (Lk. 22:17 RV), knowing what it represented; imagine His body language. Paul's references to "*the* cup" imply the same. This change was surely to indicate the unity that His death, His blood, His life, was to inspire amongst those who share in it. This, in passing, is behind my undoubted preference for not using individual cups at the memorial meeting. It would seem to be a returning to the Jewish legalistic tradition, however unintentionally. I have elsewhere commented upon the clear link between the death of Jesus and our unity. The memorial meeting is the supreme celebration of that unity between us. To deny a brother or sister participation in it is something serious indeed. Tragically, and it is a tragedy, we have tended to use the memorial meeting as a weapon for exclusion rather than as a celebration of our unity. Yet this was the intention, without doubt. Comparing Lk. 22:20 and Mk. 14:24 we find the Lord saying that the cup of wine was "for you poured out, poured out for many"- as if He wanted them to be aware at the memorial meeting that it was not only they who had been redeemed in Him. Likewise the Passover was essentially a remembering of the deliverance of a community, through which the individual worshipper found his or her personal salvation. This is why it is just not good enough to insist on breaking bread alone, or with no thought to the fact that all of us were redeemed together, as one man, as one nation, in Him. Remember that the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is "derived from a verb meaning 'to eat'" (4). That covenant was made with a community, the Israel of God; by eating the covenant meal we

recall that collective covenant, that salvation of a community of which we are part- and it is appropriate therefore that it becomes a symbol of our unity within that community. The Old Testament idea of covenant is associated with words like *hesed* (kindness, love, devotion, grace), *emeth* (truth, integrity), *emunah* (faithfulness, allegiance). These are the characteristics associated with being in covenant relationship; and we are to show them to all others who are in covenant relationship, not just some of them.

The unity between believers at the breaking of bread is brought out in Acts 2:42, where we read of the new converts continuing in

the teaching of the apostles,

the fellowship

the breaking of bread

the prayers.

It could be that this is a description of the early order of service at the memorial meetings. They began with an exhortation by the apostles, then there was "the fellowship", called the *agape* in Jude 12, a meal together, and then the breaking of bread itself [following Jewish Passover tradition], concluded by "the prayers", which may have included the singing of Psalms. The performance of this feast was a sign of conversion and membership in the body of Christ. This is how important it is.

### **Broken Body?**

Considering how the bread represents the body of Christ leads us to a common query: 'Seeing that " a bone of Him shall not be (and was not) broken" , how can we say that we remember the *broken* body of Jesus by *breaking* the bread?'. First of all, it must be understood that 'breaking bread' or 'eating bread' is simply an idiom for sharing in a meal (Is. 58:7; Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4; Ez. 17:7; 24:17; Hos. 9:4; Dt. 26:14; Job 42:11). 'Bread' is used for any food, just as 'salt' is used in the same way in Arabic. The breaking of a loaf of bread is not necessarily implicit in the phrase (although it can be). However, we must also be aware of a fundamental misconception which one feels is held by many; that the physical blood and body of Christ are *all* that we come to remember. This notion is related to that which feels that there is some mystical power in the physical bread and wine in themselves. Bro. Roberts makes the point in " The Blood of Christ" that " it is not the blood as literal blood that is precious or efficacious" . And the same might be said about the Lord's literal body. His body and blood were no different to those of any other man.

The fact that we are asked to symbolize His broken body, when it is stated that His literal body was *not* broken, is proof enough that Christ's body is to be understood as something more than His literal flesh and blood. Indeed, 1 Cor. 10:16,17 seems to suggest that the " body of Christ" in which we partake through the bread is a symbol of the whole body of believers, just as much as His actual body which enabled this salvation. Likewise the Passover was not intended to commemorate the red liquid which flowed from the first Passover lambs, but to remember the salvation which God had achieved for *all Israel* on account of that. Christ bore our sins " in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24)- and it was more in His mind and mental awareness that this was true, rather than our sins being in (e.g.) His arms and legs. Other uses of " body" which require reference to our whole mind

and being, rather than our literal body, include Mt. 5:29,30; 6:22-25; Jn. 2:21; Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 6:19; 9:23. Luke's record of the Last Supper shows how the Lord spoke of His body and blood as parallel with His whole sacrifice: " This is my body...this do in remembrance of *me* (His whole way of life- not just His physical body). This cup is the new testament in my blood, which *is* shed for you" (Lk. 22:19,20). Col. 1:20 likewise parallels "the blood of the cross" with "him" (the man Jesus). Rom. 7:4 puts "the body of Christ" for the death of that body; He was, in His very person, His death. The cross was a living out of a spirit of self-giving which *was* Him. The cup of wine represents the promises (" testament" ) of salvation which have been confirmed by Christ's blood. Note how Jesus quietly spoke of " my body which *is* (being) given for you...my blood which *is* shed for you" . The pouring out of His life/blood was something ongoing, which was occurring even as He spoke those words. The cross was a summation of a lifetime of outpouring and breaking of His innermost being, or " body" . It is this that we remember at the breaking of bread. The Passover was comprised of the lamb plus bread. The breaking of bread, the Passover for Christians, is wine and bread. The lamb was thus replaced in the thought of Jesus by His blood / wine. He perceived that His blood was Him, in that sense.

The prophecy of Ps. 34:20 about not a bone of the Lord being broken is clearly applied to Him in Jn. 19:36. But the context is clearly about all of us- any righteous man. The preceding verse speaks of how the Lord delivers the righteous man out of all his tribulations- and this verse is applied to other believers apart from the Lord Jesus in Acts 12:11 and 2 Tim. 3:11,12. The chilling fact is that we who are in the body of the Lord are indeed co-crucified with Him.

We 'discern' the Lord's body by correctly breaking bread (1 Cor. 11:29). The Greek translated 'discern' means to analyze, to pull apart, as a judge does. It is the same word translated " examine [himself]" in the previous verse; our examination of the Lord's body leads inevitably to our self-examination. Consideration of His death by His people leads to the thoughts of many hearts being revealed (Lk. 2:35). The purpose of an exhortation is therefore to centre our minds upon Christ, to analyze His " body" , His very essence and spirit, so that our minds are focussed upon the slain lamb as clearly as Israel's were on Passover night.

It is also worth reflecting how the Hebrew writer saw the torn veil as a symbol of the Lord's flesh. It is just possible that the physical tearing of the Lord's flesh at His death through the nails represented the tearing of His flesh nature, symbolized in the physical tearing of the veil. But the tearing of the veil was something essential and far reaching- not a surface rip. The Lord's death is surely to be understood as a tearing apart of the flesh nature and tendencies which He bore; and it is this we remember in breaking the bread which represents His flesh. Note that to break the bread in a place was an idiom for breaking the life there (Ez. 4:16; 5:16; 14:13; Lev. 26:26). This was what the Lord asks us to remember- not the physical breaking of His body, but the breaking of His life for us and sharing it with us (Is. 58:7).

## **A Type Of The Kingdom**

The Lord told us that the Passover feast would " be fulfilled in (i.e. by?) the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:16). This is confirmed by the description of " the marriage supper of the lamb" in Rev. 19:9. Likewise the parable of Lk. 14 speaks of " a great supper" at the beginning of the Millennium. As we share this feast together now, we are acting out a parable of the feast to be kept at the Lord's return. In the light of this, how important it is to ensure that there is no bitterness and disunity at the breaking of bread meeting! There will be a due sense of decorum to the whole meeting if its typical meaning is properly grasped; emblems laid out in time, so that they are in full view of the members

as they file into the meeting room; at least 5 minutes of silence before the meeting starts, with the congregation focusing their thoughts upon the emblems, and the Kingdom which the meeting points forward to. To be invited to sit at the King's table is an honour indeed (cp. 2 Sam. 19:28). Remember that we are reaffirming our covenant. " This is the blood of the covenant" is a reference back to the blood of the Old Covenant being sprinkled upon the people, with their response of vowing obedience unto the end (Ex. 24:7). The solemnity of that distant moment should be ours, weekly.

## Notes

(1) Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words Of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1973 ed.), p. 48.

(2) See A.J.B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper In The New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1952) p. 33.

(3) Joachim Jeremias, *op cit* p. 68.

(4) James Muilenburg, *The Way Of Israel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 55.

## 7-1 The Passover And The Breaking Of Bread

If we can establish that the breaking of bread service is intended as a similar feast to the Passover, we can look back to the details of the Passover in Exodus 12 and get deeper insight into the true nature of the memorial meeting.

1. Jesus instituted the breaking of bread in the Upper Room instead of the Passover; as the Jews physically associated themselves with the body and blood of the Lamb, so we do the same in symbol in our service.

2. In doing so, He pointed out that the bread represented His flesh, and as He said earlier " except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you" . To a Jew, the phrase 'eating flesh' would immediately take them back to the Passover, where the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten; thus in the new Passover, we eat the flesh of the lamb as we eat the bread.

3. In advising the Corinthians to withdraw their fellowship from the wrongdoer, Paul says that " Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us...let us keep the feast not with the old leaven (the wrongdoer- 'deliver such an one to satan...purge out the old leaven...I have written unto you not to keep company if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator'), neither with the leaven of malice.." ; therefore Paul is likening the breaking of bread service at which the wrongdoer should not be present to the Passover, with the unleavened bread representing error in practice or attitude.

## General Points

In Lev. 23 we learn that on the morning after the Passover Sabbath a sheaf of firstripe barley must be waived (i.e. passed to and fro) before the Lord; this represents the resurrection of Christ and the fact He is a firstfruits of us; but so encouragingly, a few weeks later at Pentecost the corresponding wave offering before the Lord was two loaves *baked with leaven*. Leaven always represents sin or corruption. They represent Jews and Gentiles who because of Christ's resurrection and triumph can come into the presence of God despite their leaven, our natural wretched man of the flesh, not having been completely purged out of them. Personally I feel that the N.T. indicates that it is God's

desire that we should break bread weekly; if so, then the seven days of unleavened bread afterwards then represent our restrained lives in the coming week until we come to break bread again.

We each come to keep our Passover with different feelings and needs. But because the Passover incorporates every kind of sacrifice, all our needs ought to be able to be met by our memorial meeting. The eating of unleavened cakes was like the meal offering, the total burning of the remains of the meal was like the burnt offering, the eating of the lamb as a holy meal was like a peace offering, and the smearing of the blood, which in Hezekiah's time seems to have been replaced by the priest sprinkling the people with the blood, corresponds to the smearing and sprinkling of the blood of a sin offering. So whether we feel a great need for forgiveness (cp. the sin offering), personal rededication (burnt offering), fellowship with God and our brethren (peace offering) or expressing our thanks to God (meal offering), our breaking of bread, Christ our Passover, is designed to have all that we need. Whether our experience of the breaking of bread is indeed this fulfilling is a question we need to meditate upon. If our taking of the emblems is like eating the Passover, then the intensity of the actual meal should be seen amongst us as we partake of the emblems. All distractions should be removed as far as possible.

### **The Exodus Record**

Ex. 12:10 implies they spent the whole night eating the meal as zealously as possible, because the aim was not to have any left by the morning. So we must make the maximum possible use of the spiritual help and forgiveness given in Christ, before the morning of His coming is here and it is too late to gain help. Dt. 16:7 also indicates the whole night was spent eating: "Thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which the lord shall chose; and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents". On this first occasion, they literally left Egypt that same night. The sense of urgency and intensity is hard to miss, yet so difficult to replicate in our own experience. And yet we are either in Egypt, or redeemed. At this moment in time, your name is either in the book of life or not. You either have unforgiven sins hanging over you or you don't. Now is the time as soon as possible to repent, to gain full forgiveness, to gain full freedom with God. They ate the feast standing up, terrified of Egypt as we are of sin, awed by the sense of the presence of God, as we should be the presence of Christ Himself in the midst of us gathered here. Likewise Hezekiah's people ate the feast with their minds prepared, or standing up. The very meaning of the words used in this chapter indicate the sense of intensity; they were to strike the blood on the door, to 'lay hand on' the blood, to grasp; the word is used in the Law about a rapist ceasing or kidnapping his victim. That's the intensity we must have in seizing Christ's sacrifice, or as the N.T. puts it 'apprehending' that for which we are apprehended, taking our place in the Kingdom almost by violence, taking hold of it by force. And that's just what the phrase in v.21 means- "*draw out* a lamb" - seize hold of one. And so like the drowning men and women we are, we grab hold of the lifebelt of Christ and cling to Him. He is the only way to save us from our sins, from the bondage and death of Egypt.

The eating of the meal with girded loins (Ex. 12:11,13) is seen by Peter as meaning we should have our *minds* girded, gathered up, in place and order (1 Pet. 1:13). Note how 1 Peter is replete with Passover allusions (1:17 cp. sojourning with fear in Egypt; 1:18 silver and gold taken from Egypt; 1:19 the Passover lamb; 1:23 corruptible seed= leaven; 2:9,10 cp. leaving Egypt at night, led from darkness to the glory of Sinai, where they became a nation.

Yet it was not all fear and intensity. Ex. 12:11 says they were to eat in haste. The Hebrew word translated "haste" is only ever used in the context of the Passover; it comes from the word for the weasel, because of its sense of quick, smooth, gliding motion. There was to be no panic in their

leaving Egypt, but calmness. It is a different word to that used in Ex. 12:33, where we read that the Egyptians sent the people out in haste; this is a different word, implying fear on the part of the Egyptians, a desire to rush the people out in panic. So in our leaving of the flesh, we must not be *driven* by a sense of panic and fear of rejection, but above all by a gliding, ever flowing love of God's commands.

The meal was followed by the seven days of unleavened bread: "no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must necessarily do to eat, that only may be done of you" (Ex. 12:16 LXX). So our daily work should be limited to providing for ourselves the necessities of life, so that the rest of our thoughts and desires can be directed to the meditation and service of God. To live up to the teaching of all these types is hard mental work; thus in Ex. 12:25 Passover is called a "service", a word which normally refers to hard physical work, tillage, bondservice, as if to say that the battle for spiritual alertness is just as hard work as the physical labour from which they were freed. Similarly in Dt. 16:3 the unleavened bread is called the "bread of affliction", whilst in 1 Cor. 5:8 it is called the "unleavened bread of sincerity and Truth", as if being sincere and true and not having malice and bitterness in our hearts is a result of much mental affliction and exercising of the mind. So to keep the feast we have to search our houses, our lives, for anything like leaven—anything that puffs us up, that distorts us from the true smallness and humility we should have, that corrupts our sincerity. By nature we have so much pride in us, so much that puffs us up. We should always find some leaven in us every time we examine ourselves. The Jews used to search their houses with candles, looking for any sign of leaven. So we too must look into every corner of our lives with the candle of the word. Similarly before the great Passovers of Hezekiah and Josiah there was a searching for idols which were then thrown down.

Passover was intended as a personal looking back to their beginnings, both as a nation and individually. It was to remind them of the day they came out of Egypt, all their lives (Dt. 16:3). This was written in the 40th year of their wanderings, as they were about to enter Canaan. Those who had literally come out of Egypt were largely dead; this verse is a general command to Jews of all generations. So God wanted them to see that in a sense they personally came out of Egypt at that time, even though they were not then born. So with us, while we were yet sinners, before we were born, Christ died for us. On the cross all God's people were as it were taken out of Egypt, in prospect delivered from sin. So we look back to the slain lamb in our feast, to us there in God's plan and delivered from sin, the power of the devil, sin in us destroyed by Christ's death in prospect on that cross. There is so much to personally meditate upon in this feast; the physical organization of the breaking of bread should never be rushed. It's better to allow ample time for meditation rather than, e.g., insist on doing long Bible readings which may not be directly relevant.

### **Leviticus Details**

There are some fascinating details in the Leviticus record of the Passover. The wood was to be placed in order on the fire (Lev. 1:7), suggesting the use of several bits of wood to be laid in order, with the parts also laid in order upon them. This was as if each part of the Lord's life (and ours) had its own cross. The offerer "shall cut it into his pieces" (1:12)—the pieces of the animal were the pieces of the offerer, so the ambiguous genitive suggests. The offerer was represented by the sacrifice. The parts were washed in the water (of the word) before the final crucifying of flesh. Lev. 1:15 A.V. mg. stipulates that if the offering was a bird, "pinch off the head with the nail" — as if a nail used in the process, perhaps for nailing the parts to the wood (cp. the cross). All this is picked up by Paul in Rom. 7 where he says that he delights in God's law after the inward man, or innards. He sees himself as cut open and offered to God. All this provokes powerful self-examination. Does

the zeal of God's house consume every part of the offering of our lives as we lay ourselves before Him at the Passover meal? Does it eat us up? Do our faces and words and way of speaking reflect the crucifixion of every part of our lives? Or does our triviality, our inability to spiritually concentrate our minds, our lack of sustained enthusiasm for the Lord's work reflect the fact that we are not like that animal as it lay dead and still in its parts on that altar, that we are not in the spirit of Christ. Our attitudes to money, holidays, relationships, standard of living, commitment to study of the word, zeal for preaching, all raise question marks in our minds. It is easy to take immediate refuge in the fact that salvation is through the grace of the Lord's sacrifice, not works. But before we go on to those sentiments, let us accept that we do all have an urgent need for improvement. If we face up to this, if our minds are alert to this in everyday life, then our hearts will be prepared, standing erect, the loins of our mind girded. We will be able like the unpurified of Hezekiah's time to acceptably eat the feast. And thus we will be able to rejoice throughout the long night of our lives, eagerly waiting for the call to leave this world and be taken elsewhere. There is a wonder in the whole Passover message; that something as simple as a sweet lamb roasting and spitting in the middle of their home and the blood zealously splashed on the door frame could bring such great deliverance. To cover an average door frame with a small lamb's blood would require all the blood to be used; and so we too zealously take hold of every part and aspect of the Lord's sacrifice, symbolized by our solemn eating and drinking of the symbols of His entire body and complete blood. " Drink ye all of it" recalls how Israel had to eat every part of the lamb, even the repulsive bits which their stomachs would have involuntarily protested at (Ex. 12:9).

### **Hezekiah's Passover**

Hezekiah and Josiah kept very successful Passovers, and the good points from them seem good for us to emulate if we are going to make the breaking of bread a successful spiritual experience. Reflect on the following observations from 2 Chron. 30:

v. 21 They sang loudly and joyfully. That there was singing at most Passovers is indicated by Is. 30:29, which prophesies concerning the joyful time of Israel's salvation that " ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity [a feast] is kept" . Passover is the only feast kept at night, and so this indicates that Israel were familiar with the idea of joyful singing whilst keeping the feast. Thus the reality of our deliverance from sin, or Egypt, should be a cause for true praise and joy.

v. 22 the people were taught " the good knowledge of the Lord" - i.e. they had some lively Bible study.

v. 22 They made confession of their human unworthiness.

v. 23 The spirit of the Passover continued- the people freely decided to " keep other seven days with gladness" . So often we are hardly out of the hall door before the spirit of our Passover leaves us.

v. 26 there was " great joy"

v. 19 Very relevantly to us, although the people were not officially cleansed and therefore technically unable to partake of the Passover, they dared to ask God for mercy that they may be able to partake of it. And so we too in our unworthiness consider the salvation of the crucified Christ, Christ our Passover slain for us, and recognize that by taking the emblems we are committing ourselves to try to rise up to not only His example but also the salvation He graciously offers; to crucify our every desire, every particle of self within us. We are not alone in our nagging sense of

unworthiness; for the record stresses that at Hezekiah's Passover " many" , " a multitude" (vv. 16,17) were unfit to take the Passover. But because of Hezekiah's intercession for them and because they " prepared their hearts" , they were able. " To prepare" means literally to erect, to make upright. As we will see later, the commands about how they were to keep the Passover standing upright ready to go were to engender mental awareness, spiritual alertness. So if we are like this, our many failures will be overlooked, and we can keep the feast with joy. " To prepare" also means to face oneself in a certain direction. If our hearts, our innermost motivations, are pointing in the right direction generally, our occasional waverings can be forgotten.

### **Burnt Offerings**

Later references to the Passover show that burnt offerings were offered by the worshippers as well; it seems that the lambs had the skin flayed off them (2 Chron. 35:11), in uncanny prophecy of the Lord's scourging. Dt. 16 says that they were to seethe or boil the Passover in the place God would chose. But in Ex. 12 they were told they must not seethe the Passover lamb; therefore we can conclude that there were other burnt offerings which were included in the Passover. Thus we read that at Josiah's Passover (2 Chron. 35:8,9,13,16) the princes gave 300 oxen- not lambs- " for the Passover offerings.. they roasted the Passover with fire...but the other holy offerings they sod in pots" . The burnt offering represented rededication; these offerings were made in response to that of the slain lamb. So this should be an element of our Passover, renewing our vows to serve God, really meaning it, not just going through a ritual of promising God to love Him more, but really deciding to desperately cling to Him the harder. The burnt offering was cut into parts by the offerer using a knife, showing how we should cut open our lives before God. Therefore although we should mainly examine ourselves at this meeting to make sure we are concentrating on Jesus, the lamb, there is also some place for personal examination. For the sacrifice of the lamb must, inevitably and inexorably, lead us to sacrifice in response.

### **7-2 The Breaking Of Bread As A Peace Offering**

The Bible defines peace with God as being the peace which comes as a result of forgiveness. God is not promising us the human emotion of peace; but a constant peace, which will reign in our hearts (Col. 3:15) as a permanent experience. The breaking of bread is a reminder of the peace which was made possible by the blood of the cross; a way to appreciate more finely how the chastisement of our peace was upon Christ as He hung on the cross (Is. 53:5). We remember and celebrate our peace with God, by way of that memorial feast. This leads us back to the idea of the peace offering under the Old Covenant, which effectively served the same purpose.

One of the most obvious similarities between the peace offering and the breaking of bread is that they both feature bread and wine, associated with a slain animal in the midst (Num. 15:9,10; 2 Sam. 6:17- 19). And further, both require the eating of the sacrifice by the offerer. The peace offering and Passover (also typical of the memorial meeting) featured the offerer eating the sacrifice " before the Lord" . This phrase " before the Lord" is continually emphasized in the records of the peace offerings. I guess we would all admit that our sense of the presence of the Father and Son at our memorial meetings has much room for improvement. We really are " before the Lord" as we sit there. God came unto men when they offered acceptable peace offerings (Ex. 20:24), as He is made known to us through the breaking of bread.

We know that Ps. 116 was one of the Passover Hallel psalms which would have been read at the last supper, the prototype breaking of bread. Much of that Psalm is wonderfully relevant to the last



supper: " I will take the cup of salvation...I will pay my vows...in the presence of all his people (cp. the twelve disciples)...precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (an intensive plural referring to Christ?)...I am thy servant and the son of thine handmaid (Mary)" . But think of the primary context. David was rejoicing in God's mercy to him, perhaps in the context of his sin with Bathsheba. He asks: " What shall I render unto the Lord for all his (spiritual) benefits toward me?" . He decides that he will offer a peace offering: " I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving (the peace offering; Lev. 7:12)...I will take the cup of salvation...I will pay my vows...in the presence of all his people...in the courts of the Lord's house" . As we sit " before the Lord" at the memorial meeting, beholding the cross of Christ and the blood of Calvary, we should be intensely aware of God's great benefits towards us: our salvation assured, sin forgiven, peace with God. Our response should be to renew our vows joyfully, here in the ecclesia, God's house, in the presence of His people, as we eat the peace offering, the sacrifice of thanksgiving. As the peace offering was to be offered publicly, " before the tabernacle of the congregation" (Lev. 3:13), so in the sight of each other we too renew our vows and express our peace with God. And if we are all at peace with God, we should therefore be at peace with each other.

## **Peace And Sin**

The record of the peace offerings in 2 Chron. 30:22,23 associates them with Bible study and confession of sin; which provides a very strong link with the memorial service. The awareness of sin in the peace offering is brought out by a highly unusual feature. The offering was to be made with " leavened bread" (Lev. 7:13), even though it was normally forbidden to offer any sacrifice made with leaven (Lev. 2:11). The unusualness of this feature was in order to drive a point home. Whilst we are not to offer our bodies to God with the leaven of sinfulness (cp. 1 Cor. 5), we are to have an awareness of the presence of sin as we keep our peace offering. The record of the sin offering in Lev. 4:10,26,31,35 stresses an impressive four times that the animal was to be prepared and offered (e.g.) " as the fat is taken away from the peace offering" . This serves to emphasize the link between the two sacrifices; the peace offering was in gratitude and rejoicing for the peace of sins forgiven. For this reason it was totally voluntary. Our ecclesial lives inevitably feature a regular time for the memorial meeting. But we should come here each time from a spontaneous joy at the peace we have with God through the blood of Christ. If the breaking of bread, our peace offering, is something done voluntarily, in thanks for the peace we have with God, perhaps it ought to be something we do at times during the week, purely from our own joy at being at peace with God. But how many of us have ever done this? It's something to think about.

The peace offering was " the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Lev. 7:12). The Hebrew for " thanksgiving" is rendered " confession" (of sin) in Ezra 10:11. Again, we see that the peace offering was linked with confession of sin. It is significant that after Manasseh's marvellous confession of sin (is there any greater encouragement as to the possibility of repentance than his case?), he then offered peace offerings (2 Chron. 29:31). In Hezekiah's time, all those who were of a " free heart" offered " thank offerings" , i.e. peace offerings (2 Chron. 29:31 cp. Lev. 7:12), after they had consecrated themselves. The free conscience that comes from realistic re- dedication was reflected in making the peace offering. Coming to the breaking of bread should have a like motivation. But how much Saturday night or early Sunday morning meditation do we do to ensure that this really is the case? The peace offering was offered with unleavened cakes as well (cp. the Passover, a clear type of the memorial meeting). The bitterness of sin was to be ever remembered, amidst the joy of peace with God. The description of the peace offering as " the sacrifice of thanksgiving" is alluded to in Heb. 13:15: " Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God" . Praise and thanks for our spiritual peace with

God, our forgiveness through His grace, should therefore feature at our gathering this morning.

The peace offerings are nearly always mentioned as coming after the sin offerings. This further stresses that the peace which they commemorate is spiritual peace with God due to forgiveness. The Law always lists the sacrifices in a specific order: sin offering, burnt offering, peace offering (e.g. Lev. 9:2- 4). This may foreshadow the New Testament trio: " Grace, mercy and peace" . Thus the peace offering is a result of having received mercy. Therefore we keep our peace offering, the memorial meeting, to recall the mercy which we have received. We do not specifically come here to find mercy. We do not need to break bread in order to be forgiven. Ps. 100:4,5 seems to allude to the peace offerings: " Enter into his gates (the peace offering was to be offered at the gate of the tabernacle) with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto Him...for the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting" . We have seen that the peace offering was " the sacrifice of thanksgiving" , and in practice it was offered in thanks and praise of God's mercy towards human sin<sup>(1)</sup>. In similar vein, Ps. 107:17- 21 exults in the wonder of God's mercy in forgiving men. The spirit told Israel to respond by making voluntary peace offerings: " Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving" (v.22), i.e. peace offerings (Lev. 7:12).

Because of its association with the forgiveness of sins, the peace offering therefore brought together a variety of emotions, blending joy, sober recognition and gratitude. We therefore find it being offered in both days of gladness and solemnity (Num. 10:10). But normally there is at least some mention of joy connected with the records of the peace offering (2 Chron. 29:35,36; Dt. 27:7). The fact we have peace with God must inevitably produce joy, not necessarily arms round the neck and grinning from ear to ear, but the real spiritual joy of being at one with God. 1 Sam. 11:13- 15 recounts the offering of the peace offering to commemorate God's salvation of Israel, and their renewal of their covenant with Him. We should be able to say, at any given point in time, that we are confident that if Christ comes now, we will be saved.

As we think of the work of Christ as we break bread, and our own sinfulness which it gloriously overcomes, we should be moved to make the same response; to renew our covenant, to rejoice, and to commemorate His salvation in this feast which He has appointed. At times, we are oppressed by the weight of our problems, perhaps by the physical effects of our sins. Peace offerings were also offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (Jud. 20:26; 21:4). In our traumas of life, we need to remember that the only thing that matters is our peace with God, the joyful fact that we have nothing separating us. As Israel made their peace offerings at those times, so we too should consider the possibility of breaking bread, perhaps alone, as we meet the desperate traumas of our lives.

Our Bible study before we take the emblems should convict us of sin. It is not a time for platitudes or academics. This is perhaps prefigured in the command to offer peace offerings with wafers anointed with oil, mingled with oil, and fried in oil. The oil/spirit of the word is to be on us, around us, in us, we are to be as it were fried in it. This teaching is to be associated with our peace offering at the breaking of bread. It is for this reason that we read and study Scripture at the same time as we break bread.

### **The Meaning Of The Sacrifice**

We now want to think in more detail about what the peace offering animal represented. The offerer put his hand on its head, thereby associating himself with it. In a sense, the animal therefore represented the offerer. But it had to be " without blemish" (Lev. 3:1), and to produce a " sweet savour" when burnt (Lev. 3:16). But how are we to offer ourselves as an unblemished sacrifice? We

are surely each aware of our desperate sinfulness. The answer is in the fact that the language of the peace offering sacrifice is applied to Jesus. " He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14), our peace offering <sup>(2)</sup> by metonymy (in the same way as Christ was made " sin" for us, i.e. a sin offering). He is the unblemished animal (1 Pet. 1:19), and if we are in Christ, we too will be counted as being without spot and blemish (Eph. 5:27). We ought to know whether we are in Christ. If we are, we will be seen by God as just as pure as He is.

The peace offering was to make a sweet savour. Through His death on the cross, Christ was this: " Christ...hath given himself for us an offering (a peace offering?) and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). If we are in Christ, then God will see us too as a sweet savour. And this is exactly what 2 Cor. 2:15 says: " We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ" . Yet we must fellowship His sufferings if we are in Him, really fellowship them. The peace offering was to have the fat and rump " taken off hard by the backbone" (Lev. 3:9). The ruthless division of flesh and spirit within Christ (shown superbly in the way His wilderness temptations are recorded) must be seen in us too. We must ask if we are really taking off the fat hard by the backbone. Are we even prepared for the pain, the pain of self- knowledge and self denial which this will necessitate?

### **The Bread Of God**

The peace offering was the " food (also translated " bread" ) of the offering made...unto the Lord" (Lev. 3:11). The peace offering was therefore God's food, or bread. Yet the offerer was invited to eat the bread of God. This implied that when the offerer sat down to eat the food, as it were, God was sitting with him, also eating of it. This was symbolized in human terms by the fact that the priest, as God's representative, ate part of the peace offering, while the offerer ate the other part. Presumably they sat down together to do this. The closeness of God which this implies is almost beyond our comprehension. We are invited to see the exquisite beauty of true fellowship with God.

The idea of eating the bread of God, the sacrifice which represents His son, and thereby having fellowship with Him, should send our minds forward to John 6. " The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven" , i.e. our Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:33). Not for nothing do some Rabbis speak of 'eating Messiah' as an expression of the fellowship they hope to have with Him at His coming. The sacrificial animals are spoken of as " the bread of thy God" (Lev. 21:6,8,21; 22:25; Ez. 44:7 etc.), pointing forward to Christ. In addition to alluding to the manna, Christ must have been consciously making this connection when He spoke about himself as the bread of God. The only time " the bread of God" could be eaten by the Israelite was at the peace offering. When in this context Christ invites us to eat the bread of God, to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn. 6:51,52), He is looking back to the peace offering. But this is also an evident prophecy of the breaking of bread service. Many of the Jews just could not cope with what Christ was offering them when He said this. They turned back, physically and intellectually. They just could not grapple with the idea that Christ was that peace offering sacrifice, and He was inviting them to sit down with God, as it were, and in fellowship with the Almighty, partake of the sacrificed body of His Son. But this is just what Christ is inviting each of us to do in the memorial meeting, to sit down in fellowship with Him, and eat of His bread. God really is here with us now. He is intensely watching us. He is intensely with us, He really is going to save us, if only we can have the faith to believe how much He loves us, how much He wants us to share His fellowship and know His presence.

### **Believe It**

Are we going to take all this seriously? Or are we going to refuse to mentally cope with it, and take

the emblems just because we're Christians, and there's no way out? Or are we going to be like Israel, who offered peace offerings, and then rose up from their tables to worship idols and indulge their flesh (Ex. 32:5,6)? Are we going to be like those Israelites who offered a peace offering, when actually they were not at peace with God at all (1 Sam. 13:9; 2 Kings 16:13; Prov. 7:14; Am. 5:22)? How *can* we be like that, now that God has so opened our eyes to what this meeting is all about? Try to visualize the Almighty on His throne far above us, the Lord Jesus at His right hand, yet very present with us as we break bread, beholding our hearts, knowing our desire to be as unblemished and as sweet a savour as He is. He really does count us as if we are perfect, we are justified, counted righteous, by faith. So we do have peace with God, surely. God will come near to us in the bread and wine, He *will* fellowship with us, eat with us, as we eat the emblems of His sacrificed Son.

## Notes

(1) Psalm 100 has many links with 2 Chron. 30, which records the making of peace offerings (See George Booker, *Psalm Studies*).

(2) If this is not the meaning of Eph. 2:14, what does it mean? How can a person be "peace", unless some figure of speech (e.g. metonymy) is being employed?

## 7-3 Hebrews: Breaking Of Bread Sermon

### Introduction

Sometimes it's best to present the end conclusion and then the evidence. I want to suggest that the letter to the Hebrews is actually a breaking of bread sermon first given by Paul to the Jerusalem ecclesia, against a background of Judaist pressure to return to the Law, and also bearing in mind some specific moral and doctrinal problems which were in the ecclesia. If you read it through out loud, the "letter" takes about 45 minutes. The last few verses seem to be 'tacked on' to turn it into a letter. Paul asks them to "suffer the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22), although, he says, it was a brief one. This would imply that usually "the word of exhortation" was a lot longer. Remember how Paul exhorted all night at Troas at the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7-9). We somehow don't like the idea of a brother 'going on' for an hour or two. Yet evidently in the first century (and the nineteenth for that matter) the brethren quite accepted this. If what is said *is worthwhile* and relevant, there is no harm in long sermons. It's only a function of our background that we lack the concentration required. As we've said before, we travel such long distances to be with our new brethren, we might as well feed them as much as possible.

There is evidence that the early breaking of bread service was based upon the Synagogue Sabbath service. Heb. 13:17,24 speak of "them that have the rule over you", the language of the 'ruler of the synagogue' (cp. Lk. 8:49; 13:14; Acts 18:8). There were weekly portions of readings which were read, similar to our *Bible Companion* <sup>(1)</sup> and then expounded by the Rabbi and any others who would like to offer a "word of exhortation" (Acts 13:15). Acts 13:15 is the only other place apart from Heb. 13:22 that "the word of exhortation" occurs. It is clearly a synagogue phrase. It is possible that "suffer the word of exhortation" was also a Synagogue phrase, said at the end of the 'exhortation' on the Sabbath. This suggests that the whole of Hebrews was a "word of exhortation" at a Sabbath breaking of bread (probably this was the day the Jewish ecclesias met in Jerusalem), being a commentary on the readings for that week (perhaps the Melchizedek passages and parts of the Law), constantly bringing the point round to the death of the Lord Jesus. In this, Hebrews is an

ideal sermon: it continually comes round to the work of Christ.

Hebrews is also a series of quotations and allusions (over half the sermon is comprised of these), interspersed with commentary and brief practical exhortation (e.g. to disfellowship false teachers, 12:15,16), all tied together around the theme of Christ's sacrifice and our response to it. Our sermons should be Bible based, after this same pattern. This is surely the way to construct sermons: re-reading verses from the chapters in the readings, commenting on them, bringing it all round to the work of Christ. A recurring theme of the Hebrews sermon is a reminding of the hearers of the reality of their future reward, made sure by Christ's work (4:9; 5:9; 6:10,19; 9:28; 10:34; 11:40; 12:10). This should surely be a theme embedded in our sermons: the personal Hope of the Kingdom, made sure for us by the work of Christ.

### **Obvious Relevance**

So much in Hebrews is obviously relevant to the memorial meeting. The wine represents the blood of the new covenant. That new covenant is repeated in 8:10,11; and the word "covenant" occurs 14 times, and the parallel "testament" 7 times. The blood of the covenant is explicitly referred to in 7:22; 8:6; 9:1 and 13:20. 12:24-26 personifies that blood as a mighty voice speaking to us, manifesting the voice of God, capable of shaking Heaven and earth. This is truly the power of appeal behind a consideration of Christ's blood, as symbolised in the wine.

There are 22 references to "blood", 4 to "body", 8 to "sacrifice" i.e. the body of the animal, and 9 to "offering", also a reference to the body of the animal. The breaking of bread is designed to remember the body and blood of our Lord's sacrifice. And this is exactly the theme of Hebrews. Yet at the same time as doing this, Paul was getting over his specific point to the Jerusalem ecclesia: the utter supremacy of Christ's sacrifice ought to obviate the need for any other theory of reconciliation to God. If only we could exhort like this: make the specific points we need to make under the umbrella of a *sustained* emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ.

### **Partakers Of Christ**

1 Cor. 10:17,21 (probably an epistle known to the Jerusalem ecclesia) speaks of us being *partakers* of the one bread at the breaking of bread, *partaking* of the Lord's table there. The same word is used in Heb. 3:14 concerning being *partakers* of Christ, again suggesting that Hebrews was first spoken in a breaking of bread context. The same word occurs in Heb. 12:8: we are *partakers* of Christ's sufferings. We are Christ's *partakers* (AV "fellows" ; 1:9); Christ *partakes* of our nature (2:14). Yet we are only ultimately *partakers* of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence (3:14). All these ideas are brought together in our *partaking* of the emblems of Christ at the memorial meeting. In them, Paul is reasoning, we should see our partaking of Christ's sufferings as a response to His partaking of our nature, and thereby our partaking of the promised reward, the "heavenly calling" (3:1).

### **Oral Style**

The references to "let us" do this or that are all so appropriate to a verbal sermon, encouraging the listeners to respond to the work of Christ. "We see Jesus" (2:9), "Consider...Jesus" (3:1; 7:4; 12:3) would fit in well to the context of a sermon given with the emblems before the audience. "Concerning whom in our discourse..." (Heb. 5:11 Diaglott) would certainly fit in to an oral discourse. "And, so to say..." (Heb. 7:9 RV) is another example. "Saying above. Sacrifice and

offering..." (Heb. 10:8 RV) sounds as if a scroll is being read and quotation made from passages "above" in the scroll. "Of the things which we have *spoken* (RV we are saying) this is the sum" (8:1) is language more appropriate to a transcript of an address than to a written composition. "As I may so say" (7:9) is another such example. "One in a certain place..." (2:6) is an odd way to write in a formal letter. Yet it fits in if this is a transcript of a sermon; it's the sort of thing you would say verbally when you know your audience can't turn up the passage. The word of exhortation contained in Hebrews was in "few words" (13:22); but this is a bad translation. Strong defines it as meaning "a short time, for a little while" <sup>(2)</sup> - i.e. Paul is saying 'It won't take long in terms of time to hear this, but consider the points carefully'. Note that the RV speaks of "suffer the exhortation", unlike AV "the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). One almost gets the impression that Paul is speaking with great constraints on his time: "the cherubims...of which we cannot now speak particularly...what shall I more say? for the time is failing me, running out" (Heb. 9:5; 11:32 Gk.). These sort of comments would surely be irrelevant in a written letter. But as a transcript of a live sermon, they make perfect sense. M. R. Vincent in his *Word Studies Of The NT* observed in Hebrews "a rhythmical structure of sentences (with) sonorous compounds", as if what is written had first been spoken.

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God" (13:15) would be appropriate to communal praise at a memorial meeting. Likewise "Let us draw near...we draw nigh...let us come boldly before the throne of grace" (4:16; 7:19) is appropriate to the congregation coming before God in collective and private prayer, culminating in the 'drawing nigh' of taking the emblems (cp. the idea of 'coming to God' in 11:6). The emphasis on the power of Christ as a mediator (7:25; 9:24) would be appropriate in this context of rallying the congregation's faith in their prayers and confessions of sin. The encouragement to "exhort one another *daily*" (3:13; 10:25) takes on a special relevance if said at the breaking of bread; Paul would have been implying: 'Don't just listen to me exhorting you today, or a brother doing it once a week; you must *all* exhort each other, every day, not just on Shabbat!'

### **Self Examination**

There is another sustained theme in this sermon, in addition to all the stress on our Lord's sacrifice. It is the repeated warning as to the likelihood of apostasy (2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1; 6:4-8; 10:26-30,38; 12:15-17,25,27) and the possibility of abusing the blood of Christ (10:26-30)- exactly after the pattern of 1 Cor. 11:26-30, which explicitly makes this warning in the context of the breaking of bread. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye [again, oral style], shall he be thought worthy, who hath...counted the blood of the covenant...as unholy thing?" (Heb. 11:29) is almost allusive to 1 Cor. 11:29, warning of drinking damnation to oneself through an incorrect attitude to the memorial cup. This kind of emphasis in a 45 minute sermon wouldn't go down well in a Western church. Yet the more we consider the wonder of the work of Christ, the more we will be driven to consider our own weakness, and the need to "hold fast" our connection with it. This is why we should examine ourselves at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). "Hold on" is another related theme (3:6,14; 4:14; 10:23). And here and there we find brief, specific practical warnings which were doubtless especially relevant to the initial audience. It's amazing that Paul got so much in 45 minutes. Yet this is what is possible. Note that all the exhortations in Hebrews, the comfort, the warnings, are all an outcome of a consideration of first principles, especially relating to the atonement. Thus Paul turns the fact that Christ is our *representative* round to teach the need for unity amongst us whom He represents (2:11).

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief" (3:12) is very relevant to a call for self-examination in the presence of the emblems. "Let us" boldly ask for forgiveness

(4:16) could be read in this context too. The reminder that Christ examines us, that we are naked and opened in His sight, would have encouraged them to be open with him in their self-examination (4:12). Paul reminds them of their initial conversion (3:6,14; 6:11; 10:22,32), in the same way as the Passover was intended to provoke national and personal self-examination, looking back to their spiritual beginnings at the Red Sea (cp. baptism). He encourages them with a reminder that Christ is such a powerful priest that He can really cleanse our conscience (9:14; 10:2,22); the blood of the *new* covenant can destroy an evil conscience (10:22 cp. 9:20). Therefore, Paul reasons, with this clear conscience, "let us draw near" - to the emblems, to the reality of our relationship with God. Again we see a marked emphasis on the need for self-examination at the breaking of bread.

Having created this background of self-examination, Paul is able to more easily hand out explicit rebuke; e.g. "Ye are dull of hearing" (5:11-14; 12:5). Yet at the same time Paul expressed a very confident view of his audience; e.g. "We are persuaded better things of you" (6:9; 10:38,39). This is an important aspect of exhortation; to convey to the brethren and sisters the fact that we genuinely respect them as brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus, with the sure Hope and possibility of salvation.

There is an emphasis on the good works which a true understanding of the first principles should bring (4:11; 9:14; 10:24; 12:28). This is exactly in harmony with the idea presented above: that exposition of first principle doctrine is the basis for practical exposition. This emphasis on the need for works in response to the doctrines of the atonement could suggest that Paul expected the congregation to make resolves at the breaking of bread concerning their future behaviour. Maybe this is behind his appeal for them to appreciate that Christ offers our works to God as the priests did the sacrifices in the past (5:1; 8:3,4; 9:9).

### **Personal Relevance**

The Hebrews sermon is shot through with internal connections; just as our preaching sessions should constantly refer back to each other. Paul is trying to get the brethren and sisters to see that if they respond to his exhortations as they should, they will be connected in spirit with the faithful heroes of the Old Testament; they will become connected with "the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:23). Thus Noah was moved with fear, Paul says (11:7), just as we should be (4:1); Sarah "judged him faithful who had promised" (11:11), just as we should (10:23); as Moses bore the reproach of Christ (11:26), so should we (13:13). The breaking of bread is the equivalent of the Passover under the Old Covenant; therefore 11:28 highlights how Moses kept the Passover in faith as to the power of the sprinkled blood of the lamb. The implication is that if we take the wine with a similar faith in Christ's blood, we will come become united with the spirit of Moses.

There are many of these inter-connections within Hebrews. Our "afflictions" (10:32) uses the same word translated "suffering" in the context of Christ's sufferings (2:9,10); we are to "endure" (10:32) as Christ "endured" the shame of the cross (12:2,3 same word). Through these inter-connections, Paul is trying to make the sufferings of Christ relevant to them. We may never hope to achieve as much as Paul did in those 45 minutes. But the principles remain for us to try to copy. Therefore we should try not to offer unconnected comments on the readings, we should seek to tie them together under the umbrella of the work of the Lord Jesus, we should relate His sufferings to those of our brethren and sisters, we should seek to inspire them with the fact that they are fellowshipping the hope of the faithful recorded in the Bible records.

### **A Pattern For Us**

The sermon to the Hebrews becomes more significant for us as we consider its likely background. In his book *The Jewish War*, Josephus explains in detail how the Jews in Palestine revolted against the Romans in AD66-70. Initially, everything went well for them. The Romans were defeated at the foot of the temple mount, the legions of Cestius Gallus were defeated, and the Jewish zealots attributed these successes to God's rewarding of their loyalty to the Law. They purified and rededicated the temple, and appointed a High Priest who was not a collaborator with Rome. The zealots spoke of the liberation of Israel in strong religious terms; there was a great wave of enthusiasm for the Law. It seems that Hebrew Christians were caught up in this revival, and of course all Jews were expected to take up arms and fight. The exhortation to the Hebrews therefore stressed the passing of the Mosaic Law, the need to rally around Christ as the true altar and the only true, pure High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 10:19-25; 13:10). There was the command to move outside the camp of Israel, i.e. Jerusalem (Heb. 13:13). And the institutions of the temple, which the Jewish nationalists were so glorifying, are shown to be of no value compared to the blood of Christ. The references to the temptations of Jesus (Heb. 2:17,18; 4:15) may be references back to the wilderness temptations, where He faced the same choice that the Jewish Christians had- to opt for a Kingdom here and now, throwing off the Roman yoke; or to hold fast our faith in the Kingdom which is surely to come. The speaker / writer to the Hebrew Christians doesn't specifically tackle the issues affecting them in bald terms. He instead sets a masterful example of how we should approach issues and weaknesses which need our comment. He adopts a Christ-centred and Biblical approach, demonstrating that he is exactly aware of the issues which face them, and reasoning from unshakeable principles towards specific applications of them.

### **The Final Appeal**

All good sermons have a strong final appeal and focus on the sacrifice of Christ. Heb. 12:23 appears grammatically and structurally to be a climax: "Ye are come unto... the general assembly and church of the firstborn". It is possible to understand this 'general assembly' as a reference to the combined ecclesia present at the breaking of bread. Indeed the Orthodox churches use this verse in this sense in their eucharist liturgy, rendering it "the festival of the firstborn" (3). Chapter 13 contains a series of brief practical exhortations just before the final appeal to home in on the body and blood of our Lord. 13:10 then goes on to compare us to the priests eating the sacrifice on the altar; a picture so appropriate to partaking the emblems at the memorial meeting. 13:11-15 is surely a fitting climax to the sermon, as the audience prepared to take the emblems: "The *bodies* of those beasts...Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with his own *blood, suffered*...let us go forth therefore unto Him, bearing his reproach...by Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God *continually* (not just at this meeting)". Notice the emphasis on the *body* and *blood* of Christ, and an appeal for our response in praise rather than further self-examination. The whole sermon started with God (the very first word in 1:1), and ends with God; reflecting the fact that Christ's work is a manifestation of God, and is intended to bring us to the Father, and eternally reconcile us with Him.

Indeed, a fair case can be made that most of the NT epistles are in fact based upon sermons read out at the breaking of bread service. Given that most Christians would have been illiterate, the memorial meeting would have been the logical time and place to read out the latest letter from Paul or Peter, in any case (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Consider how Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 5:3-5 as if he is present with them at their memorial meeting [" ye being gathered together..."]. Many of the endings and greetings of the letters have some reference to the memorial meeting. The commands to pray and kiss each other which conclude some of the letters must be compared to the information we find in Justin Martyr's description of the early communion meetings: " When we



have ceased from prayer, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president bread and a cup of wine" (*Apology* I, 65). The strange ending of 1 Corinthians 16:20-24 is an obvious allusion to the passage in the *Didache*, describing the words spoken at the breaking of bread meetings in the first century: " If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema. Maranatha...Amen" . According to the *Didache*, the president at the memorial meeting said: " If any man is holy, let him come; if any be not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen" . Indeed, it is possible that the book of Revelation is a series of prophecies initially given at ecclesial gatherings. The whole book is punctuated by passages of liturgy and worship (4).

## Homework

The evidence provided here that 'Hebrews' was a sermon at the breaking of bread is to me quite strong. As we've said, in an oral culture of illiterate converts, it is to be expected that the majority of Paul or Peter's letters would've been read aloud to the assembled congregations when they gathered for worship. There is reference to a "holy kiss" at the end of some of the letters (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). This was understood by Justin, Tertullian and Hippolytus to be a signal to the hearers that now the sermon had ended, and they were to kiss each other and begin partaking of the Lord's supper (5). Whether that's the case or not, there's some major homework here for the enthusiast- to study each of the New Testament letters as a sermon appropriate to the breaking of bread service.

## Notes

- (1) See Joe Hill, 'An Ancient Bible Companion', *Tidings*, series 1994/5.
- (2) The only other times this construction occurs is in Heb. 2:7,9, where we read that Christ was for " a little while" (RV mg.) lower than Angels.
- (3) Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom Of Morality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996) p. 107.
- (4) This idea is developed further in Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM, 1953) .
- (5) References provided in Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 176.

## 7.4 The Cross And The Breaking Of Bread: Foretaste Of Judgment

There are times when for all the Bible reading in the world, the sincere prayer, the attendance of meetings- the flame of a true faith burns dim, the fire of real devotion flickers. And there may not be any particular omission or slip in our spiritual lives which is responsible for it; it simply happens. I would imagine every one of us are bound together by an assent to this. It's simply so. Reader and reader, from black Africans to the chain of believers strung out through the vastness of Russia, from little Indian congregations to the huge ecclesias of North America, from reader to writer- we're all bound together in this realisation and admission. We hear words, read articles; and sometimes nothing can really reach us, nothing and nobody shakes us any more. And we are in that state of numb indifference more often and more deeply than we might care to admit. I read recently of how the Church of England interviewed people leaving church on Sunday mornings, asking them what they remembered from the sermon. The results were shocking. And when they were asked what was said the week before, or the month before, or how many sermons they remembered in their lives- it was pathetic. And we shouldn't be too complacent. People in the world around us don't remember sermons, and they don't act on them. And with us, for all our listening to and

reading of Christian words, are we really better people? In this lies the limitation, it seems to me, of all platform speaking and article writing. We just don't remember, we rarely act- although, thankfully, we *sometimes* do. But it would be wrong to imply that our forgetfulness is of itself sinful. It would be like saying sneezing was a sin. It's just how we are. But all the same, realising this, we need something to shake us, right to the bone. Thankfully, there is just such a thing, something far beyond human words.

### 7-4-1 The Voice Of The Cross

The blood of Christ is personified as a voice that speaks to us, a better word than the voice of Abel's blood which *cried out* its message (Heb. 12:24 NIV; Gen. 4:10). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on "the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony" (Num. 7:89 NIV). The ark was made of shittim wood- from a root meaning 'to flog, scourge or pierce', all replete with reference to the cross. And it was there on that wooden box that Yahweh was declared in the blood sprinkled upon it. Note how there is an association between the blood of atonement and the throne of judgment in 2 Sam. 6:2 and Is. 37:16, as if we see a foretaste of our judgment in the way we respond to the Lord's outpoured blood for us. The Lord Jesus in His time of death is the "propitiation", or rather 'the place of propitiation' for our sins, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat...of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). The blood of Christ is therefore to be associated with the commanding voice of God, such is the imperative within it. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterised by the blood of His cross. His blood is His word. The blood of both old and new covenants enjoined the obedience of God's *word* upon those sprinkled with it (Heb. 9:19,20). The blood and God's word were linked. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterised by the blood of His cross<sup>(1)</sup>.

Hebrews 12:25-29 goes on to draw a parallel between the voice of the Lord's blood and the sound of the earthquake and voice of God when the Old Covenant was inaugurated, a noise that made even Moses exceedingly fear and quake (Ex. 19:18 LXX). The voice of the Lord's blood shakes *all* things, the only thing unshaken by it is the Hope of the Kingdom. It shews forth, as a voice, God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25,26 RV). There is a real and living power in the blood of Christ. We have come "unto a palpable and kindled fire... unto the voice of words... unto the blood of sprinkling" (Heb. 12:18 RVmg., 19, 24). The blood of Christ is as palpable as fire, and as real and actually demanding as words booming from Sinai. When 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of "the preaching (Gk. 'the word') of the cross", we have the same idea; the word of the cross, the word which is the cross, preaches to us of itself, as we behold it. Paul declared unto Corinth "the testimony of God", i.e. "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). This message was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power", "the wisdom of God", "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:17,23,24; 2:4,5). Indeed, "the cross of Christ" is put for 'the preaching of His cross' (1:17). All these things are parallel. The cross is in itself the testimony and witness of God. This is why, Paul reasons, the power of the cross itself means that it doesn't matter how poorly that message is presented in human words; indeed, such is its excellence and power that we even *shouldn't seek* to present it with a layer of human 'culture' and verbiage shrouding it. In the context of commenting on His impending death, the Saviour said that He came to bear witness unto the Truth; for this cause He came into the world (Jn. 18:37 cp. 12:27, where the cross is again "this cause" why He came). His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God. "The work that the Father gave me to finish...testifies" (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when "it[was] finished" in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding

Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God's word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). The Lord's blood was thus a spoken testimony to all men (1 Tim. 2:6 AVmg.). Beholding the cross and the water and blood that flowed from it, John struggled with the inadequacy of human language: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true" (Jn. 19:35). Years later he described himself, in allusion to this, as he "who bare record [in the past tense] of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). He had earlier commented that the Spirit, water and blood of the cross bore witness (1 Jn. 5:8). John seems to be saying that the Lord's final death which he had witnessed was the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. And as he had been a faithful witness to this, so now he would be of that further revelation he had now seen in the Apocalypse.

The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it. Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service. And yet notice how the Lord took that bread of life and gave it to the disciples as His guests at the last supper. To take the bread is to show our acceptance of the gift of life which is in Jesus. The Lord stated that when He had been lifted up on the cross, *then* the Jews would realize the truth and integrity of the words that He had spoken (Jn. 8:28). Again, the cross is presented as a confirmation of all the words / verbal teaching of the Lord.

The Lord was "the word made flesh"; having spoken to us through the words of the prophets, God now speaks to us in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2 RV). His revelation in that sense hasn't finished; it is ongoing. Right now, the Lord Jesus speaks with a voice like many waters and a sword of flame-according to John's vision of the Lord's post-resurrection glory. John exalts in the fact they touched and saw "the word of life"; the Lord Jesus personally was and is the voice of God's word. When John writes that "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:3), he doesn't mean to say that he is simply giving a transcript of the Lord's spoken words. He is telling men about the person of Jesus, the man he personally knew, and in doing this he was declaring God's word to them. If the very being of the Lord Jesus was the expression of God's word, it is little to be marvelled at that the cross, being as it is the crystallisation of all He was and is, should be in an even more intense sense the voice of God to us. And the same process of the word becoming flesh must be seen in us too. We have the witness within ourselves; for the witness is the word and life of Christ, His eternal life, which lives in us (1 Jn. 4:10,11). The Lord Jesus didn't witness to His word by giving out bits of paper or teaching a catechism; He was, in person, the constant exhibition of the word He witnessed to. And with us too. I'm not saying don't write books, give out literature, speak words from platforms...but the more essential witness to men is that of our lives, that witness which wells up from the word and life of Christ within us. The way God's word is made flesh can be seen in Hosea. His going and marrying a worthless woman is prefaced with the statement that this was the beginning of the word of the Lord (Hos. 1:2). The command to go and marry her was not so much "the word of the Lord" to Israel as his marriage and example of true love to his wife. Hosea's

example in his marriage was the word of the Lord to Israel. He made the word flesh. The Lord did this to perfection, and yet like Hosea we in principle must do the same.

When the Jews lifted up Christ in crucifixion, then they would know that the words He spoke were the words of God, that the Father had not left Him at all, and that Jesus had done "always those things that please Him" (Jn. 8:28,29). Surely this implies that His death, His dead body motionless there, was in fact some sort of word of testimony, a voice from God. Note too that when He looked as if He was forsaken by God, it was apparent that He was not. The Jews had jeered at Him as He still clung on to life, implying that God and the prophet Elijah had now abandoned Him- clearly, they mocked, He was not the Son of God. But when He was lifted up by them- i.e. in death- the lifeless body must have spoken to them of something. Somehow [and the earthquake and darkness doubtless confirmed this], there was the very real presence of God evident in the scene once He had died. The Centurion realized that "truly, this was the Son of God"- and from these prophetic words of the Lord, it appears that the Jews generally had to face the same conviction. This is the sort of paradox God delights to use- the humanly hopeless and God forsaken, the lost cause, becomes the very convicting proof of just the opposite- that we are *not* forsaken. In all this there was the word of the cross.

## Notes

(1) This whole theme is developed, albeit from a different perspective, in J.D. Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

### 7-4-2 The Cross And Self-Examination

As a man or woman seriously contemplates the cross, they are inevitably led to a self-knowledge and self-examination which shakes them to the bone. We are to "purge out" the old leaven from us at the memorial meeting (1 Cor. 5:7). But the same Greek word for "purge" is found in passages which speak of how the blood of Christ purges us: Jn. 15:2; Heb. 10:2. We purge ourselves because Christ has purged us. This is the connection between His death for us, and our self-examination. 1 Cor. 11:23 associates the themes of betrayal and the breaking of bread- and John quotes the prophecy that "He who feeds on bread with me has raised his heel against me" in the context of Judas breaking bread with Jesus. "Is it I?" must be a dominant part of the breaking of bread experience. A number of passages shed light on the way the cross leads to self-examination.

As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:35). The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasises the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts" (Prov. 20:27); our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the sermon, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe- then we simply don't

know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 further suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the lord's judgment of us: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord". We expect Paul to say: 'But when we judged ourselves, we are chastened...'. But he doesn't; our judgment is what reveals us to the Lord, and is therefore the basis of His judgment of us. Even if we flunk conscious self-examination from an underlying disbelief that we will attain the Kingdom, then this of itself reveals our hearts to Him. Because of this connection between the breaking of bread and judgment, it would seem that the first century church experienced the physical chastising of the Lord in terms of being struck with sickness and even death *at the memorial meeting* (1 Cor. 11:29,30). Thus at ecclesial meetings- particularly the breaking of bread- the early church confessed their sins and prayed for healing from the afflictions some were smitten with as a result of their sins (James 5:14-16). It's easy to forget that the prophecy of the crucifixion in Is. 53 is in fact a confession of repentance by God's people- as His sufferings are spoken about, so they lead to the confession that "He was bruised for *our* iniquities... with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:3,5). Reflection on the servant's sufferings elicited repentance.

Those who beheld the cross "beat their breasts", Luke records (23:48). The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because "that sight" convicted them of their own sinfulness? Their "return" to their homes uses the Greek word usually translated 'to repent'. The cross inspired their repentance. The records of the crucifixion are framed to focus upon the response of individuals to the cross. The response of those who beat their breasts is very similar to that of the Centurion:

Centurion	Crowds
Having seen	Having observed
Happening	Happenings
Was glorifying	Returned / repented
Saying	Striking breasts

The parallel is between his glorifying God, and their returning / repenting. The need for repentance is a strong theme in Luke (10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 16:30; 17:3,4)- as if he perceived that the ultimate motivation to repentance was in the cross. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* 4.5 claims that "all the crowds who were gathered together for the observation of this... returned striking their breasts and weeping awful tears". And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, "these things" = the record of the cross). The humble man "smote his breast, saying, God, be *merciful* to me a sinner". "Be merciful" translates the word elsewhere translated "make propitiation", in describing the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2:17). The man's sinfulness drove him to plead for the cross: 'Please God, make a propitiation for me' was his plea. He realized his need for the cross. And we should look back at the cross and feel and know the same need.

Serious meditation upon the Lord's work ought to have this effect upon us. Can we really see his agony, his bloody sweat, without a thought for our response to it? It's impossible to passively

behold it all. There is something practically compelling about it, almost in a mystical way. *Because* "Christ died for the ungodly", because in the cross "the love of God" was commended to us, *therefore* "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5,6,8). As the smitten rock gave out water, so the smitten Saviour gave out the water of the Spirit. This link between the shedding of the Lord's blood and the shedding of love in our hearts is surely because an understanding and relation to His sacrifice brings forth in the believer a response of love and spirituality. As the love of God was shown in the cross, so it will be reflected in the heart of he who truly knows and believes it.

1 Cor. 11:29 invites us to *discern* the Lord's body at the memorial meeting. The same word occurs in v.28: "let a man *examine* himself". It's too bad that the translations mask this connection. We are to examine / discern the Lord's body, and to do the same to ourselves <sup>(1)</sup>. The two are inextricably related. Meditation upon and analysis of *His* body will lead to *self* examination and discernment. In this lies the answer to the frequent question: 'What should we examine at the breaking of bread? Our own sins, or the facts of the crucifixion / resurrection?'. If we think about the latter, we will inevitably be led to think of the former.

In Isaiah 6:1-4 we have a vision of "the Lord high and lifted up", enthroned in the temple, with an earthquake, the temple filled with smoke, the doorposts that held up the veil being shaken (with the implication that the veil falls; 6:4). Note how Rev. 15:5-8, building on this passage, has the veil being removed, the Most Holy opened, and the temple filled with smoke. This sends the mind straight to the rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion and the earthquake (Mt. 27:51). The Lord "high and lifted up" (6:1) is a phrase that occurs later in Isaiah (52:13), concerning the crucified Lord, lifted up and exalted "very high" by the cross. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. So once again, the vision of the cross convicts men of their sin, and yet inspires them to go forward in service. In passing, it should be noted that the vision of Isaiah 6 has evident similarities with those of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4. These likewise show something of the glory of God in the crucified Christ, and they likewise inspired men like Ezekiel and John in their work of witness and living the life of the spirit in the midst of apostasy. The only other time the phrase "high and lifted up" occurs in Isaiah is in 57:15, where we read that He who is the exalted and lofty one (AV- the same words as 'high and lifted up') dwells with those who are crushed (Heb. *Dakka*- cp. Is. 53:5,10), i.e. those who share in the Lord's crucifixion in their lives. This passage is talking about God Himself in the first instance- just as Yahweh is spoken of as walking on the waters, and yet the Lord Jesus did this in manifestation of the Father. Likewise many NT passages appropriate words true only of God Himself to the Lord Jesus, in that He manifested the Father. And so it seems the same principle operates here. The one "high and lifted up" was the Lord Jesus in Isaiah chapters 6 and 52. Here in chapter 57 it is God Himself, and yet in that the Lord Jesus knew the depths of the cross, so He came to manifest the heights of His Father. And *through this* God through Him is able to dwell with the crushed. In a sense, the suffering servant has been exalted to the throne of God and yet is able to know the feelings of those who are still the suffering servants. The same idea is found in Rev. 4- the one who sits enthroned is as it were a slain lamb. There is a connection between His present glory and His previous suffering on the cross.

Rev. 4:9 alludes to the Isaiah 6 vision, and applies it to the future judgment. Yet silhouetted within the vision of the judgment throne is a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6), as if before the judgment, all will be aware of the Lord's sacrifice. The accepted will utter praise immediately after realising the wonderful verdict pronounced for them- in terms of praising the Lord Jesus for his sacrifice, and recognising their eternal debt to the blood of His cross (Rev. 5:9). The cross and the judgment and reward are connected. This is why the Sephardim called the Day of Atonement, with all its typology of the cross, "the day of judgment".

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. People 'beheld... the sight' (Lk. 23:48) - the verb *theoreo* and the noun *theoria* here suggest that people 'theorized', what they saw inevitably made them think out a response. Mark's account of the crucifixion has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John's record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19:22; 23,24; then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John's charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end...and that he, John, was honoured to have been there and seen it all.

The gruesome record of the Levite cutting up his wife's body and sending parts of the body throughout all Israel has much to teach us of the power of the memorial service. It was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would "take advice and speak [their] minds" (Jud. 19:30). It was designed to elicit the declaration of their hearts, and above all to provoke to concrete action. Splitting up a body and sharing it with all Israel was clearly a type of the breaking of bread, where in symbol, the same happens. Consider some background, all of which points forward to the Lord's sufferings:

- The person whose body was divided up was from Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah (Jud. 19:1)
- They were 'slain' by permission of a priest
- They were dragged to death by a wicked Jewish mob
- They were "brought forth" to the people just as the Lord was to the crowd (Jud. 19:25)
- "Do what seemeth good unto you" (Jud. 19:24) is very much Pilate language
- A man sought to dissuade the crowd from their purpose- again, as Pilate.

There should be a like effect upon us as we receive the emblems of the Lord's 'broken body' - the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

### **The Value Of Achieved Self-Examination**

If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let

alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to “cast out” the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to “cast [out]” our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for “cast out” in 7:5 and “cast” in 7:6 are related. The idea of being “cast out” is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be “cast out” and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be “cast out” into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be “cast out” into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be “cast out” at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor. 11:31). But we are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would’ve confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren’t food but stones. They just wouldn’t have appreciated them. This isn’t any justification for hypocrisy; it’s simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to “pearls”; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

## Notes

(1) In the Corinthian context, the body of Christ is to be understood as the ecclesia. 1 Cor. 12 is full of this figure. The need to discern the Lord’s body at the breaking of bread means that we must go beyond reflection upon His physical body. We must recognise / discern His ecclesia too. The immediate context of 1 Cor. 11 is of unbrotherly behaviour at the memorial meeting. If we fail to recognise / appreciate / discern the Lord’s physical body, we will fail to recognise His brethren. And if we do this, we have made ourselves guilty of His body and blood, we have crucified Him again. This is why I plead with those who use the breaking of bread as a weapon for division within the Lord’s body to think again. The body which we must discern at the breaking of bread evidently has some reference to the ecclesia. We thereby place ourselves in a dangerous position by refusing to share the emblems with others in the body, and disfellowshipping those who do so.

## 7-4-3 The Cross And The Judgment

So Isaiah 6 shows the Lord Jesus as *enthroned in glory* upon the cross. John says that Isaiah saw the Lord *in His glory* at this time. Yet He will sit on His throne of glory when He returns in judgment (Mt. 25:31). So there is a connection between the cross and the judgment. There the Lord sat (and sits) enthroned in judgment. There, “The Lord reigned from the tree” (Ps. 96:10 LXX- the context is of the final judgment, and yet the image is so appropriate to the Lord’s death). Men smote “the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (Mic. 5:1). The RVmg. of Mk. 14:65 says that the Lord was hit with “strokes of rods”. Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of



dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him (cp. "all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28). It is also worth musing on 1 Pet. 2:23, which speaks of the Lord in His time of dying committing Himself "to him that judgeth righteously". It's as if the Father judged the world as unworthy and His Son as worthy in the time of the Lord's death. It is possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24. The Gospel of Peter 3:7 actually says this happened: "And they clothed him with purple and sat him on a chair of judgment, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel".

Both the cross and the final judgment (Rev. 14:7,15) are described in John's writings as 'the hour coming'; the parallel language indicates that he presents the cross as the essence of the judgment. Is. 53 speaks of the Lord as being "bruised" upon the cross. But Is. 42:4 had earlier used this language about Christ, saying that He would be bruised with the result that he would "set judgment in the earth" (RVmg.). His bruising thus set forth judgment to all. We have suggested above that there was a *sedile* or seat affixed to the cross, on which the victim sat in order to get temporary relief. Thus some accounts of crucifixion describe the victim as mounting the cross as one would mount a horse. This would make the cross capable of interpretation as some kind of seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. It is possible to translate the repentant thief as telling the other: "Do you not fear God *when* you stand condemned?". Before Jesus crucified, we all stand condemned. And he stresses that "we are condemned justly" (Lk. 23:41), for it was evident to all that here hung a just / righteous man. He, there, the just hanging for the unjust, convicts us of sin. Somehow the repentant thief came to know Jesus in the deepest possible sense. Truly could he address him as "Lord", perceiving already how the cross had made Him "Lord and Christ". The thief knew that judgment day was coming, and asked to be remembered for good there. He was surely alluding to Ps. 106:4: "Remember me, Lord, in the course of favouring your people. Visit me with your salvation". And this connection between the cross and the judgment was evidently impressed upon the thief. Doubtless he also had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: "Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- "when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross.

The death of the High Priest was paralleled with a man standing before the judgment for his crime in Josh. 20:6 RV. This surely prefigured how Christ's death was and is effectively our judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the

bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord. Reflect for a moment upon the fact that the women wept, and amongst them were the Lord's relatives (Lk. 23:27). Lamentation for criminals on their way to die was not permitted in public. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61) reports that "the relatives [of the crucified] were forbidden to go into mourning". Likewise Tacitus (*Annals* 6.19), Philo (*In Flaccum* 9,72) and Josephus (*Wars Of The Jews* 2.13.3,253). This is all quite some evidence, from a variety of writers (1). So why did they make this great sacrifice, take this great risk? The cross has power. Whether we feel it is impossible for us to be emotional, given our personality type, or whether we feel so lost in our own griefs that we cannot feel for Him there, somehow sustained reflection on the cross will lead us out of this. We will mourn, come what may. Yet the tragedy is that those women who risked so much didn't necessarily maintain that level of commitment to the end. For the Lord had to tell them that they should weep for themselves given the calamity that would befall them and their children in AD70- for they would not listen to Him.

The language of Is. 63:1-5 applies with equal appropriacy to both the cross and the judgment. It is the time when the servant gains salvation and redemption for His people, alone, when all others have failed, with stained clothes reminiscent of Joseph's, with all their reference to the death and resurrection of the Lord... and this is far from the only example of where prophecies can apply to both the crucifixion and the final judgment.

There seems to be a link made between the Lord's death and the judgment in Rom. 8:34: "Who is he that judgeth / condemneth? It is Christ that died...", as if *He* and His death are the ultimate judgment. The OT idea of judgment was that in it, the Lord speaks, roars and cries, and there is an earthquake and eclipse of the sun (Joel 3:16; Am. 1:2; Jer. 25:30; Ps. 46:7; Rev. 10:3). Yet all these things are associated with the Lord's death. God will judge every man's work "forasmuch as ye know that ye were...redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb slain..." (1 Pet. 1:17-19). The link between our judgment and Christ's death needs to be reflected upon here. Our appreciation ("forasmuch...") of the cross is related to how we will be judged. The Lord's death should influence our works and therefore it is intimately related to our final judgment. We will be judged in accordance with how far we have let the cross influence our daily works.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed* (Lk. 2:35); and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

When the disciples got carried away wondering where the future judgment would be and how ever they would get there, the Lord replied that where the body is, thither the eagles naturally gather. One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the

private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body...realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn between:

- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in it's most crystallised form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this word is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain...an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. The

same Greek word is used in describing how the jailor asked for a "light", i.e. a blazing torch, in order to inspect the darkened prison (Acts 16:29). Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, Jesus would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the ensign / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to the Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). Lk. 1:78,79 foretold how the Lord would be a lamp to those in darkness- and this had a strange fulfilment in His death. His example there on the cross was a light amidst the darkness that descended on the world. In the light of His cross, true self-examination is possible. Significantly perhaps, the Greek word for "light" occurs in Lk. 22:56, where Peter sits by the "fire" and was exposed. It was as if Peter was acting out a parable of how the "light" of association with the suffering Christ makes our deeds manifest. The day of "light" is both the crucifixion, and the last day of judgment, when all our deeds will be made manifest before the light (Lk. 12:3). By coming to the cross and allowing it to influence our self-examination, we come to judgment in advance.

Is. 45:20-24 speaks of how "all the ends of the earth" will look unto "a just God and a Saviour [Jesus]" and be saved- evident reference back to the brazen serpent lifted up for salvation. The result of this is that to Him "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess" his moral failures, rejoicing that "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength...in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory". These words are quoted in Phil. 2:11 in description of the believer's response to the suffering Saviour. And yet they are quoted again in Rom. 14:10-12 regarding our confession of sin before the Lord at judgment day. The connections mean simply this: before the Lord's cross, we bow our knee and confess our failures, knowing the imputation of His righteousness, in anticipation of how we will bow before Him and give our miserable account at the judgment. And both processes are wonderfully natural. We must simply allow the power of a true faith in His cross to work out its own way in us. At the judgment, no flesh will glory in himself, but only in the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 1:29). And even now, we glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14).

<b>Is. 45:23-25 cp. Rom. 14:11,12, about our reaction at the judgment seat</b>	<b>Phil. 2, about our reaction to the cross of Christ today</b>
:23 every knee shall bow	:10 every knee shall bow
:23 every tongue shall swear	:11 every tongue shall confess
:24 in the Lord	:11 Jesus Christ is Lord
:25 shall glory	:11 to the glory of God

Clearly our response to the cross is a foretaste of our response to the judgment experience. In a similar way, the connexion between the cross and the judgment is solidified by the image of the winepress. It is used in Rev. 14:19 as a figure for the final judgment by Jesus; but this passage is in turn quoting from Is. 63:1-6, where the treading of the winepress "without the city" is clearly with reference to the Lord's crucifixion "without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). As He said, in His death, there was the judgment of this world.

There is a powerful practical result of this connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "For (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far

you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now. On the cross, the Lord Jesus was 'manifested', shown as He really and essentially is (Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:19,20; 1 Jn. 3:5,8; 1 Tim. 3:16). But the same word is also used about the final manifesting of the Lord Jesus at His return (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). This explains the link between the cross and His return; who He was then will be who He will be when He comes in judgment. There He endured the spitting and hatred of men in order to save them. And the same gracious spirit will be extended to all His true people, whatever their inadequacies.

The second coming will be our meeting with the Lord who died for us. To come before Him then will be in essence the same as coming before His cross. Rev. 16 describes the events of the second coming, and yet it is full of allusion back to the cross: "it is done", the temple of heaven opened (16:17); an earthquake (16:18), a cup of wine (16:19). We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our "day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are "justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day. The judgment quality of the crucifixion is further reflected by the way in which the Lord speaks of both the cross and the day of future judgment as "the hour" (Jn. 5:25-29). When the Lord taught that "the hour" is both to come and "now is", He surely meant us to understand that in His crucifixion, properly perceived, there is the judgment of this world, the end of this age for us who believe in Him, the cutting off of sin. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench by Pilate, as if He is the authentic judge, is further confirmation that in His Passion, the Lord was truly Judge of this world <sup>(2)</sup>.

## Notes

(1) Further evidence that the women were risking crucifixion by standing next to the crucified is provided in Louise Schotroff, *Let The Oppressed Go Free* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), pp. 168-203.

(2) For justification of reading the Greek *kathizo* as a transitive verb ['to sit someone down'], see I. de la Potterie, 'Jesus King and Judge According To John 19:13', *Scripture* Vol. 13 (1961) p.p. 97-111 and Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) pp. 73-76.

## 7-4-4 The Breaking Of Bread And The Judgment

The Lord told a parable about how the man who takes the highest room in the feast [= the ecclesia in this life] will be rebuked at the coming of the Master and "with shame take the lowest room" (Lk. 14:9). The idea of the Lord Jesus returning and one of His guests having "shame" must surely refer, in line with other Biblical passages, to the shame of condemnation. 'And so therefore', the Lord continues, 'take that lowest place at the feast right now'. When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually referring to condemned King Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). If the "lowest room" is seen as the place of the shame filled condemned... then surely He's saying that we should consider ourselves as "condemned" now as we sit at the feast. And what feast does the Lord have in mind? Is He perhaps referring on some level to the breaking of bread, which is the Lord's supper / feast where we now each take our place? Should we not, therefore, be sitting there feeling [although this is only part of the story] condemned, and the lowest of all? Is that

not *one* [and only one, be it noted] of the emotions elicited in us by the cross? The "feast" of the breaking of bread is clearly meant to be understood by us as a foretaste of the Messianic "feast" of the future Kingdom. And if we genuinely feel we should have the least place there, we will reflect that in our taking the lowest place at the memorial meeting. In our hearts, we will sit there knowing we ought to be condemned.

The Lord Jesus clearly saw a link between the breaking of bread and His return. He not only told His people to perform it "until he come", but He said both before and after the last supper [putting together the Gospel records] that He would not keep this feast until He returned. Our breakings of bread are therefore a foretaste of the final sitting down with Him in His Kingdom- for He had elsewhere used the idea of feasting with Him as a symbol of our fellowship with Him at His return. The Rabbis had repeatedly taught that Messiah would come at Passover; the first century Rabbi Joshua said that "In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed by Messiah". Much evidence could be given of this<sup>(1)</sup>. For this reason Josephus records how the Jewish revolts against Rome repeatedly occurred around Passover time.

Yet all the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord's second coming from Heaven bearing our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: "At four times in the year is the world judged"<sup>(2)</sup>. Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat. Our attitude to the cross *and all that is meant by it* is the summation of our spirituality. I normally dislike using alternative textual readings to make a point, but there is an alternative reading of 1 Cor. 11:29 which makes this point so clearly: "He who eats and drinks ['unworthily' isn't in many manuscripts], eats and drinks discernment [judgment] to Himself. Not discerning the Lord's body is the reason many of you are weak and sickly". The Corinthians were not discerning the difference between the Lord's body and a piece of bread, for they were eating the bread as part of a self-indulgent social meal, rather than discerning Him.

The eating and drinking at the memorial meeting is a judging of ourselves. It's a preview of the judgment. 1 Cor. 11 seems to be concerning behaviour at the memorial meeting. Time and again the brethren are described as "coming together" to that meeting (:17,18,20,33,34). Believers 'coming together' is the language of coming together to judgment. Where two or three are *gathered*, the Lord is in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20) uses the same word as in Mt. 25:32 concerning our gathering together unto judgment. We should not forsake the "assembling of [ourselves] together" (Heb. 10:25)- the same word as in 2 Thess. 2:1 regarding our "gathering together unto Him". The church being assembled (Acts 11:26), two or three being gathered (Mt. 18:20)- this is all a foretaste of the final gathering to judgment (Mt. 25:32 s.w.). The command to *examine* ourselves (11:29) uses the same word as in 3:13 concerning the way our works will be *tried* with fire by the judgment process of the last day. If members of an ecclesia break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). This is after the pattern of the brethren at the first breaking of bread asking "Is it I?" in response to the Lord's statement that one of them would betray Him (Mt. 26:22). They didn't immediately assume they wouldn't do. And so we have a telling paradox: those who condemn themselves at the memorial meeting will not be condemned. Those who are sure they won't be condemned, taking the emblems with self-assurance, come

together unto condemnation. Job knew this when he said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock...for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross.

More positively, because we know God's judgment, we can have some knowledge of our acceptability with God as we face the emblems. Whilst it may be hard to believe, Gal. 6:4 says that we can prove / judge our own works, and thus have rejoicing in ourselves. Although self-examination is fraught with problems, and even our conscience can be deceptive at times (1 Cor. 4:4), there is a sense in which we can judge / discern ourselves now.

This connection between the breaking of bread and judgment day is in fact a continuation of an Old Testament theme. Three times a year, the Israelite had to 'go up' to present himself before the Lord at the feasts (Dt. 16:16). He was to 'appear' there- a Hebrew word elsewhere translated approve, discern, gaze upon, take heed, look upon oneself, perceive, shew oneself. His very presence before the Lord would have this effect: he would be revealed openly to God, and he would see himself as he was. This was the intention; and yet Yahweh went on to warn them not to appear before Him "empty", vainly, 'to no effect'. Behold the intense relevance to our appearing before the Lord at our Passover: we can *so easily* present ourselves there 'to no effect', when the intention is that we should be manifesting ourselves to ourselves and to God. The familiar order of service, the well known hymns, the presence of familiar and often family faces...these factors (not wrong in themselves) all encourage us to 'appear' there to no effect. David describes the going up to keep the feasts in unmistakable judgment-seat language: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go [up] into the house of the Lord...the tribes go up...unto the testimony of Israel [cp. the Lord Jesus, the faithful and true witness], to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set [AV mg. 'do sit'] thrones of judgment, the thrones [an intensive plural- the great throne] of the house of David [i.e. that of Christ]" (Ps. 122:1-5). David wrote this well aware that Messiah was to sit on his throne in Jerusalem at His return and final judgment. Is it going too far to suggest that David saw in the tribes going up to Zion a type of God's people going up to meet the Lord at the final judgment? If so, he understood their response to the invitation to go there as one of *joy*; we go to judgment to praise, joyful at the invitation.

Another OT anticipation of these things is found in the way the "water of separation" granted cleansing, in prophecy of the effect of the blood of Christ (Num. 19:21). But the Hebrew for "separation" is also translated 'uncleanness' (Lev. 20:21; Ezra 9:11; Zech. 13:1). Touching this water for any other reason made a man unclean. Only if used in the right context did it make him clean (Num. 19:21). This is why it is described with a word which has these two meanings. Thus the RSV gives "water of impurity", the Russian, following an LXX manuscript: 'water of purifying'. And so it is with our contact with the work of the Lord, symbolized in the emblems. We are made unclean by it, we drink damnation to ourselves, if we don't discern it. Only if we properly discern it are we cleansed by it. The idea of the breaking of bread becoming a place of condemnation for the unworthy is to be found in Ps. 69:22, where those who crucify Messiah afresh are warned that their

table will become a snare to them, and their own sense of peace will trap them.

The most evident link between the breaking of bread and the judgment / second coming is in the fact we are to do it "until he come". The Jews expected Messiah to come at Passover, and the Lord seems to have plugged into that fact. 'Until he come' was an allusion by Paul to the contemporary Passover prayer for the coming of Messiah at the Passover meal: "May the Lord come and this world pass away. Amen. Hosanna to the house of David. If any man is holy, let him come; if any man is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen". Joachim Jeremias translates the phrase: "'Until (matters have developed to the point at which) he comes', 'until (the goal is reached, that) he comes'" (3). He points out a similar construction in other passages relevant to the second coming (Lk. 21:24; 1 Cor. 15:25; Rom. 11:25). Thus each memorial meeting brings us a step closer towards the final coming of Jesus. It would therefore be so appropriate if the Lord did return during a breaking of bread. One day, the foretaste of judgment which we experience then will be, in reality, our final judgment. As we break bread, each time we are 'reminding' the Father as well as ourselves of His Son's work and the need to climax it in sending Him back.

I've pointed out elsewhere how Paul so often alludes to and further interprets the words of the Lord Jesus. In Mk. 4:22 the Lord says: " For nothing is hidden, except to **be revealed**; nor has anything been **secret**, but that it should **come to light**". Paul's inspired allusions to this can be found as follows: 1 Cor 4.5: " who will bring to light the **secrets** of darkness and will **make public** the purposes of the heart" ; Rom 2.16: " God judges the **secrets** of people, according to my gospel through Jesus Christ" ; and, significantly for our context, 1 Cor 14.25: " The **secrets** of his heart are made **public / revealed**" . The context of 1 Cor. 14 is of behaviour at the memorial meeting, following on from Paul's concerns about this in 1 Cor. 11 and 12. The point of the connections is this: As the secret / hidden matters of the heart will be judged at the last day, so they are revealed at the memorial meeting. For there, we stand before the cross, and the hidden thoughts of our hearts are revealed.

But let's not think from all this that the memorial service is solely a terribly heavy challenge to us. The breaking of bread is also intended to be a comfort to us as well as a challenge. The language of breaking bread and drinking wine from "the cup of consolation" is found in Jer. 16:7 to describe a funeral wake, a meal intended to comfort the mourners at a funeral. When the Lord asked us to do this in memory of Him, He was inviting us to have our mourning for Him assuaged by the breaking of bread and drinking of wine. And yet there is again a challenge in this idea, too- for do we so *know* Christ as a person that the breaking of bread is a comfort to us as we mourn for what happened to Him? If we do feel this way for Him, then the memorial service will be the meal of comfort which He intended.

## Notes

(1) See Joachim Jeremias *The Eucharistic Words Of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1973 ed.,) p. 206.

(2) Quoted in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching Of The Cross*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 266.

(4) Joachim Jeremias, *op cit* p. 253.

## 7-4-5 Joseph's Cup Of Divination

The whole story of Joseph is one of the clearest types of Jesus in the Old Testament. The way His



brethren come before His throne and are graciously accepted is one of the most gripping foretastes we have of the final judgment. The rather strange way Joseph behaves towards them was surely to elicit within them a true repentance. He sought to bring them to self-knowledge through His cup. Joseph stresses to the brethren that it is through his cup that he "divines" to find out their sin. He also emphasizes that by stealing the cup they had "done evil" (Gen. 44:4,5). And yet they didn't actually steal the cup. The "evil" which they had done was to sell him into Egypt (Gen. 50:20). They had "stolen" him (Gen. 40:15) in the same way they had "stolen" the cup. This is why he says that "ye" (you plural, not singular, as it would have been if he was referring merely to Benjamin's supposed theft) had stolen it (Gen. 44:15). And the brethren in their consciences understood what Joseph was getting at- for instead of insisting that they hadn't stolen the cup, they admit: "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants" (Gen. 44:16). Clearly their minds were on their treatment of Joseph, the sin which they had thought would not be found out. And this was why they were *all* willing to bear the punishment of becoming bondmen, rather than reasoning that since Benjamin had apparently committed the crime, well he alone must be punished. The cup was "found" and they realized that God had "found out" their joint iniquity (Gen. 44:10,12,16). The cup was perceived by them as their "iniquity" with Joseph. They had used the very same Hebrew words years before, in telling Jacob of Joseph's garment: "This have we found..." (Gen. 37:32).

The cup made them realize their guilt and made them acceptive of the judgment they deserved. And it made them quit their attempts at parading their own righteousness, no matter how valid it was in the immediate context (Gen. 44:8). The cup made them realize their real status, and not just use empty words. Behold the contradiction in Gen. 44:9: "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my Lord's bondmen / servants". The Hebrew words translated "servants" and "bondmen" are the same. Their mere formal recognition that they were Joseph's servants was to be translated into reality. Thus they say that Joseph had "found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we *are* my Lord's servants". Describing themselves as His servants had been a mere formalism; now they wanted it in a meaningful reality. And the Lord's cup can do the same to us. The way they were "searched" (Gen. 44:12) from the oldest to the youngest was surely the background for how the guilty men pined away in guilt from the Lord, from the eldest to the youngest. The whole experience would have elicited self-knowledge within them. The same word is found in Zech. 1:12, describing how God Himself would search out the sin of Jerusalem.

Joseph was trying to tell them: 'What you did to the cup, you did to me. That cup is a symbol of me'. And inevitably the mind flies to how the Lord solemnly took the cup and said that this was Him. Our attitude to those emblems is our attitude to Him. We have perhaps over-reacted against the Roman Catholic view that the wine turns into the very blood of Jesus. It doesn't, of course, but all the same the Lord did say that the wine *is* His blood, the bread *is* His body. Those emblems are effectively Him to us. They are symbols, but not mere symbols. If we take them with indifference, with minds focused on externalities, then this is our essential attitude to Him personally. This is why the memorial meeting ought to have an appropriate intensity about it- for it is a personal meeting with Jesus. "Here O my Lord, I see thee face to face". If it is indeed this, then the cup will be the means of eliciting within us our own realization of sin and subsequently, of our salvation in Jesus.

Joseph's brothers' words are exactly those of Daniel in Dan. 10:15-17, where in another death and resurrection experience, he feels just the same as he lays prostrate before the Angel. Our attitude to the Lord in the last day will be our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread- just as our "boldness" in prayer now will be our "boldness" in the day of judgment. In the same way as the brothers had to

be reassured by Joseph of his loving acceptance, so the Lord will have to 'make us' sit down with Him, and encourage us to enter into His joy. There will be some sort of disbelief at the extent of His grace in all those who are truly acceptable with Him ("When saw we thee...?"). The brothers grieved and were angry with themselves in the judgment presence of Joseph (Gen. 45:5)- they went through the very feelings of the rejected (cp. "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in self-hatred). And yet they were graciously accepted, until like Daniel they can eventually freely talk with their saviour Lord (Gen. 45:15). And so the sheep will feel rejected at the judgment, they will condemn themselves- in order to be saved ultimately. The same words occur in Neh. 8:10,11, when a repentant Israel standing before the judgment *bema* (LXX) are given the same assurance.

The Hebrew for "divineth" means literally 'to make trial'; their taking of the cup was their trial / judgment. Thus we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves by taking the cup. The word used by the LXX for "divineth" in Gen. 44:5 occurs in the NT account of the breaking of bread service: 'everyone should *examine* himself, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup' (1 Cor. 11:28). The Lord examines us, as we examine ourselves. There is a mutuality here- the spirit of man is truly the candle of the Lord (Prov. 20:27). He searches us through our own self-examination. He knows all things, but there may still be methods that He uses to gather than information. Our hearts are revealed to God through our own self-examination. And is it mere co-incidence that the Hebrew words for "divination" and "snake" are virtually identical [*nahash*]? The snake lifted up on the pole [cp. the crucified Jesus] is the means of trial / divination. Through the cross, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed (Lk. 2:35), just as they will be at the last day (1 Cor. ). Thus the breaking of bread ceremony is a means towards the sort of realistic self-examination which we find so hard to achieve in normal life.

#### **7-4-6 The Trial Of Jealousy**

The very nature of the breaking of bread brings us to the equivalent of the Old Testament trial of jealousy; to a T-junction in our lives. The Corinthians were told that they would "provoke the Lord to jealousy" by breaking bread and yet also worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:22). This is surely an allusion to the "trial of jealousy" (Num. 5:24). A curse was recited and then the believer drunk a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drunk to their condemnation. Paul's allusion suggests that each day we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives in the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup.

The breaking of bread brings us before the cross, which is in a sense our judgment seat. There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19) <sup>(4)</sup>. Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. Indeed, the Lord's supper is a place to which the rejected are invited (Zeph. 1:7,8; Rev. 19:7), or the redeemed (Rev. 3:20). Like the cup of wine, being invited to the Lord's supper is a double symbol.

And there is no escape by simply not breaking bread. The peace offering was one of the many antecedents of the memorial meeting. Once the offerer had dedicated himself to making it, he was condemned if he didn't then do it, and yet also condemned if he ate it unclean (Lev. 7:18,20). So a man *had* to either cleanse himself, or be condemned. There was no get out, no third road. The man

who ate the holy things in a state of uncleanness had to die; his eating would load him with the condemnation of his sins (Lev. 22:3,16 AV mg.). This is surely the source for our possibility of "eating...condemnation" to ourselves by partaking of the breaking of bread in an unworthy manner. And so it is with us as we face the emblems. We must do it, or we deny our covenant relationship. And yet if we do it in our uncleanness, we also deny that relationship. And thus the breaking of bread brings us up before the cross and throne of the Lord Jesus- even now. It brings us to a realistic self-examination. If we cannot examine ourselves and know that Christ is really in us, then we are reprobate; we " have failed" (2 Cor. 13:5 G.N.B.). Self-examination is therefore one of those barriers across our path in life which makes us turn to the Kingdom or to the flesh. If we can't examine ourselves and see that Christ is in us and that we have therefore that great salvation in Him; we've failed. I wouldn't be so bold as to throw down this challenge to any of us in exhortation. But Paul does. It's a powerful, even terrible, logic. 1 Cor. 11:26 AVmg. makes the act of breaking bread a command, an imperative to action: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, shew ye the Lord's death, till he come". If we are going to eat the emblems, it is axiomatic that we will commit ourselves to shewing forth His death to the world, like Paul placarding forth Christ crucified in our lives (Gal. 3:1 Gk.). The Passover likewise had been a 'shewing' to one's family "that which the Lord did unto me" (Ex. 13:8), the redemption we have experienced.

When the people ratified their covenant with Yahweh [cp. the breaking of bread], they had to confirm their agreement that they would be cursed for disobedience to it; and "cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them" (Dt. 27:26). They couldn't opt out of bringing this curse upon themselves for disobedience- if they did, they were cursed.

The Passover was another foretaste of this trial of jealousy, the bread and wine service we participate in. If it was eaten unclean, the offerer ate condemnation to himself. He was to be cut off from the community if he opted out of keeping the Passover; and yet he was also rejected if he kept it unclean. So he couldn't just flunk his need to keep the feast. He *had* to keep it, and he *had* to keep in a clean state. And so with us. To simply not break bread is to deny our relationship with the Lord. But once we commit to doing it, we *must* search our houses for leaven, for those little things which over time will influence the whole direction and nature of our spiritual lives. The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it*, after that sign of the Lord's *especial love* for him, "satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

Judging / examining ourselves is made parallel with discerning the Lord's body: as if discerning His body on the cross inevitably results in self-examination, and vice versa (1 Cor. 11:28,29). We must *discern* the Lord's body, and thereby *examine* ourselves (these are the same words in the Greek text). Yet the Lord's body in the Corinthian context is the ecclesia, the body of Jesus. To discern ourselves is to discern the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29,30 RV). By discerning our brethren for who they are, treating them as brethren, perceiving our own part in the body of Jesus, our salvation is

guaranteed. For this is love, in its most fundamental essence.

If we examine / judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, God will not have to do this to us at the day of judgment. If we cast away our own bodies now, the Lord will not need to cast us away in rejection (Mt. 5:30). There is a powerful logic here. If we pronounce ourselves uncondemned, we condemn ourselves (Tit. 3:11); if we condemn ourselves now, we will be uncondemned ultimately. This is why the Greek word translated "examine" (1 Cor. 11:29) is also that translated "approve" in 11:19 (and also 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Tim. 2:15). By condemning ourselves we in a sense approve ourselves. Our self-examination should result in us realising our unworthiness, seeing ourselves from God's viewpoint. There is therefore a parallel made between our own judgment of ourselves at the memorial meeting, and the final judgment- where we will be condemned, yet saved by grace (James 2:12; 3:1). If we don't attain this level of self-knowledge now, we will be taught it by being condemned at the judgment. This makes the logic of serious, real self-examination so vital; either we do it in earnest, and realise our own condemnation, or if we *don't* do it, we'll be condemned at the judgment. Yet as with so much in our spiritual experience, what is so evidently logical is so hard to translate into reality. The process of judgment will essentially be for our benefit, not the Lord's. *Then* the foolish virgins realise that they didn't have enough oil / spirituality; whilst the wise already knew this (Mt. 25:13). As a foretaste of the day of judgment, we must "examine" ourselves, especially at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). The same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:13 concerning how the process of the judgment seat will be like a fire which *tries* us.

Notes

(1) The very structure of the Hebrew language reflects this. Thus the Hebrew 'baruch' means both 'blessed' and 'cursed'; 'kedoshim' means both 'Sodomites' and 'saints'.

#### **7-4-7 Breaking Bread: Practical Advice**

So, in the light of all this, *break bread*. Many readers of these words are isolated or only occasionally meet with their brethren for formal memorial meetings. But *break bread alone*, weekly if you can. I know, from years in semi-isolation myself, how terribly tempting it is to let it slip from a weekly habit. 'I'll do it tomorrow, next week, well soon we'll have a visit / meeting, I'll do it then anyway...'. Whenever the Lord started to speak about His death, the disciples invariably turned the conversation round to another tack. And it seems, from a careful analysis of the crucifixion records, that those who came to behold Golgotha's awful scene couldn't watch it for too long, but went away. And so with us, we have a tendency to defer facing up to the message of the cross as the emblems portray it; and even while we are doing it, to concern ourselves with anything *but* the essential essence of the cross; the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the sermon... all these things we can so eagerly crowd out the essence of the cross.

When you're living in isolation from other Christians, nobody ever asks you point blank: 'Do you break bread alone every week?'. We may meet together with others occasionally, and when we do we all act as if *of course* this is the norm of our spiritual lives; when it can so easily not be so at all. If the above reasoning has been followed, the breaking of bread is a vital, God-designed part of our spiritual growth. It should shake us to the bone, as it brings us face to shame-bowed face with the

crucified Saviour. It isn't a ritual which somehow shows us to be a keen Christian; it's a vital act within our very personal spirituality. And so I will ask you point blank: 'Do you break bread each week?'. Not that actually there's any specific command to do it weekly; but it's so evidently a vital part of our relationship with the Lord that we must ask ourselves why *shouldn't* we do it weekly.

And break bread *properly*, not just to salve your conscience or because it's expected of you, or because it's your psychological routine. Be aware that there is a psychology of religious experience; all religious people like to have some physical symbolism (e.g. bread = body, wine = blood), and especially, some solemn rituals that they observe; and they feel calmer, satisfied, fulfilled after keeping them. On one level, we are religious people like any other religious people, and have the same features. But on another level, true Christianity is *the one and only ultimately true religion*, which by grace we have come to know. Our breaking of bread is *far far more* than *just* religious ritual, although on one level it is that. But we must rise well above this. Israel kept the Passover (cp. the breaking of bread), and yet to God they never *really* kept it. The Corinthians took the cup of the Lord and that of the idols; they broke bread with both (1 Cor. 10:21). But they were told they *could not* do this. They took the cup of the Lord; but not in the Lord's eyes. They ate the Lord's supper; but they had to be told that they were *not* really eating it (1 Cor. 11:20). They turned *His* supper into their *own* supper. They did it, but for themselves. And so in spiritual terms, they didn't do it (1 Cor. 11:20.21). Just as the "Lord's passover" became by the time of the NT "the feast of the Jews". They turned His passover into their own. Likewise they turned the house of God into their own house (Mt. 23:38); and the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now "their law" (Jn. 15:25). And so we must just accept the real possibility that we can break bread on the surface, but not break bread. We've probably all done this. Don't let it become the norm. Likewise Israel had to be asked the rhetorical question: "*Have ye* offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years?" (Am. 5:25). Because they *also* worshipped Molech, their keeping of the feasts wasn't accepted. So I can ask again: Do you *really* break bread?

So not only must we break bread by all means; we must allow ourselves the time and collected mind to enable us to do it as we are intended to. Like baptism, we can't keep in mind at the same time all the wonderful, high things which the service means to us whilst we perform it. But we should try, as far as we can, to be as aware as possible of all these things. So may I say some things which ought to be obvious:

- Don't noisily dash in to a memorial meeting late. Try to take your place with as little disturbance of others as possible. Bring your kids with you by all means; but try to make every reasonable effort to keep them from unduly distracting others. Try to remove all distractions, as far as you can, and minimise the possibility of interruption if you are breaking bread alone at home.
- Prepare your mind before the meeting. Realise something of what you are about to do. We could *all* ensure we sit in silence for at least five minutes before the meeting starts.
- If you are making comments on Bible passages or giving a sermon, or simply seeking exhortation for yourself from the readings, concentrate on the things of the Lord Jesus and His cross. He is to be found in all the Scriptures. Don't use this time as a platform for airing your crotchets or hang ups about others (even if only within your own mind).
- Don't start talking (or thinking) about the things of this life the moment the last prayer finishes.
- Be sober, in view of the seriousness of what we are doing. Don't allow a spirit of levity to creep in

to the proceedings. We are going through a dummy run of judgment day. We stand before the Lord's cross.

- And yet be joyful, as far as you can be. But don't let the expression of that joy in music take you away from the focus of the meeting. Intricate part-singing in the Western world and repetitive, rhythmic choruses used elsewhere aren't wrong *per se*; but if glorified in themselves they *can* take us away from the focus, the Head, which is the Saviour Lord Himself, and our desperate gratitude for His love.

- Don't hold yourself back during the meeting; allow yourself to make those mental commitments you are moved to. Our flesh almost makes us feel embarrassed or insincere if we resolve to make a major (or minor) change in our lives. Let true devotion and response rise above this. We must just accept that the memorial meeting *is* an emotional experience; it can be nothing else, to the devoted heart. And there's nothing wrong with this. Don't be too proud (brothers) to shed a tear.

And especially. *Don't separate the act of breaking bread from the rest of your life.* It should be the natural flow-on from your daily meditation on the Lord's love. The mind set we have in that quiet hour should in principle be that which we have all our hours and days; for we live as men and women under judgment, ever confronted and comforted by that love of the Father and Son, so great, so free. It demands by its very nature and existence our self-examination and response, far more than just one hour / week. If there *is* a fundamental separation between the breaking of bread and the rest of daily life, the result will be that the memorial service becomes mere theatre; an acting out, going through a ritual, a saying of words, even a feeling of feelings, which has no connection with the world into which we step when we leave the service. This was the Corinthians' problem. Their refusal to share their packed lunches with each other just before the actual taking of the communion meant that actually, they could not take that communion as God intended.

## 8. The Cross In John's Gospel

It is easy to overlook the fact that the Gospel records are essentially transcripts of the Gospel message preached, e.g., by John. The point of this present study is to show how John's Gospel is full of both conscious and unconscious allusion to the crucifixion. His words are capable of a simple, surface level interpretation; but it is apparent that he is using simple language with deep meaning below that surface. 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of the "preaching of ['which is', Gk.] the cross". John did just this- he preached his Gospel, but throughout there is reference to the cross. Quite rightly, he saw this as the centrepiece of the Gospel message. And also, it shows how much it played upon his mind, consciously and unconsciously. Would that our words and writing were likewise saturated with the cross and all that it stands for. Admittedly, the power of some of the following suggestions only becomes apparent when the whole weight of the argument has been considered collectively. It may be helpful, therefore, to read the following commentary through twice.

*1:1 In the beginning was the logos...The logos was with God and the logos was God*

The essential *logos* of the Gospel is the message of Christ crucified. There in the cross is the kernel of everything; there was the "beginning" of the new creation. John later speaks of the Lord Jesus as being the 'faithful martyr' in His death, and thereby being "the beginning [s.w.] of the [new]

creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). The beginning was not only at the beginning of the Lord's ministry; the essential beginning of the new creation was when the blood and water came out of His side. And we have shown at length in [God Manifestation In The Cross](#) that Yahweh Himself was totally bound up in the death of His Son. God was there with Him and in Him, to the extent that He was in Christ there, reconciling the world unto Himself. In this sense, the *logos* of Christ and the death of the cross "was God". There the Father "was with" the Son [see notes under 16:25,32].

*1:1 All things were made by him*

The very same Greek words are used in 19:36 [cp. Lk. 24:21] in describing the cross: "these *things* were *done* [s.w. 'made']". All things of the new creation were made on account of His cross.

*1:5,9 The light shineth in darkness...That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

3:19-21 and 12:32-46 [see later commentary] suggest that one level of meaning of Jesus as "light of the world" was that in the darkness that came over the land at the crucifixion, He upon the cross was the light of a darkened world. The Lord was "the beginning of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14); each believer who enters the spiritual world is enlightened by the light of Christ crucified.

*1:10,11 The world was made by him and the world knew him not...his own received him not.*

The new creation was brought into being by the cross. The Jewish world's rejection of the Lord was crystallised in the crucifixion.

*1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*

The Lord's death was as a result of Him being given over "to their [man's] will" (Lk. 23:25 s.w.), but the birth of the new creation was by the will of God. This phrase is frequently associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). We were born by the will of God, i.e. the death of the Lord fulfilling that will. The later references in John to the Lord coming to do God's will refer to His coming in order to die the death of the cross. John's account of how blood and water issued from the Lord's pierced side is an evident allusion to childbirth; he saw the ecclesia as being born out of the pierced body of the Lord at the time of His death.

*1:14 The word was made flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled / was manifested] among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father)*

The essential *logos* of God in Christ was articulated not only in the birth of the Lord, not only at the start of His ministry [the two interpretations most common amongst us], but supremely in His death. John's Gospel is packed with allusion to Moses' Here the reference is to Moses cowering in the rock, beholding the glory of Yahweh and hearing the declaration of the Yahweh Name. Speaking of His forthcoming death, the Lord was to say: "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). This second declaration of the Name was to be in His death. The same allusion back to the declaration of Yahweh in Ex. 34 is to be found in John 12:27-28: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will

glorify it again". This second glorifying of the Name was surely in the Son's declaration of the Name in His death. And this connects with the evidence elsewhere presented that the Yahweh Name was closely connected with the Lord's death, in that 'Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews' in Hebrew would have used words, the first letters of which spelt 'Yahweh'.

John's claim that he beheld the glory of God's Son may therefore be a specific reference to the way he describes his own 'seeing' of the crucifixion in John 19:35: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe". He seems to be saying: 'I saw Him there. I really and truly did'. He uses the same kind of language in 1 Jn. 4:14: "we have seen and do testify [cp. "his record is true"] that the Father sent the son to be the saviour of the world" in the cross. "The only begotten of the Father" is a phrase nearly always used in the context of the Lord's death (e.g. Jn. 3:16). The love of God was defined in the way the Lord laid down His life in death (1 Jn. 3:16); but it is equally defined in that "God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live" (1 Jn. 4:9). God sending His son into the world was therefore in His death specifically [see notes under 3:14-18]. And it was through this that life was won for us. As He hung covered in blood and spittle, as He gasped out forgiveness for His enemies, God's Son as it were came into the hard world of men. The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not and does not overcome it. There, the word, the essential love and grace and judgment and mercy of Yahweh, was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us. The common translation "dwelt" can give the sense that John is merely saying 'Jesus lived in Israel'; but there is far more to it than that. In clear allusion to his Gospel, John opens his first letter by speaking of the Lord Jesus, whom "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled [a reference to the taking down of the body and embalming?], of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness [cp. 19:35] , and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1:1-3). The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; 1 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26). And John exalts that they saw this, and now they too declare / manifest it to the world. One cannot behold the cross of Christ and not witness it to others.

John says that he beheld "his glory". Christ's glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). However, it is also so that John "saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and yet even there, "they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as "they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John's many allusions to Moses' experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son *has declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked; we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John's tenses) displayed to us in the cross. All of God's word was made flesh in the crucified body of the Lord Jesus. The very essence of Yahweh and all His self-revelation was epitomised there. Therefore when the Son of man was lifted up, men knew the truth of all God's words [see notes on 8:21-28].

The Lord was "full of grace and truth". Yet according to Phil. 2:7 RV, on the cross the Lord emptied Himself. Yet there He was filled with the essence of Yahweh's own character; for the RV of Ex. 34 stresses that Yahweh is a God whose name is *full* of grace and truth. On the cross He was



emptied of self and yet totally filled.

The fact that the word was made flesh in the crucifixion explains why the atonement is described time and again with metaphors, as if it is a struggle for language alone to convey what happened. In the person of the crucified Christ, the ideas, the language, the words... became real and concretely expressed in a person. There is far more revealed by meditation upon the cross than can ever be put in words. There, the word, all the words, were made flesh.

It is possible to see the fulfilment of the idea of the word being made flesh in Pilate's mocking presentation of the bedraggled Saviour: " Behold the man!" . Rudolph Bultmann commented: " The declaration " the Word became flesh" has become visible in its extremest consequence" <sup>(1)</sup> .There in the spat upon Son of God we see humanity as it is meant to be; " the flesh" , " the man" as God intended, unequalled and unmatched in any other human being.

*1:29 John sees Jesus and says "Look! The lamb of God..."*

The three underlined words for "see", "says" and "Look!" are uniquely repeated in Jn. 19:26, where again we have the lamb of God, now sacrificed, on the cross.

1:51 ...you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man

This was a prophecy of what was to happen "hereafter", and it seems relevant to the cross. Heaven, in the sense of the Most Holy place, was opened by the veil being torn down at the Lord's death. By the blood-shedding of Jesus, the way into the Holiest was made manifest. There is evident allusion to Jacob's vision of the ladder reaching to Heaven; and surely the Lord is saying that He is going to become the ladder to Heaven, linking Heaven and earth, when Heaven is opened by Him in the future. And that point was surely the crucifixion. Significantly, He says: "You will see...", another hint that the disciples, especially John, saw the crucifixion. They may well have "seen" in the Johanine sense of perceiving that there, unseen, Angels were ascending and descending in ministrations. John also records how the Lord saw Himself as the gate / door (10:9), just as Jacob described what he had seen as "the gate of heaven". The stone upon which he slept, lifted up and anointed with oil to become the corner-stone of the house of God, Beth-el, was all prophetic of the Lord's death and rising up again (Eph. 2:20-22).

*2:4 mine hour is not yet come*

This evidently refers to the 'hour' of the cross, whereby the true wine / blood would be outpoured, that which had been offered before being inadequate. The governor of the feast, cp. the Jewish elders, "knew not whence it was" (2:9), using the same words to describe how they knew not from whence was the Lord, and didn't 'know' / comprehend to where He was going in His death (7:27; 8:14; 19:9).

*2:11 He manifested forth his glory*

Just as the cross was to be a greater manifestation of his glory (see under 1:14).

2:13,17 And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem... And his disciples

remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up

Just as He “went up” at the final Passover. A Psalm evidently relevant to the crucifixion is then applied to the Lord’s behaviour; as if the disciples later realized that this early visit to Jerusalem was a living out in the Lord of the final one.

2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

3:13-14 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

This follows straight on from the discourse about being born again. We earlier suggested that John very much saw the new birth of the believer as a coming out of the Lord’s pierced side; this was what enabled the new birth [see under 1:1 and 1:13]. 2 Cor. 5:17 likewise speaks of the new creation in the context of expounding the Lord’s death. “Lifted up” translates a Greek word usually translated “exalt”, and is used about the Lord’s exaltation after His resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Although “no man hath *ascended up* to heaven” uses a different word, the idea is just the same. The word is usually used by John to describe the Lord’s ‘going up’ to Jerusalem to keep and finally fulfil the Passover (2:13; 5:1; 7:8,10,14; 11:55; 12:20). John’s comment that only the Lord Jesus has “ascended up to heaven” may therefore be a reference to both His crucifixion and ascension. His ‘coming down’ may have a hint of how John records His body being ‘taken down’ from the cross.

3:14-18 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:*

*That whosoever believeth in him [i.e. Him hanging there in victory over sin, not just in Him as a historical person] should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

‘Belief in Him’ therefore specifically refers to looking upon the cross in understanding, and believing it. ‘He’ was and is His cross. There we see the epitome of Him. Jesus “by himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3) and yet it was by His cross and His blood that sin was purged. But He Himself was epitomized in His blood / cross. And so to believe in Him is to believe in Him crucified (Jn. 3:15,16). God’s so loving the world was in the giving of His son to die. His sending His Son into the world was specifically through the cross [see under 1:14]. One wonders whether we gaze enough upon the cross. Jn. 3:14 uses the Greek word *semeion* for the standard / pole on which the serpent was lifted up, representing as it did the cross of Christ. But *semeion* is the word which John seven times uses to describe the sign-miracles worked by the Lord in His ministry. Interestingly, the Jewish Midrash on Num. 21:9 likewise associates the pole with something miraculous: “Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it up by a miracle. He cast it into the air and it stayed there” (Soncino translation). Surely John’s point is the same as Paul’s in 1 Cor. 1:22-25: the Jews want signs / miracles, but Christ crucified is the power of God, the greatest sign. And maybe this is why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn’t record any miracle within the narrative of the crucifixion. The simple, actual death of Jesus was and is the greatest and most convicting sign.

3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God

The light coming into the world is parallel with God's son coming into the world in the cross [see under 1:5,9]. Men "came to that sight" and turned away from it (Lk. 23:48). Our natures likewise resist us concentrating upon the cross. Something in us makes our minds wander at the breaking of bread. There our deeds are manifested. Thus the breaking of bread naturally brings forth self-examination as we focus upon and reconstruct His death. There are our deeds reprov'd, and also made manifest. In murdering the Son of God, Israel showed how they hated the light; the same word is used in describing how "they hated me without a cause" (Jn. 15:25). John develops the idea in 1 Jn. 2:9,11, in teaching that to hate our brother is to walk in darkness; whereas if we come to the light of God's glory as shown in the cross, we will love our brother. The cross is the ultimate motivator to love our brethren; this was one of the reasons why the Lord died as He did (Jn. 17:26). The light of the cross is the light of all men in God's world (1:4). The Lord later associates His being the light of the world with following Him; and 'following him' is invariably associated with taking up the cross and following Him. To follow the light is to follow Christ crucified (8:12).

4:10-14 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?...Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life".

It was from the smitten rock that springing water came out. There is an endless inspiration in the cross, an endless source of that spirit of new life. And the influence of the cross cannot be passive; we will also give out living water, *we* will become as the smitten rock, and through our share in His crucifixion we will give out to others that same new and eternal life.

4:21-23 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32 Gk.; 17:1; 19:27). Yet in a sense the essence of His death was ongoing throughout His life, as discussed at length in the section [Ongoing Death](#). This the 'hour' was to come, and yet was. Then, through the cross, true worship of the Father in spirit and in truth was enabled, when the veil of the temple was torn down, and the system of Mosaic worship ended. The 'true' worship of the Father doesn't imply necessarily a 'false' worship prior to it; it is the 'true' in contrast to the shadow that had existed before it (cp. the true vine, the true manna).

4:32-34 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of...Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work

The finishing of the Father's work was accomplished in the cross- hence the final cry of triumph, "It

is finished!" (19:30). But this meat was not appreciated by them in His lifetime. The work of sharing in Christ's cross should be our meat and drink, to the eclipsing of the pressing nature of material things. For this was the context in which the Lord spoke; His men were pressing Him to attend to His humanity, whereas His mind was filled, even in tiredness and dehydration, with the living out of the cross unto the end. He saw that "meat" in the conversion of the Samaritan woman. He saw the connection between His cross and the conversion of that woman; thus "the meat...the will...[God's] work" was the cross, and yet it was also the conversion of the woman. The cross is essentially the converter of men and women, and thereby our crucifixion-lives are likewise the power of conversion.

5:25-29 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

As noted under 2:4 and 4:21-23, the hour that was coming and yet was refers to the Lord's death. There, the voice of the Son of God was made clear. We have shown elsewhere how the Lord's blood is personified as a voice crying out. Those who truly hear that voice will be raised to life. The way the graves opened at His death was surely a foretaste of this. See too notes on 16:25.

*The Lord's discourse about the Himself as the bread / manna must be understood in the light of His explanation that "the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (6:51).*

6:33-58 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world...

*Life was given to the world not only in the sense of eternal life. A way of life was shown to us, the only way of life- the life of the cross. It is a frequently found paradox in Scripture that life comes through death. The Lord's cross and resurrection are the prime example. However, it is not simply that His death opened the way to eternal life for us at His coming. It gives us spiritual life now, in that all that we do in our being and living should be motivated by the spirit of the cross. Each of the myriad daily decisions we take should be impacted by our knowledge of the cross. In this way, the cross gives life right now.*

I am the bread of life:

*Several times the Lord stresses His personal identification with the manna / bread. But this was His flesh, which He gave for the life of the world. The cross epitomised the man Jesus. Thus He could take the bread and deftly insist: "This is my body". There and then, He was to be identified with the slain body that hung upon the cross. In death, in life, this was and is and will be Him.*

He that cometh to me shall never hunger

*A reference to men and women 'coming to' the cross to behold "that sight", just as men came to the lifted up snake.*

and he that believeth on me shall never thirst

*Only in a personal appropriation of the cross to ourselves can we find an inspiration that is utterly endless. No wonder the Lord insists we remember His cross at least weekly in the breaking of bread.*

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me...

*He accomplished the will of God on the cross (see 4:32-34 notes). On the cross He came down from Heaven, there He manifested Yahweh in the greatest theophany of all time. The darkness over Him is to be read in the context of the OT theophanies which involved darkness.*

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day...

*This is similar language to that concerning the lifted up snake. God's will is that we should look upon the cross, with the faith that comes from a true understanding, and accept that great salvation. This is why the cross must be central to our whole living and thinking and conception of our faith and doctrine. The comment that "Every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him [shall] have eternal life" (Jn. 6:40) is another allusion to the serpent lifted up on the pole, where everyone who "looked upon the serpent of brass... lived" (Num. 21:9).*

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day...

*The drawing power is surely in the cross itself. There was and is a magnetism about Him there.*

It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

*We are taught of God by the display of His very essence which we see in the cross. We have emphasised the degree of 'seeing God' which is possible through the cross in 'God manifestation in the cross'.*

Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.

*We see God in the crucified Christ, just as Moses saw God in the glory which was announced before him. And we have shown that John saw this as a prototype, in essence, of the crucifixion.*

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world...

*As the manna was regularly eaten of, so the Lord's cross should be our daily inspiration and food. We must ask whether we personally and collectively have appreciated this. We obtain eternal life from the cross in the sense that we see there the definition of the true life; the life of crucifying self, slowly and painfully, for others; of enduring injustice and lack of appreciation to the very end, of holding on in the life of forgiveness and care for others in the face of their bitterest rejection...we*

*see there the life we must lead, indeed the only true life. For all else is ultimately only death. And it is "eternal" in its quality more than in its length, in that this is the type of life which will be lived eternally in the Kingdom. It is in this sense that John later comments that eternal life is "in" Christ (1 Jn. 5:11,20 cp. 3:14,15).*

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

*There is nothing else of meaning in human experience. His life, as shown in His death, is the only true and lasting sustenance for the believer.*

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him...This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

There is evident reference here to the breaking of bread. In our absorption of the bread and wine into our bodies, we symbolise our desire to appropriate His life and death into the very fabric of our lives. It is a symbol of our total commitment to living life as He did, and as it was epitomised in His time of dying. The breaking of bread is therefore not something which can be separated from the rest of our lives; it is a physical statement of how our whole lives are devoted to assimilating the spirit of this Man.

7:3-8 Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world....Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come [i.e. to die on the cross]: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth [through crucifying Him], because I testify of it [especially through the cross], that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.

The cross was the open exhibition of who Jesus really was. This He understood to be His greatest "work"; and this was His shewing of Himself unto the world. And this is why we should preach Christ crucified to the world. The cross was in every way the naked exhibition of Jesus.

7:18-19 He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him...Why go ye about to kill me?

This is the language of Jn. 17 concerning the Lord's upcoming death. The cross was and is the declaration of God's glory, the ultimate truth of life. Men sought to kill Him because He was the truth (8:40). In the cross the Lord spoke not of Himself, but only of His Father's glory. The perfection and Divinity that exuded from Him eclipsed the humanity of the man from Nazareth, the carpenter's son, the man who spoke through the larynx of a Palestinian Jew.

7:33-34 Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me:

His going unto the Father was how He understood going to the cross (13:1,3 make the connection

clear). Later, the Jews would recollect Golgotha's scene and seek Him, but not find Him. There was a time for them to accept the cross, but there would come a time when they would not be able to accept it. This surely cannot refer to their mortal lives; for whoever comes to the Son, He will in no wise cast out. So it presumably means that at the judgment, as they wallow in the wretchedness of their condemnation, they will recall the cross and wish desperately to appropriate that salvation for themselves. They will seek Him, but be unable then to find Him.

*and where I am, thither ye cannot come.*

We expect: 'Where I *will be*...'. But He was in principle already with the Father, the cross was ongoing, and He had already reached and was living the spirit of the cross.

*8:12 I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness*

See under 3:19-21. The "light" was a lifted up torch of fire, exactly as He was to be lifted up on the cross. But He saw Himself as there and then lifted up as the light of the world. The principles of the cross must be the light, the only light, of our lives. When the Lord speaks of Himself as the light / burning torch of the Jewish world, He continues: "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness" (Jn. 8:12). Nobody follows the sun when they walk- so the "light" referred to is hardly the sun. Surely the reference is back to the fiery pillar in the wilderness, which gave light by night so that the Jews could walk in the light even when darkness surrounded them.

And there's an upward spiral in all this. If "the light" is specifically a reference to God's glory manifested through the crucifixion, then this must provide the background for our understanding of Jn. 12:35-50. Here the Lord teaches that only those who walk in the light can perceive who He really is, and "the work" which was to be "finished" on the cross. It is the light of the cross which reveals to us the essence of who the Lord really is... and this in turn leads us to a keener perception of the light of the cross. Which in turn enables us to see clearer the path in which we are to daily walk.

8:21-28 Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.

*"I go my way" was to the cross. He was and is the way, the cross is the only way to the true life, both now and eternally. "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (14:4) further cements the connection between His "way" and the cross.*

Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come...I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins...

*When they had lifted up the Son of man in crucifixion, then they would "know that I am he" (v. 28). Unless they saw the manifestation of the great "I am" there, Yahweh Himself, they would die eternally. Eternal life therefore depends upon an appreciation of the cross. For this reason, the atonement must be the central doctrine of the Gospel, and those who believe it must feel it and know it personally if they are to be saved in the end. This is why 20:27-29 seems to show that the Lord understood the essence of faith in all His people as meaning that they would discern and believe the marks in His hands where the nails were.*

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

The cross would confirm all He had spoken. There the words of Jesus were made flesh (1:14). In the lifted up Jesus, we see all His words, God's words, brought together in that body.

10:4-18 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice...

*The idea of 'following' Jesus is invariably associated with the carrying of the cross. Why do this? because of the voice / word of Jesus. This must be the ultimate end of our Bible study; a picking up of the cross. For there we see God's words made flesh.*

This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them...

*This is usually stated about the Lord's prediction of His death.*

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

*It was the smitten rock that gave abundant, springing life. "I am come" seems to refer to His 'coming down' on the cross, as if it was already happening.*

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

*The Lord's care was shown in the death of the cross. Any care we may show, to the aged or ill or poor, is to be a reflection of the cross which we must see as the true and ultimate care.*

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

*The cross is the basis of unity amongst us. We cannot be focused upon "that sight" and be divided.*

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

*The Lord knows His sheep according to whether they follow Him, i.e. whether they take up His cross and follow Him. The question of cross carrying therefore reveals a man to his Lord for what he is. And it also reveals the Lord to His would be followers for who He really is.*

11:50-52 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he



prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation [*cp. 18:14*]

The death of Jesus was primarily for Israel; and that whole nation need not have perished, due to the cross. Here we see the depth of grace; their rejection of Him, their doing of their Saviour to death, was actually the means for their salvation. We would have made it the basis of their condemnation, were we in the Father's position. But potentially, it was the means of their salvation. But such grace was incomprehensible to them. The whole nation, or many of them, *did* perish. And thereby we learn that the extent of the Lord's victory is dependent upon our response to it; so much was made possible through it, but human response is still required. John evidently intended us to see the connection with his earlier comment that the Lord was lifted up *that whosoever believeth on Him* should "not perish" but have eternal life.

And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

Again, the basis of our unity is a sustained, individual appreciation of the cross.

12:23-28 And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

*The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle...was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory.*

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

*Again, the power of conversion, the fruit of many converts / sons (as in Is. 53:10-12) is the cross.*

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

*He speaks of our death in the context of His death. Baptism is a statement that we are prepared to identify with His death as the guiding principle for the rest of our eternal existence.*

If any man serve me, let him follow me;

*"Follow me" is usually used by the Lord in the context of taking up the cross and following Him. True service is cross-carrying. It cannot be that we serve, truly serve, in order to advance our own egos. It is all too easy to "serve" especially in an ecclesial context without truly carrying the Lord's cross.*

and where I am, there shall also my servant be:

*We can know something of the spirit of His cross. We can be where He was and where He is, in spirit. The life of cross carrying, devotion to the principles of the cross, will lead us to be with Him always wherever He leads us.*

if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.

Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The second glorifying was in the cross.

12:31-41 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

*The cross is what converts men; this must therefore be the essence of our preaching.*

This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.

*He had earlier spoke of Himself as the light of the world, meaning a torch lifted up, just as the snake was lifted up on a standard pole. And He had spoken this in evident anticipation of the manner of His death. Yet He speaks as if He was in His life the light of the world, by which men must walk. He was, in that His life exhibited the spirit of His final death. And this is the light, lifted up, by which we must live. There can be no sense of direction to life unless it is guided by the principles of the cross- we will know not whither we go. For those whose lives seems a long tunnel, through reason of their jobs or family burdens, let His cross enlighten our darkness.*

These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

Here the Lord combines quotations from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6, applying them to His cross. There He was lifted up in glory, with the power to both convict Isaiah of his sinfulness and also inspire his service of the Gospel. Yet Is. 53:1 also applies to Israel's refusal to hear the "report" of the Lord's miracles. The Lord saw His death as summing up the message of all the "works" of miracles which He had done, at least those recorded by John. This opens up a fruitful line of investigation of the miracles; they all show something of the spirit of the cross, and find their final fulfilment in the cross. In 4:34 [see notes there] He had spoken of His death as the final, crowning "work" of His ministry. If men understand the cross, then they see with their eyes, understand with their heart, and are converted.

13:34-35 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

"As I have loved you" is another example of how the Lord spoke of His impending sacrifice as if He had already achieved it in His life. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end in His death (13:1). 15:12-13 says the same: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Only the cross can be a strong enough power to inspire a love between us quite different to anything

known in previous times; a love so powerful that it in itself could convert men and women.

14:3-6 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

*The way He was going was to the cross- not to Heaven. There our place was prepared.*

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

*Here we have our typical problem- we know the way of the cross, but in practice we don't know- or rather, we don't want to know.*

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

*We have earlier commented that "the way" was to the cross, and there we find and see the only true kind of life. That "way" of crucifixion life leads us to the Father, just as the Lord understood His death on the cross as a going to the Father. Because the cross so supremely manifested the Father, there we find Him, if we will live the life of Christ crucified. Yet if we keep His commandments, the Father and Son come to us (14:23), and we come to them. The cross enables a mutuality of relationship between us all. Note too that "the way" is now another term for "the cross". They were asking where He was going; was He going to die on a cross? And He replies that "I am the way"- that they ought to have realized that His whole way of life was a cross carrying, and so of course, He would be literally going to die on the cross; He would follow His "way" to the end.*

14:21 I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.

The love of Christ is nearly always associated, throughout the New Testament, with His death. In the perception of that personal love of the Son for us, we have Him manifested unto us personally. This is why personal meditation upon the cross is so crucial.

15:8 Herein is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.

The Father is glorified in our fruit bearing; but it is a major theme of John that it is the cross of Christ which brings glory to Him. The connection is in the fact that a true response to the principles of the cross brings forth true spiritual fruit. The glory of God is His Name and the characteristics associated with it; and we will bear these if we respond to the spirit of the cross. In this sense the Lord Jesus could say that through His death, He would be glorified in us (Jn. 17:10). By beholding and perceiving His glory on the cross, we glorify Him (Jn. 17:24,10)

15:24-25 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

This hating without a cause surely refers to their crucifixion of Him "without a cause". He again seems to use the past tense to describe His yet future death. There men would see the Father and Son, which has to be connected with John's recurring theme that in the cross men saw what Moses

so wanted to see- Yahweh Himself manifested.

16:2-3 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

Not knowing the Father and Son was the reason why they killed the Lord (Acts 13:27,28). Because they killed Him, we must expect persecution at their hands. John stresses that because they knew not the Father nor Son, they crucified Jesus (8:19,28; 15:21). This sheds light on 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent". Knowing the Father and Son means to discern the meaning of the cross. And this is life eternal, in the same way as water of life comes from the smitten rock, and as the bread of life is in the flesh that was given on the cross for the life of the world.

*16:25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time [Gk. 'hour'] cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.*

As noted under 2:4; 4:21-23 and 5:25-29, the hour that was to come is a reference to the cross. There, we see and hear the preaching / word of ['which is', Gk.] the cross. There on the cross, there was no allegory. There we were shown plainly the Father <sup>(2)</sup>. He went on: "Behold, the hour [s.w. "time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (16:32). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. Philip had just asked to be shown the Father, just as Moses had asked (14:9,10). And the Lord is saying that in the cross, they will see plainly of the Father. And perhaps therefore we are to understand 17:24 as meaning that Jesus prayed that the disciples would physically see and spiritually understand His cross: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". "I am", "my glory", given by the Father, and the lamb slain from "the foundation of the world"...these is all language of the cross.

21:17-23 concludes the Gospel with a detailed call to stop worrying about the weakness of our brethren, and follow our Lord in cross carrying to the end. The following study investigates the context in depth, as it would seem that in this final epilogue John is giving us his mature summing up of the message of the cross.

### **"Follow me"**

There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". To follow Christ was to leave all, to give our wealth to others, to carry the cross (Mt. 19:21,22,27,28). But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father's coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt. 8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk. The blood-soaked warrior Saviour is followed by His people (Rev. 19:13,14). "He that loveth his life shall lose

it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it...if any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am (in the agony of decision in Gethsemane), there shall my servant be" (Jn. 12:25,26). The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*...if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words (see *Peter: Bible Student*); but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer. The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He didn't want Jesus to suffer because he knew that what was true of his Lord must be true of him. And this is why we too don't want to focus too much upon the Lord's sufferings; it demands too much of us. Which is why we turn away from our study of the cross. It was why as the disciples followed Jesus on the Jerusalem road [with all the connection between following Him and carrying His cross], they "were afraid" (Mk. 10:32). The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

But Peter, to his credit, did learn something from the Lord's rebuke and directive to follow Him in the sense of laying down his life. For when it became apparent that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake". He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn't occur to him, for his brethren. He didn't then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.)

Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right. After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die: "when thou shalt be old (i.e. more spiritually mature?), thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee (as Christ was carried to the cross) whither thou wouldest not (even at that last moment, Peter would flinch from the cross). This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (as Christ's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life. Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me". This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1<sup>st</sup> hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life.

John's Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John's Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord's opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keeping on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of 'follow me' is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John's Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that "hereunto were ye called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshiping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call "Follow me", and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion.

This study could be extended by analyzing John's allusions to the cross in Revelation. At the end, he twice says that when he had heard and seen all things, he realized that he was the one who had seen them, and he fell down to worship (Rev. 22:8). 'Heard and seen' is the very language he uses about seeing the cross (Jn. 19:35). His feelings as he beheld the crucified Jesus were those which he

had on surveying the whole wonder of God's purpose in Him; it was all made possible by that naked, tortured body.

All this reference to the cross throughout the Lord's ministry enables us to appreciate how for Jesus, the shadow of the cross was constantly before Him. With a Biblically attune mind as He had, He would have seen the significance of so many things in the light of the death He had to die. A window into His wonderful mind is provided by the account of the Greeks 'coming to' Him. He responds that He must be glorified, i.e. in the cross, and that a grain of wheat must first be buried in the earth and 'die' before it can bring forth many other seeds (Jn. 12:21,23,32). As He saw Gentiles coming to Him in order to 'see' Him, He would have thought of the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole / standard, and the way so many passages in Isaiah speak of the Gentiles coming together to behold the ensign / standard / pole. My point is that just one incident- a few Gentile guys coming to Him and wanting to see Him- triggered off within Him whole chains of Biblical thought relating to His forthcoming death on the pole / standard / ensign. And this must be one of literally thousands of such associations and thought processes that were going on within that altogether lovely mind.

Summing up, John's Gospel contains tremendous emphasis upon the cross. Much of the Gospel is concerned with the final week of the Lord's life, and chapters 13-19 almost totally focus upon the language and circumstances of His death. I have underlined in a Bible all the verses in John that have some reference to the cross. I found 317 out of John's 879 verses. This means that once every two or three verses, John is referring to the cross. And let us be aware that His gospel is but a transcript of the presentation of the Gospel which he normally gave. There can be no doubt at all that the cross was consciously and unconsciously His predominant theme. And so it should be with us. And in John's follow up letters to his converts who had believed that Gospel, he likewise appeals for them to live a spiritual life on the basis of the historical reality of the cross and the atonement achieved there. And our lives likewise must be walked and lived in the same light. For all else is darkness.

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## Notes

(1) Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) p. 659.

(2) See [\*God Manifestation In The Cross\*](#) for further extension of these ideas.

## 9. "The rock that followed them"

It should be evident enough that the rock which Moses smote in the desert was simply a rock; it wasn't Christ personally. It " was" Him in the sense that it represented Him. Likewise He said about the wine: " This is my blood" . It wasn't literally His blood; it was and is His blood only in that it represents His blood. Paul is describing the experience of Israel in the wilderness because he saw in it some similarities with the walk of the Corinthian believers towards God's kingdom. The whole of 1 Cor. 10 is full of such reference. And this is why he should speak about the rock which Moses smote as a symbol of Christ. The Israelites had been baptized into Moses, just as Corinth had been baptized into Christ; and both Israel and Corinth are " the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink" . " Spiritual meat...spiritual drink" shows that Paul saw the manna they ate and the water they drank as spiritually symbolic- just as He saw the rock as symbolic. Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 10:16,17 to write of how Corinth also ate and drank of Christ in the breaking of bread, and in

chapter 11 he brings home the point: like Israel, we can eat and drink those symbols, " the same spiritual meat...the same spiritual drink" , having been baptized into Christ as they were into Moses, and think that thereby we are justified to do as we like in our private lives. This is the point and power of all this allusion. The picture of their carcasses rotting in the wilderness is exhortation enough. Baptism and observing the 'breaking of bread' weren't enough to save Israel.

Jesus Himself had explained in John 6 how the manna represented His words and His sacrifice. He spoke of how out of Him would come " living water" , not still well water, but bubbling water fresh from a fountain (Jn. 4:11; 7:38). And He invites His people to drink of it. It was this kind of water that bubbled out of the smitten rock. Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21 describe it with a variety of words: gushing, bursting, water running down like a high mountain stream, " flowed abundantly" .....as if the fountains of deep hidden water had burst to the surface (" as out of the great depths" , Ps. 78:15). So the Lord was saying that He was the rock, and we like Israel drinking of what came out of Him. The Law of Moses included several rituals which depended upon what is called " the running water" (Lev. 14:5,6,50-52; 15:18; Num. 19:17). " Running" translates a Hebrew word normally translated " living" . This living water was what came out of the smitten rock. The Lord taught that the water that would come out of Him would only come after His glorification (Jn. 7:38)- an idea He seems to link with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19; Heb. 2:9). When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. The rock was " smitten" , and the water then came out. The Hebrew word used here is usually translated to slay, slaughter, murder. It occurs in two clearly Messianic passages: " ...they talk to the hurt of him [Christ] whom thou hast smitten" (Ps. 69:26); " we esteemed him [as He hung on the cross] smitten of God" (Is. 53:4). It was in a sense God who " clave the rock" so that the waters gushed out (Ps. 78:15; Is. 48:21). " Clave" implies that the rock was literally broken open; and in this we see a dim foreshadow of the gaping hole in the Lord's side after the spear thrust, as well as a more figurative image of how His life and mind were broken apart in His final sacrifice. Yahweh, presumably represented by an Angel, stood upon [or 'above'] the rock when Moses, on Yahweh's behalf, struck the rock. Here we see a glimpse into the nature of the Father's relationship with the Son on the cross. He was both with the Son, identified with Him just as the Angel stood on the rock or hovered above it as Moses struck it...and yet He also was the one who clave that rock, which was Christ. As Abraham with Isaac was a symbol of both the Father and also the slayer, so in our far smaller experience, the Father gives us the trials which He stands squarely with us through. And within the wonder of His self-revelation, Yahweh repeatedly reveals Himself as " the rock" - especially in Deuteronomy. And yet that smitten rock " was [a symbol of] Christ" . On the cross, " God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" . There He was the most intensely manifested in His beloved Son. There God was spat upon, His love rejected. There we see the utter humility and self-abnegation of the Father. And we His children must follow the same path, for the salvation of others.

The rock " followed them" . We must understand this as a metonymy, whereby " the rock" is put for what came out of it, i.e. the fountain of living water. It seems that this stream went with them on their journey. A careful reading of Ex. 17:5,6 reveals that at Rephidim, Moses was told to " Go on before the people" , to Horeb. There he struck the rock, and yet the people drank the water in Rephidim. The water flowed a long way that day, and there is no reason to think that it didn't flow with them all the time. The records make it clear enough that the miraculous provision of water was in the same context as God's constant provision of food and protection to the people (Dt. 8:15,16). The rock gave water throughout the wilderness journey (Is. 48:21). This would surely necessitate that the giving of water at Horeb was not a one-off solution to a crisis. There is a word play in the Hebrew text of Is. 48:21: " He led them through the Horebs [AV 'desert places']" by making water



flow from the rock. The Horeb experience was repeated for 40 years; as if the rock went on being smitten. Somehow the water from that smitten rock went with them, fresh and bubbling as it was the first moment the rock was smitten, right through the wilderness (1). It was living, spring water- not lying around in puddles. The water that came from that one rock felt as if God had opened up fresh springs and torrents in the desert (Ps. 74:15 NAS). It always tasted as if it was just gushing out of the spring; and this wonder is commented upon by both David and Isaiah (Ps. 78:15,16,20; 105:41; Is. 48:21). It was as if the rock had just been struck, and the water was flowing out fresh for the first time. In this miracle, God clave the rock and there came out rivers (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 78:16,20; Is. 43:20). Each part of Israel's encampment had the water as it were brought to their door. And so it is in our experience of Christ, and the blessing enabled by His sacrifice. The blessings that come to us are deeply personal, and directed to us individually. He died once, long ago, and yet the effect of His sacrifice is ever new. In our experience, it's as if He has died and risen for us every time we obtain forgiveness, or any other grace to help in our times of need. We live in newness of life. The cross is in that sense ongoing; He dies and lives again for every one who comes to Him. And yet at the end of their wilderness journey, Moses reflected that Israel had forgotten the rock that had given them birth. The water had become such a regular feature of their lives that they forgot the rock in Horeb that it flowed from. They forgot that 'Horeb' means 'a desolate place', and yet they had thankfully drunk of the water the first time in Rephidim, 'the place of comfort'. We too have done the same, but the length of time we have done so can lead us to forget the smitten rock, back there in the loneliness and desolation of Calvary. Not only did his disciples forsake him and his mother finally go away home, but He even felt that the Father had forsaken Him. As Abraham left alone in the Messianic "horror of great darkness", as Isaac alone with only his Father, leaving the other men behind...so the Lord on the cross was as a single green root grown up out of a parched desert. Let us never forget that 'Horeb'; and let's not let the abundant new life and blessing which there is in Christ become something ordinary. God forbid that we like Corinth, like Israel, should drink of that sparkling water each week in our 'place of comfort' and go forth to do just as we please.

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## Notes

(1) There is repeated emphasis in the records that the water came from the [singular] rock. However Ps. 78:16 speaks of God cleaving the rocks. I suggest this is an intensive plural- the sense is 'the one great rock'. The next verses (17,20) go on to speak of how the water came from a singular rock.

## 10. Taking Up The Cross

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life.

"Take up *the* cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "*the* cross" rather than '*a* cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between *our* taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him.

Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our *attitudes*. "Take up" is translated 'take on' when we read of 'taking on' the yoke of Christ, i.e. learning of Him (Matt. 11:29). To take up Christ's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ.

### **The Context Of "take up the cross"**

Consider the contexts in which Christ spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross!'

(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, Christ spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.

(3) The command to take up the cross in Matt. 10:38 is in the context of Christ's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but Christ asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow Christ - but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with Christ. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ. Israel were an empty vine, without fruit in God's eyes- because the spiritual fruit they appeared to bring forth was in fact fruit to themselves (Hos. 10:1; see *From Milk To Meat* 2.13 for more on this).

### **Against The Grain**

Solomon is an example of this. He loved building and architecture (Ecc. 2:4-6; 2 Chron. 8:4-6), therefore his building of God's temple was something he revelled in. But when it came to obeying the clear commands concerning not multiplying horses or wives, Solomon simply disregarded them. Likewise Israel were so sad to lose the temple because "*Our* holy and *our* beautiful house...is

burned...and all *our* pleasant things are laid waste" (Is. 64:11). It was *God's* house, not theirs. They only mourned for the loss of it insofar as it was a reflection of what they revelled in anyway, as an expression of themselves, rather than a means of worshipping God.

By contrast, Paul says that the proof that he had been given a command to preach the Gospel was in the fact that he preached against his own will; he says that if he did it willingly, i.e. because it coincided with his own will, then he had his reward in this life (this is a paraphrase of 1 Cor. 9:17 and context). It seems strange to think that Paul had to *make* himself preach, that he did it against his natural will. But remember his poor eyesight, ugly physical appearance, his embarrassing early life spent persecuting and torturing Christians - no wonder public preaching of Christ was something he had to make himself do. It may be that the reason he went to the wilderness of Arabia after his conversion was that he was running away from the command to preach publicly (Gal. 1:17,18). Several times he speaks of how he fears he will lose his nerve to preach, and thereby lose his salvation; he even asks others to pray for him that he will preach more boldly. It also needs to be remembered that Paul was a passionate Jew; he loved his people. It seems that he "preached circumcision" (Gal. 5:11) in the sense of being involved in actively trying to proselytize Gentiles. But it was Paul the Hebrew of the Hebrews who was called to be the apostle *to the Gentiles*. It might have sounded more appropriate if preaching to the Jews was his specialism, and fisherman Peter from half-Gentile Galilee went to the Gentiles. But no. Each man was sent against his grain. And more than this. It seems that the Lord set up Peter, James and John as some kind of replacement to the Scribes and rabbis. Peter was given the authority to bind and loose on earth, with Heaven's assent (Mt. 16:19); and binding and loosing were terms widely used amongst the Rabbis with respect to the force of their commandments and judgments having God's agreement (even in the NT record, 'binding' means 'to decree' in Mt. 23:4). They had the keys to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), and shut it up against men. Now, in the Lord's new Israel, Peter was to have that power. An uneducated fisherman was to have the place of the learned Scribes; it would have seemed so much more appropriate if Paul took this place. And James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of...truly they were being pushed against the grain.

This all confirms the suggestion that Paul had to make himself preach; it was against his natural inclination - and yet this was exactly why Christ had called him to preach (1 Cor. 9:17). In refusing funding for his work from the Corinthians, he *abased* himself that they might be *exalted*- all language of the crucifixion (2 Cor. 11:7 cp. Phil. 2:8,9). Thus his refusing of legitimate help to make his way easier was an enactment in himself of the cross. The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. He had to warn Timothy against the tendency to think that a man can attain the crown of mastery without striving for it according to the laws (2 Tim. 2:5). We can have an appearance of spiritual progress towards the crown, as did the man who quickly built his house on the sand. But it was the man who perhaps didn't finish his house (we are left to imagine) but who had hacked away at the rock of his own heart, striving to seriously obey the *essence* of his Lord's words, who was accepted in the end. And let's not forget Amos, too. He defended his

prophetic ministry, as Paul defended his, by saying that it was something he had been called to quite against his nature. He was not a prophet nor a prophet's son, and yet he was taking from following his flock of sheep to be a prophet to Israel- quite against his will and inclination (Am. 7:14,15).

### **Real Crosses- ?**

It is not difficult to see the relevance of these principles to our lives. Consider the following possibilities:

- A young brother loves the idea of travel, as many young men in the world do. So he travels, preaching as he goes. He may reason that he is obeying the command to preach world-wide; actually he is doing what he wants to do.
- A brother or sister may have no desire to marry - an attitude shared by some in the world. It may seem they are rising to the heights of 1 Cor. 7:32 - staying single for the Lord's sake - but actually they may be doing just what they want to do anyway.
- A brother in (e.g.) China may enjoy writing letters to brothers in England because he likes to have friends in England and to improve his English - like many Chinese. But he may kid himself that he is writing those letters only because he likes fellowshiping his brethren in Christ, although he may be much less enthusiastic about contact with his Chinese brethren.
- Some people like to be in a group; they are social people. For them it is easy to attend ecclesial meetings; they like going out and meeting people. But for the single sister who has had her life wrecked by a series of bad relationships, and has four young children...to get out to a meeting full of those she perceives to be happy-clappy people with no problems: this is a real picking up of the cross. She would much rather stay at home, in her own world, and break bread alone.
- Some will reason that they marry and have children because this is what God commands, but actually this is only doing what most human beings throughout history have desired to do. Most human parents enjoy giving some of their time and money to their children. The fact that Christian parents feel the same doesn't *necessarily* mean that they are being spiritual or Godly in doing so.
- It has often been observed that a reward of righteousness can be self-righteousness. Especially is this to be seen in public acts of generosity. L.G. Sargent coined a powerful phrase: " Self satisfaction at the emotional gluttony of giving" . The fact we make sacrifice, however great, is not necessarily the sacrifice of true love of Him and His Son which God looks for (cp. 1 Cor. 13). Remember how Israel made such great sacrifices to their idols, when ultimately they were only doing it for their own pleasure.
- All of us have a certain amount of anger and aggression in our souls. All too often we can use the Truth as a vehicle to express this, whilst we deceive ourselves that we are actually standing up for the Truth's doctrines. Consider the young well-versed brother triumphantly, aggressively debating the trinity with a Biblically-ignorant Catholic; or the sister storming out of a meeting because a brother says 'You' rather than 'Thee' in his prayer. In these rather exaggerated examples, love of the Truth's purity is made an excuse for expressing the anger and aggression that is within every human soul. To defend purity without such anger coming out is indeed a spiritual art form.

And so each of us could go on finding examples, drawn from our own deeply private lives. But by

now the point is clear: we are called to *take up* the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. If only the picture and spirit of Him and His cross were more permanently with us! We would be the more sensitive to our need to serve until it hurts, to truly sacrifice *ourselves*, not to fake our fellowshiping of His sufferings. Like David, we must recognize that there is no point in offering a sacrifice which has cost us nothing. Sacrifice is essential if we are to have a covenant relationship with God (Ps. 50:5).

It seems to me that the Lord asks each of us to do that which is essentially difficult for us personally, something against the grain of our very nature and personal understanding of and position in life. This may explain why sometimes He asked those He cured to spread the message (perhaps the introverts, or those whose past lives had been notorious?), whilst others (perhaps the extroverts?) He asked to remain silent about what He had done. When the Lord asked Peter to go out fishing, for example, this was totally and exactly against every grain of Peter's natural self. He was a fisherman, he'd been fishing all night, he knew it was *absolutely* pointless to try again. He knew that a carpenter didn't know what a fisherman did. The Lord's request was a blow at the justifiable pride in his specialism which every working man has. If the Lord Jesus had asked let's say *Paul* to go out fishing, well, I guess he'd have obeyed with no real difficulty. But He asked Peter to do that, at that very moment, because it was a real cross for Peter to pick up. Likewise it would have seemed logical for Paul to preach to the Jews, and Peter to the Gentiles (note how the Gentiles approached Philip, from semi-Gentile Galilee, in Jn. 12:20,21). Yet in fact the Lord God used those men in the very opposite way, right against the grain of their natural abilities. He asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan. And Abraham was asked to do what was so evidently the hardest thing- to offer up his only, specially beloved son.

Ex. 38:23 seems to imply Aholiab was used to working with materials but had to work with metals (cp. Ex. 31:56), in the same way as in the building of the temple, the goldsmiths had to build. But (v.18), they were not only confirmed in their natural talent but also confirmed in going against the wind of natural inclination. Ex. 35:34,35 seems to imply Aholiab was best at embroidery, Bezaleel at metal work – but both had to do the other's work too.

### **"Him that overcometh"**

The Lord Jesus, in His final words to us, keeps repeating a theme - " To him that overcometh..." runs like a refrain throughout Revelation 2 and 3. Many of those to whom He wrote in Rev. 2 and 3 were fitting a few convenient commands into their lives, but ignoring, doctrinally and practically, what did not appeal to them. There is reason to think that in our own lives, personally and collectively, there is this same tendency. " To him that *overcometh*..." is therefore a call to us too. The one who overcomes will eat of the tree of life, as will he who does Christ's commands (Rev. 2:7; 22:14). To overcome is to do the commandments; to overcome is therefore to overcome ourselves - our natural resistance to God's principles.

All of us are weak-willed, vacillating by nature - although we may cover this through making

dogmatic statements of one sort or another. All too many of us (and thousands out in the world) live lives full of fine intentions, deep realizations of where we need to change - yet failing, time and again, to actually take up the cross. For myself, this is an agony of my soul. I speak, I talk, I think, I decide, so much. Yet when it comes to doing it, I fail utterly. " Well, we're all like that" , I can hear you saying. Whether or not 'we're all like that' is irrelevant- to me. And it should be to you too; for perhaps you know exactly how I feel. Our failure to actually *do* what we resolve to do, what we know we ought to do in the light of Christ's example, in response to Him who loved us and gave himself for us, should be an agony of your soul too. Long term attitudes, entrenched habits, things we feel we just can't do without; rejecting *these* things is taking up the cross. The Lord almost mocked the Pharisees for tithing herbs but not showing true mercy and love. It's as if He were saying: 'Of course it's easy to be religious in things like tithing herbs. But the really essential issues, love, mercy, justice- that's not so easy. But they are crucial'. We become experts at manipulating our understanding of God's commands so that we keep what we should reject, and hive off those parts of our lives which ought to be the subject of close self-examination.

And so the cross is realistically intended to be lived out in daily experience. The record of the crucifixion and trials of the Lord are framed in language which would have been relevant to the first hearers of the Gospel as they too faced persecution and suffering for their faith. John's account of the interrogation of the Lord by the Jewish leaders, accusing Him of being a false prophet, was surely written in the way it was to provide encouragement to John's converts [the " Johannine community" as theologians refer to it] to see how their court appearances before the Jews were in fact a living out of their Lord's cross [\(1\)](#). They too were to 'speak openly to the world' and 'bear witness to the truth before the world', living out the cross in the way in which they responded to the great commission.

Do you see what I'm saying? Do you hear the call of your Lord to *take up* that cross to serve, as an act of the will? Ten minutes' self-examination will show how alarmingly much of our spirituality is only compounding our own natural personality and preferred lifestyle. If we can at least grasp the spirit of taking up Christ's cross, there will be a deep sense of fellowship with others who have reached the same realization; and a deep joy and calmness in confidence of sharing His resurrection. *The cross is attainable*. It's not just an awful thing that happened in a few hours of history so long ago, the details of which we flinch from, excusing ourselves that it's just too terrible. Look how Paul alludes to it, and arose to the point where he could truly claim to us that he was living the crucified life. The Lord predicted in Mk. 10.44,45: " and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be **slave of all**. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and **to give His life a ransom for many**". And Paul alludes to this in 1 Cor. 9.19: " I have made myself **a slave to all...**" ; and later in 1 Cor. 10.33: " just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but **the profit of the many, that they may be saved**". Through his sharing in the cross of the Lord Jesus, he, the very human Paul, became an agent in the salvation of all men. He too became a 'slave of all' after the pattern of the Lord in His time of dying. We may make excuses about Jesus not being exactly in our position, because God was His Father etc. Valid or not, those excuses disappear when we are faced with Paul's challenge. The cross is attainable for us, as it was for Paul. Christ offered Himself on the cross "through the eternal spirit" (Heb. 9:14). I understand by this that it was the Spirit of God, understanding from His word what God really wanted, what He is really like and thereby demands of us, which led the Lord Jesus to the cross. And why the odd phrase "the eternal spirit"? Surely to show that this same Spirit operates today, and if we follow it, will lead us likewise to the same death of the cross. These things are challenging to the very core of our being, the very fabric of our self-understanding. We who cower in the dentist's chair, who fear and avoid pain, who would sooner die than have a surgery without anesthetic... are called to die with Jesus, the

death of the cross.

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## Notes

(1) For more on this see R. Kysar, *John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) p. 273; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Seabury, 1983) Vol. 3 p. 238.

## 11. Our Christian Extremism

Repeatedly, the Lord bids us take up our cross and follow Him. The life of self-crucifixion, daily carrying a stake of wood to the place where we will be nailed to it and left to die a tortuous death...day by day living in the intensity of a criminal's 'last walk' to his death; how radical and how demanding this really is can easily be lost upon us. And it can be overlooked how totally unacceptable was the idea of dying on a cross in the context of the first century. In Roman thought, the cross was something shocking; the very word 'cross' was repugnant to them. It was something only for slaves. Consider the following writings from the period <sup>(1)</sup>.

- Cicero wrote: "The very word 'cross' should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but...the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man...your honours [i.e. Roman citizenship] protect a man from...the *terror of the cross*".

- Seneca the Elder in the *Controversiae* records where a master's daughter marries a slave, and she is described as having become related to *cruciarum*, 'the crucified'. Thus 'the crucified' was used by metonymy for slaves. The father of the girl is taunted: "If you want to find your son-in-law's relatives, **go to the cross**". It is hard for us to appreciate how slaves were seen as less than human in that society. There was a stigma and revulsion attached to the cross.

- Juvenal in his 6<sup>th</sup> *Satire* records how a wife ordered her husband: "Crucify this slave". "But what crime worthy of death has he committed?" asks the husband, "no delay can be too long when a man's life is at stake". She replies: "What a fool you are! Do you call a slave a man?".

The sense of shame attached to the cross was also there in Jewish perception of it. Whoever was hung on a tree was seen as having been cursed by God (Dt. 21:23). Justin Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, records Trypho (who was a Jew) objecting to Christianity: "We are aware that the Christ must suffer...but that he had to be *crucified*, that he had to die a death of such shame and dishonour- a death cursed by the Law- prove this to us, for we are totally unable to receive it" <sup>(2)</sup>. Justin Martyr in his *Apology* further records: "They say that our madness consists in the fact that we place a *crucified* man in second place after the eternal God". The Romans also mocked the idea of following a crucified man. The caricature [see box] shows a crucified person with an ass's head. The ass was a symbol of servitude [note how the Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass]. The caption sarcastically says: "Alexamenos worships God".

Yet with this background, "the preaching of the cross" won many converts in the first century. "The Jews require a sign and the Greeks [Gentiles, e.g. Romans] seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:22,23). Paul

exalts that Christ “became obedient to death- even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:8 NIV). Those brethren and sisters must have endured countless taunts, and many times must have reflected about changing their message. But the historical reality of the crucifixion, the eternal and weighty importance of the doctrine of the atonement, as we might express it today...this was of itself an imperative to preach it. We cannot change our message because it is apparently unattractive. The NT suggests that the cross was not just something shocking and terrible, but a victory, a triumph over sin and death which should be gloried in and thereby preached to the world in joy and hope (Gal. 6:14). We may look at the world around us and decide that really, there is no way at all our message will convert anyone. We are preaching something so radically different from their world-view. But the preaching of a crucified King and Saviour in the first century was just as radical- and that world was turned upside down by that message! People *are* potentially willing to respond, even though in the stream of faces waiting for transport or passing along a busy street, we might not think so. It will be our simple and unashamed witness which will be used by the Father to convert them; we needn’t worry about making our message acceptable to them. There was nothing acceptable in the message of the cross in the first century- it was bizarre, repulsive and obnoxious. But the fact men and women gave their lives to take it throughout the known world shows the power of conviction which it has. And that same power is in the Gospel which we possess. If we believe it rather than merely know it, we will do the same with it.

## Public Witness

There was something essentially public about crucifixion. Quintillian wrote: “Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear...[crucifixion] relates not to much to retribution as to exemplary effect” [quoted in Hengel].

Minucius records that opposition to the Christian faith was because the believers so closely identified themselves with the crucified Christ that His death and shame were seen as theirs: “they are said to be a man who was punished with death as a criminal and the fatal wood of his cross, thus providing suitable liturgy for the depraved friends” (3). Thus we see how deep was their appreciation of the doctrine of representation: they saw the Lord in His time of dying as representative of themselves. Time and again the words and actions of Paul show that both consciously and unconsciously he was aware that he was experiencing in himself the experiences of his Lord. In his preaching he *made himself a slave of all, weak* that he might gain the weak (1 Cor. 9:19,22). This is language he elsewhere understands as appropriate to the Lord in His death (2 Cor. 13:4; Phil. 2:7 cp. Mk. 9:35). In our preaching, like Paul, our lives should placard the crucified Christ before the eyes of men (Gal. 3:1). Yet remember how obnoxious it was for a Roman citizen like Paul to have anything to do with a cross, to even think about it or speak the word. And yet he placarded Christ crucified to men, radically going against all he humanly was and was meant to be. Our preaching of Christ likewise involves us in presenting something radical to our surrounding world. A village headman converted in an African context may have to give up his position, preaching the virtue of humility; high caste Indian brethren may have to publicly associate with their lower caste brethren, evidently esteeming them as better than themselves to be; Europeans have to reject promotion to jobs which cannot be done with the spirit of Christ...in all these things, we are fools for Christ’s sake; for the sake of His cross. And yet we are witnesses for Him through all this, in a more compelling way than we may realise at the time. The very nature of crucifixion meant something public, for all to see. There is no way we can hide our conversion from others. Those who do this usually end up losing what faith they had. The Lord taught this: He said that a lamp is not lit to be placed under a bucket but to give light to others. If we hide our light under the



bucket of embarrassment and worldly behaviour, *it will go out*. I am not saying we will be damned if we don't preach. But the Lord is saying that if the light of personal faith is hidden from others, it will go out. If we have the Truth- use it or lose it. The crucifixion life is one that by its nature is evident to all. For this reason I am hesitant about applicants for baptism not wanting to tell their families for fear of persecution. I appreciate that there are specific cases where this seems *in the short term* the most reasonable thing. But ultimately, a true life of faith cannot be hid.

What I am saying is that there was and is something utterly radical and extreme about the essential message of Christ crucified. He died for us, that we should henceforth not live unto ourselves but unto Him. Because we identify with His death and resurrection, the world is crucified unto us. The cross is to be seen as the pattern of our self-denial. We will not become mere religious fanatics; but His death and dying, and His life and living, will mean that we are deeply and fundamentally affected. We will reject the passing pleasures of the flesh which this world offers, its drunkenness, drugs and adultery; in all our ways we will show whom we know and whom we have believed. Somehow our body language, our dress, our deportment, our ways "which be in Christ" will preach to the world the radical nature of our experience of Christ. We will be fools for Christ's sake in the eyes of the world; for belief in the demands of the cross is still as essentially foolish and bizarre as it was in the first century. Our understanding of the atonement- of "the cross"- makes us separate from the various sects of Christendom. Dare I say it, but in this sense we "have the Truth" in the sense that we have the real Christ. There is therefore (or should be) an overpowering *urgency* about our witness.

## Demanding Language

Despite "the offence of the cross", Paul preached it. "I determined not to know [an idiom for 'teach the knowledge of] any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul didn't accommodate his message to the ears of his hearers. There are times when God's revelation *is* accommodated to us, but not when it comes to the basic message of Christ and the demands which His cross makes upon us. Likewise the Bible contains teaching about the place of women which was violently in collision with the accepted place of women at the time. It is not that the Bible [or its believers] seek to be controversial. But there is a radical and uncompromisable message which is expressed.

The Lord used language which likewise challenged people. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). All three synoptics record how He summarily ordered His weary disciples to feed a crowd numbering thousands in a desert, when they had no food (Mt. 14:16; Mk. 6:37; Lk. 9:13). He criticises the man who earnestly wished to follow Him, but first had to attend his father's funeral. "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22) was a shocking, even coarse figure to use- 'let the dead bodies drag one more dead body into their grave'. And then He went on to speak and show His matchless, endless love. Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him...Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). He expressed Himself to the Jews in ways which

were almost provocative (consider His Sabbath day miracles, and invitation to drink His blood). He intended to shake them. He seems to have used hyperbole in order to make the point concerning the high standard of commitment He expects. Thus He spoke of cutting off the limbs that offend. He told those who were interested in following Him that He had nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). That may have been true that night, but the ministering women surely saw to it that this was not the case with Him most nights.

## The Harder Side Of God

The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus actually serves as an attraction to the serious believer. The lifted up Jesus draws men unto Him. When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon " as many as heard these things" . Many would have thought His attitude hard; this man and woman had sold their property and given some of it (a fair percentage, probably, to make it look realistic) to the Lord's cause. And then He slew them. But just afterwards, " believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:12,14). The Lord's harder side didn't turn men away from Him; rather did it bring them to Him. And so the demands and terror of the preaching of the cross did likewise. The balance between His utter grace, the way (e.g.) He marvelled at men's puny faith, and His harder side, is what makes His character so utterly magnetic and charismatic in the ultimate sense. Think of how He beheld the rich man and loved Him, and yet at the same time was purposefully demanding: He told Him to sell all He had and give it to beggars. Not to the work of the ministry, but to beggars, many of whom one would rightly be cynical of helping. It was a large demand, the Lord didn't make it to everyone, and He knew He was touching the man's weakest point. If the Lord had asked that the man's wealth be given to Him, he may have agreed. But to beggars.... And yet the Lord made this heavy demand with a deep love for the man.

Many readers will be perplexed by questions such as: 'Why does God call this man but not that woman, who seems such a nice person? Why does God allow children and animals to die, in many cases without hope, according to the Bible? Why are many good living people not called to know the Truth? Why do some people suffer so terribly? Why does God allow some to be born mentally ill, and others likewise to suffer through no fault of their own?'. To me, these must remain questions to struggle with. I see no trite answer within the limits of Biblical exposition (4). But for me, this apparently harder side of God in a way attracts me to Him. I see in these imponderables that surely there is a God above, and we are mere men, with all the arrogance of our misunderstanding. This harder side of God converts men, and will convert them at the final judgment. God judged nations [often terribly] in order that men might *know* Him as Yahweh (e.g. Ez. 25:11; 28:22; 30:19). Yahweh is exalted in His judging of men (Is. 5:16). His judgments make His Name / character manifest. "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy Name?...all nations shall come and worship before thee; *for thy judgments are made manifest*" (Rev. 15:4). A number of OT passages (e.g. Is. 25:3) hint that a remnant of Israel's Arab enemies will actually repent and accept Yahweh's Truth- *after* their experience of His judgments. God is to be feared and worshipped because of the hour of His judgment (Rev. 14:7); "when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Is. 26:9).

## Higher Standards

And so the stark and chilling message of the cross somehow attracts men, as it did in the first century- despite being such an obnoxious Gospel. There is something in human nature which responds to extremism; we want a challenge, we want orders to live by, we want to see a hard line

in some ways. And we must articulate these tendencies in us to response to the cross. The height of the demand is in itself proof that this religion we have found is truly and ultimately of God: that we are to be willing to give up our lives, our relationships, to ditch that worldly girlfriend or boyfriend, to appear prudish and unsociable in our rejection of the adultery and drug taking of this world, to be honest in our business dealings, to even lose money because of this...for the sake of living the life of the crucified Saviour with whom we have identified, and whose eternal life we now seek to live. Martial described a crucifixion victim [in *Liber Spectaculorum*]: "In all his body was nowhere a body's shape". We are to be "conformed to the image of [God's] son" (Rom. 8:29)- to share His *morphe*, which was so marred beyond recognition that men turned away in disgust (Is. 52:14 cp. Phil. 2:7). The mind that was in Him then must be in us now (Phil. 2:5).

It seems to me that the height of the standard, the extent of the demand, the power of the imperative, is not felt by us as a community as it should be. Those who first heard the Lord's words had seen crucifixion. "When a man from their village took up a cross and went off down the track with a little knot of Roman soldiers, they knew he was on a one-way journey. He would not be back" <sup>(5)</sup>. The call to carry the cross means far more than to patiently bear the hardships of daily life; the cross was an instrument of death, not a means for carrying burdens. Let us get it straight. It was and is a call for a total abandonment of selfishness; it is an image that speaks of the utmost in self-denial. It's a one-way journey. The Lord and Paul are asking a very high level of commitment from us. It's so high that it seems strange to us. The reason, I suggest, is that 21st Century Christianity and first century Christianity are very different- in terms of commitment. Consider the sort of thing that was accepted as common-place in the early church, and yet which today would be frowned upon as spiritual fanaticism:

- There is evidence that " the single life was highly honoured and respected in the early church, sometimes even going beyond the teaching of Paul" . And 1 Cor. 7 seems to invite single people to dedicate themselves to the Lord's service rather than family life. Yet for us, marriage is given more respect than singleness. Any serious advocacy of 'trying the single life' would be seen as extremist.
- Converts joyfully selling all their lands and property, pooling the money, and dividing it among the poorer members. Yet how many owners of property of whatever kind have seriously even thought of giving it away for the benefit of their brethren? We can't just leave welfare to 'the mission' or the 'richer brethren'.
- Husbands and wives regularly abstaining from sex so they could the more intensely pray and fast for a period of several days. Surveys of Christian prayer habits reveal that on average we spend around 10 minutes / day praying. And scarcely any fast.
- Elders who spent so much time in prayer that they had to ask others to do some practical work for them so they could continue to give the same amount of time to prayer (Acts 6:2-4).
- Young brethren, " the messengers of the churches" , who spent their lives full time running errands in dangerous situations throughout the known world.
- Over zealous brethren (in Thessalonica) who packed up their jobs because they were so sure the second coming was imminent.
- The expectation that the Gospel of Mark (at least) was to be memorised by all converts. Most

Christians can scarcely quote more than 50 Bible verses.

- The assumption that all believers would make converts (1 Cor. 3:10-15).
- Widows were expected to remain single; if they remarried, this was acceptable (1 Cor. 7:39,40), but Paul describes it as 'waxing wanton against Christ' (1 Tim. 5:11) because it was a stepping down from the higher standard, which he defines as remaining single (1 Cor. 7:40). This seems a harsh attitude to us. But this is what the Spirit taught.
- Believers were regularly persecuted, tortured, imprisoned and forced to migrate long distances unless they made what some today would consider only a tokenistic denial of their faith.

I am not advocating any of these things specifically; rather together do they give a picture of a community who knew, in their context, the meaning of the cross.

We have somehow hived off the first century ecclesia in our mind, as if to say to ourselves: 'Well, that was them, but we're in a totally different spiritual environment'. The same mind-set occurs when we consider the zeal of earlier believers in more recent history. We *may* not need to suffer or physically extend ourselves in these ways; but the imperative of the cross is to live the life of Christ until it hurts. To keep our mouth shut under provocation, to forgive our apparently slanderous brethren, from the heart...these sort of things are also the living and dying of the cross. There is no doubt that the more we read the New Testament, the more we will see that the level of commitment required is high indeed. The fact many failed to rise up to it doesn't affect this. But as the disciples kept changing the subject whenever the Lord started speaking about the cross, and as men hid their faces from the physical reality of Christ crucified, we can likewise turn away from the demands of His cross. Notice how when the Lord spoke of going up to Jerusalem and being crucified there, Peter tried to stop Him. The Lord responded: "Get thee [Peter] *behind* me...if any man will come *after* me, let him...take up his cross and *follow* me". The words in italics are all the same in the original. Jesus is saying: 'Come on Peter, take up your cross and walk behind me; don't stop me walking to my crucifixion, just because you know that if I die in that way, so you must too'. We can turn away from the cross [and we all have a problem concentrating on it at the memorial meeting]...simply because we realise what it therefore and thereby implies for us, who are "in Christ", represented in Him in His time of awful dying. When Peter was told in Jn. 21 that he would die with hands spread out [a reference to crucifixion], he was then bidden 'follow after' the Lord there and then. Very often 'following' Jesus is in the context of carrying the cross. And so Peter did follow; Jesus went in front, and Peter walked behind Him. But then he turned away from following Him because he had noticed John following. "Lord, and what shall this man do?" was met with a call back to the essential: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me". He got so easily distracted from the call of the cross, in this case by the 'following' of his brother. And we know this problem all too well. I am not preaching fanaticism or extremism in a cult-like sense. I am drawing attention to the essentially radical demands of the crucifixion life we vowed to live through our baptism into that death, those vows which we confirm by taking the cup at the memorial meeting [note how 'baptism' and 'cup' are both symbols of the Lord's passion in Mk. 10:39]...and asking us to face up to them, rather than turn away from them and quickly get back on with our external Christianity, or with the futile analysis of others as Peter did with John. And if we can live that crucifixion life, albeit partially, we will even now know His resurrection life, with which we are also identified. And this is life of matchless joy and peace through believing.

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## Notes

- (1) These quotes are from Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World*.
- (2) Quoted in Maurice Goguel, *Jesus The Nazarene*.
- (3) Quoted in Bill Farrar, *The Preaching Of A Crucified Saviour*. I am indebted to this work in many ways.
- (4) The best I can do is a stuttering, poorly written appendix on 'The Justice Of God' at the end of *Bible Basics*.
- (5) Leon Morris, *The Cross Of Jesus*.

## 12. Peter And The Cross

### Leaving All

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him. Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

"Sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor	"We have left all
...and come, take up the cross	[no comment by Peter]
and follow me"	...and have followed thee"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end. And was Peter really correct to say that he had really "left all"? He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's..." (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night (11:5)- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. Mk. 14:68]. Now, by the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing"

(Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack (Mt. 17:27). The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are Christians, apparent followers of the Lord in a world which choses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

The Lord went on to define what leaving all really was- and he includes leaving wife and brethren. Peter hadn't left at least one of his brethren; for Andrew was with him. And 1 Cor. 9:5 implies Peter's wife accompanied him in his travelling. Jesus went on to point out that the last shall be first and the first last, as if warning Peter not to over-rate his following and cross-carrying. And He then gave the parable of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour labourer being rewarded with the same salvation as he who thought he deserved so much more (Mt. 20:1-16). Surely the Lord is broaching Peter's intolerance of the rich young man's honest recognition that he couldn't follow as required. For Peter was to learn the paucity of his following, and to see how in sacrifice of material as well as more abstract things, he had not really understood what following Christ was all about. And yet even at that time, he could display a fierce and commendable loyalty for the things of his Lord. He knew Him as Lord and Master, and he said well. But there was so much further yet to go.

More than not fully forsaking his fishing gear by selling it, it would seem that Peter as a working man had a love of his job. He left his fishing in Mark 1 to follow the Lord, but returned to it by Luke 5. Then he left it, and returned to it in the post-resurrection crisis. The Lord's provision of fish on the shore was simply saying: 'You don't need to fish any more'. He asked them to drag the nets to land, which would usually have broken them, but they didn't break. Likewise He had earlier told fisherman Peter to cast the net on the other side, when Peter knew full well which side of the boat there were likely to be fish. And a whirlwind storm had come upon Galilee which would have drowned fisherman and sailor Peter were it not for the Lord's presence. In all these things, Peter was being taught to quit the life that he loved. "Lovest thou me more than these?" was asked with the huge catch of fish lying there on the shore- a fisherman's dream. It could be that the question referred to them. 'Go and feed *my* sheep rather than worry about *your* fish'. When earlier the boats had begun to sink with too many fish, the word used for 'sinking' occurs in 1 Tim. 6:9, about believers being drowned in materialism and thereby condemning themselves (Lk. 5:7). Whether it's a career that we love, a livelihood that we simply trust as a sure means of human survival, or the spiritual pride that we love the Lord more than our brethren, all these things are demanded of us by the demanding Lord, as we seek to follow Him to the cross.

### **"Follow me"**

There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father's coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt. 8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk. The blood-soaked warrior Saviour is followed by His people (Rev. 19:13,14). "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it...if any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am

(in the agony of decision in Gethsemane), there shall my servant be" (Jn. 12:25,26). The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*...if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words (see *Peter: Bible Student*); but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer. The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

But Peter, to his credit, did learn something from the Lord's rebuke and directive to follow Him in the sense of laying down his life. For when it became apparent that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake". He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn't occur to him, for his brethren. He didn't then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37) (1). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right. After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die: "when thou shalt be old (i.e. more spiritually mature?), thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee (as Christ was carried to the cross) whither thou wouldest not (even at that last moment, Peter would flinch from the cross). This spake he,

signifying by what death he should glorify God" (as Christ's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter <sup>(2)</sup>. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life. Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me". This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1<sup>st</sup> hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life.

John's Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John's Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord's opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keep on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of 'follow me' is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John's Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that "hereunto were ye called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshiping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call "Follow me", and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion. It is perhaps significant, given the theme of 'following' in the records of Peter, that he became well known for 'leading about' his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have 'forsaken' his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

## **Final Identity**

We have seen that although the Lord frequently spoke of His impending crucifixion, and taught



plainly that His followers must go through a like process if they are to share His resurrection, Peter simply didn't want to accept it. He strictly forbade the Lord to die the death of the cross, knowing that this would become an imperative for him to follow this example, in principle if not actually. Yet Peter knew as head knowledge the Lord's doctrine of the cross. But there was something in it which he found almost offensive, it was a teaching upon which he couldn't comfortably focus. And the disciples likewise always changed the subject, whenever the Lord started on again about His 'last walk' to a place of crucifixion. And when we find, as we surely all do, that we cannot attain that sustained concentration on the cross which we fain would, or we own up to our hopeless mind wandering at the breaking of bread, we have just the same motive as they had: it becomes unbearably uncomfortable to realize that we are really called to this same inevitable and painful self-sacrifice. Yet Peter's objection to the Lord's going to die at Jerusalem surfaced several times. He wanted to build tents so that Jesus wouldn't go down from the mountain to the strange *exodos* which the prophets declared. When he wanted to "smite with the sword" in the Garden, it was to get the Lord out of the cross. Peter was willing to suffer, to fight, to even die in what would have been a hopeless combat, outnumbered dozens to one. But he just didn't want the cross to be the way. It is recorded that when Peter saw "what would follow" in the Garden, he wanted to start a fight in order to at least have some slim chance of avoiding that inevitable crucifixion which now looked so certain (Lk. 22:49). He didn't want the path of events to "follow" to that end. He again denied the connection between following and cross carrying. Later, the Lord told Peter in categorical terms that he personally was to follow Him to the death of the cross. And Peter turns round, sees John following, and gets sidetracked by the question of what the Lord thinks about John. As with us, quasi spiritual reasoning and issues were allowed to cloud and dilute the essential and terrifying truth- that we are called to bear Christ's cross to the end. Years later, Peter had another blip on the screen. He turned back to circumcision, which was a denial of the imperatives of the cross <sup>(3)</sup>. Paul had to remind him that sustained meditation on the implications of the cross simply destroyed Peter's position, to the extent that yet once again, Peter was denying his Lord's cross.

But finally, Peter learnt his lesson. His letters are full of reference to the cross and various physical aspects of the trial and mocking of the Lord which he witnessed first hand:

- Girding ourselves with humility 1 Pet. 1:13), as the Lord did at the last supper (s.w. Jn. 13:5), although then, Peter had so misunderstood what He had done.
- Christ as the sacrificed lamb (1 Pet. 1:19)
- "Buffeted" (2:20) s.w. Mt. 26:67 re. Christ being struck with a fist- something Peter would have probably watched out of the corner of his eye from where he was.
- "No guile found in his mouth" (2:22)- the trial trying to find evidence that the Lord had spoken bad words during His ministry, but no conclusive evidence being found.
- "Found" (2:22)- a legal word, s.w. Mt. 26:60; Jn. 18:38; 19:4,6 concerning Christ's trial, parts of which Peter would have seen or heard first hand
- "Committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (2:23)- a reference to the Lord's final words on the cross: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit"? We likewise should follow that example in our dying with Him, in that we too "commit the keeping of [our] souls to him in well-doing" (4:19).
- "stripes" (2:24)- Gk. 'weals', the swollen up bruises, which Peter would have seen when Christ

turned and looked at him through blackened eyes (after the beating of Mt. 26:67).

- "the tree" (2:24). An unusual term for the cross (he also uses it in Acts 5:30; 10:39). Perhaps because he saw the crucifixion (5:1) and was struck by the way the Lord carried a piece of a tree and was impaled upon it.

- "Who his own self bare our sins in his body up on to the tree" (2:24 RVmg.) suggests the watching Peter reflecting, as the Lord's body was lifted up vertical, that his sins of denial and pride were somehow with his Lord, being lifted up by Him.

- "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18) could well have been written by Peter with a glance back at the way that after his denials, he the unjust went to the crucifixion scene and reflected just this. When in 5:1 he comments that he witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he could be saying that therefore these thoughts were his thoughts as he witnessed it: the just suffering for him the unjust, to bring him back to God.

- "Christ hath suffered for us *in the flesh*" (4:1). That He suffered "in the flesh" could be seen as stating the obvious until it is realized that Peter is referring to the way in which he actually saw the flesh of Christ really suffering.

- Elders are to be "ensamples" (5:3)- s.w. Jn. 20:25 about the "print" of the nails.

- It is interesting to note the changes of pronouns in 1 Pet. 2:20 ff: "Hereunto were *ye* called: because Christ also suffered for *you*, leaving *you* an example, that *ye* should follow his steps...who his own self bare *our* sins...that *we* having died to sin, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes *ye* were healed". In the context, Peter is speaking about the need for slaves to live out the death and life of Christ; but when he comes to speak of the Lord's death for sin, he cannot but include himself as a sinner and a beneficiary in the cross.

In Peter's final maturity, his mind was full of the cross. This was the pattern of spiritual growth followed by Moses, Samson, Jacob, David, Paul...He saw the centrality of the cross, and its insistent, continual imperative. As he faced up to his own imminent time of dying, he saw that his death would be a death with the Lord (Paul also spoke of his death in this way). He spoke of his death as "my *exodos*" (2 Pet. 1:15), using the very same and specific word which he had heard at the transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah comforted the Lord regarding His *exodos* (Lk. 9:31). He saw his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:4). Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, either for his Lord or for himself. But now he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down, the vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). And in this life, "the death that *he* died...the life that *he* liveth" are the life and death and the living again that we live and die, day by day (Rom. 6:10 RV). The believer's death is a pouring out of blood on the altar (Phil. 2:17 Gk; Rev. 6:9), which is language highly appropriate to the Lord's death. It follows from this that the death of one in Christ is the pinnacle of their spiritual maturity, as the Lord's death was the pinnacle of His. It is a spiritual victory, more than the

temporal domination of the flesh which it can appear. John repeatedly records Christ's description of the cross as Him being "lifted up" (Jn. 3:14; 8:18; 12:32,34). But Peter uses the very same word to describe Christ's exaltation in resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Looking back, Peter saw the cross as a lifting up in glory, as the basis for the Lord's exaltation afterwards. At the time, it seemed the most humiliating thing to behold. It was anything but exaltation, and Peter would have given his life in the garden to get the Lord out of it. But now he saw its glory.

## Quo Vadis?

Yet it is an observable feature in the lives of many giants of faith that they die with elements of weakness still (Samson with his unChristian desire for personal vengeance would be the clearest example, or Jacob speaking of how he took land from the Amorite with his strength and his bow, when the Lord gave it to him by grace, cp. Ps. 44:3). And in this matter of following the Lord to the cross, it could be that even Peter faltered <sup>(4)</sup>. Jn. 21:18,19 could be taken as meaning that Peter was to die the death of crucifixion, which would be the final fulfilment of the charge to "follow me". Jn. 21:19 contains the observation that as he would be led to that place of execution, it would be a death that "thou wouldest not". The Lord foresaw that Peter's unwillingness to accept the cross would surface even then. One of the most well attested extra Biblical traditions about Peter is found in the apocryphal 'Acts of Peter'. It is that as he was being led to crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter, and Peter asked: 'Domine, quo vadis?' - 'Lord / Master, to where are we going?' (repeating his words of Jn. 13:36), as if somehow even then, he found the final acceptance of the cross hard. As indeed, it would be. In Jn. 13:36, the Lord had answered the question by telling Peter that then, he wasn't able to follow Him to death. But he would do so at a later date. And that time had come, although it took a lifetime to reach. This tradition has, to me, the ring of truth about it, from all that we know of Peter's problem with the cross. And it exactly mirrors our own difficulty in facing up to the stark realities of the life of self-sacrifice and ultimate self-crucifixion to which we are called. Only then, at the very very end, did he realize that following Christ was a call to follow Him to His cross. And another extra Biblical tradition has a similar likelihood of truth: it is said that when finally Peter was brought to the place of crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside down, as he was unworthy to die the same death as his Lord. Another tradition says that because of this unusual angle of crucifixion, the nails fell out and Peter was offered the chance of release, which he refused, and asked to be crucified with his Lord, still upside down. If all this is so, he finally learnt the lesson which we likewise struggle for a lifetime to learn: that following Christ means going to His cross with Him, and in the process learning and feeling through and through our unworthiness. And he learnt too that to die with Christ is never forced upon us by the Lord who bought us: in Peter's final, willing choice of death, as with our day by day denials of the flesh for Christ's sake, we make the choices purely from our own volition. We alone decide, in the terror, pain and difficulty of a genuine freewill, that thus it must be for us.

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## Notes

(1) Jesus had already told the twelve that "ye which have followed me...ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones" (Mt. 19:28). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted

their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

(2) Earlier, Peter had thought that following Christ to the end could be achieved in a quick, dramatic burst of zeal- for surely his desire to "smite with the sword" in Gethsemane was almost suicidal, and yet by doing so he thought that he would fulfil his promise to lay down his life for Christ's sake. He learnt the lesson, that crucifixion is a way of life rather than just dramatic death; for he said that the Jews had slain Christ *and* hung Him on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39). This seems strange- that they should have killed Him and then hung Him on the tree. Peter has in mind the practice of hanging an already dead criminal on a tree as a warning (Dt. 21:23). Paul appears to make the same mistake in Gal. 3:13, where he too says that the lifting up of Christ on the cross was typified by the lifting up of the already dead body of a criminal. Christ was not dead when He was lifted up- physically. But first Peter and then Paul came to understand that His death was actually in His way of life- so that He was as good as dead when lifted up. He was the dead bronze snake of the wilderness; the flesh had been put to death by a daily life of crucifixion.

(3) See *Peter The Shepherd* for more explanation of this conclusion.

(4) As an aside, there is an OT background to the Lord's invitation to follow Him in the taking up of the cross and following to the place of crucifixion. It is in the frequent references to the faithful following after Yahweh Himself (e.g. Dt. 7:4; 2 Chron. 34:33). It's as if the Lord was saying that the essence of Yahweh was in the cross He carried. To follow Him to the end, to live the life of cross carrying, leads us to Yahweh Himself. The connection between the cross and God Himself is expanded upon in *God Manifestation In The Cross*.

### **13. Images Of The Love Of Christ**

God has more spiritual culture, for want of a better way of putting it, than to describe the love of Christ just with a string of superlative adjectives. Paul prayed that his Ephesians would be strengthened by the Spirit's working in the inner man, so that they would "be strong to apprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:18,19 RV). There is a paradox here; to know something that can't be known, that passes knowledge. We can only know that love by God working on our inner man, so that we realize the experience we have of the love of Christ, and by seeing it manifested in others. Yet we are helped in this by the way the Bible brings before us men who reached such a high level of love that it to some extent typified the love of Christ. If we appreciate that what they manifested was a poor shadow of His love, we start to see something of this length and depth and height which we fain would "be strong to apprehend" .

#### **The Love Of Moses**

Take Moses. Israel hated him, they thrust him from them (Acts 7:39); due to their provocation he failed to enter the land. He had done so much for them, yet they bitterly rejected him- "this Moses" , as they called him (Ex. 32:1,23 cp. Acts 7:35). But when God wanted to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation, he pleaded for them with such intensity that he achieved what few prayerful

men have: a change (not just a delay in outworking) in God's categorically stated intention. And especially, consider that time when Israel had sinned with the golden calf. Moses said that he would climb that mighty mountain yet again, and " I will make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). He knew well enough that no atonement was possible without the shedding of blood (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22; and see the similarity with Phinehas making an atonement for Israel's forgiveness through the slaying of Zimri and Cozbi in Num. 25:8,13). And yet he hoped (" peradventure" ) that God would accept *him* as an atonement: " I will make an atonement" . He intended to offer his own life as an atonement for them- for that people who hated him, who pushed him from them and in their hearts returned to Egypt. He climbed that mountain (nearly a day's work), and at the top he made an even finer and altogether higher offer to the Angel: " If thou wilt forgive their sin...blot me, *I pray thee* (notice the earnestness of his desire) out of thy book" (Ex. 32:32) <sup>(1)</sup>. And he begged Yahweh to accept this for 40 days and nights, fasting without food or water (Dt. 9:17; 10:10). It wasn't just a once off, emotional outburst of a moment. Omission of the name from God's book is a clear reference to a believer losing his part in God's Kingdom (Ex. 32:33; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 17:8; 21:27; 22:19). This was not an offer made in hot blood; after the hours of climbing the mountain, Moses had decided what he sorely wished to do: to offer his place in God's Kingdom, so that Israel might be forgiven one awful sin. This is just superb. To offer one's physical life is one thing; to offer one's eternal life is quite another. And he pleaded with God to accept his offer, just for the forgiveness of one sin, of a people who hated him and were evidently bent on fulfilling the lust of the flesh. If this is how much Moses loved sinful Israel, think how much more Christ loved them. And if that's the level of Christ's love for sinful Israel, consider (or try to) the level of Christ's love for us who at least *try* not to thrust Him from us, who wish, in our weakness, to follow Him to the end.

To be blotted out of the book God had written may have been understood by Moses as asking for him to be excluded from an inheritance in the promised land; for later, a 'book' was written describing the various portions (Josh. 18:9). The connection is made explicit in Ez. 13:9: "...neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel". To be blotted out of the book meant to not enter the land (surely Ezekiel is alluding to Moses' experience). If Israel were to be blotted out there and then in the wilderness, then Moses wanted to share this experience. God had just spoken of 'blotting out' Israel from before Him (Dt. 9:14), and making a nation of Moses; but now Moses is asking to share in their condemnation rather than experience salvation without them. This was the extent of his devotion. On the last day of his life, Moses reeled off the great speech of Deuteronomy, knowing full well that he was to die without entering the land. In Dt. 9:18 he says that his prayer of Ex. 32:32 *was heard*- in that he was not going to enter the land, but they would. Hence his urging of them to go ahead and enter the land- to experience what his self-sacrifice had enabled. In this we see the economy of God, and how He works even through sin. On account of Moses' temporary rashness of speech, he was excluded- and yet by this, his prayer was heard. He was temporarily blotted out of the book, so that they might enter. Moses' fleeting requests to enter the land must be read as a flagging from the height of devotion he reached, rather like the Lord's request to escape the cross in Gethsemane. But ultimately he did what he intended- he gave his place in the Kingdom / land so that they might enter [although of course he will be in the future Kingdom]. This is why Moses stresses on the last day of his life that he wouldn't enter the land *for Israel's sake* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). He saw that his sin had been worked through, and the essential reason for him not entering was because of the offer he had made. It "went ill with him *for their sakes*" (Ps. 106:32).

In all this, Moses was typifying the death of the Lord. Is. 53:8 describes His cross as being "cut off [Strong: 'excluded?'] from the land of the living" (s.w. 'the congregation'- of Israel), for the transgression of His people. This is undoubtedly reference to the self-sacrificial exclusion of Moses

from the land, that Israel might enter. The Lord died the death of a sinner, He chose like Moses to suffer affliction with us, that we might be saved. The intense prayer of Moses for Israel's salvation inspired David in prayer (Ps. 25:11 = Ex. 32:30,31). And Paul makes a series of allusions to Moses, which climax in an invitation to pray like Moses for the salvation of others:

<b>2 Tim. 2:24,25</b>	<b>Moses</b>
“the servant of the Lord	A very common title of Moses
must not strive	As Israel did with him (Num. 26:9)
but be gentle unto all	The spirit of Moses
apt to teach	As was Moses (Ex. 18:20; 24:12; Dt. 4:1,5,14; 6:1; 31:22)
patient	As was Moses
in meekness	Moses was the meekest man (Num. 12:3)
instructing those that oppose themselves	at the time of Aaron and Miriam's self-opposing rebellion
if God <i>peradventure</i> will give them repentance [i.e. forgiveness]"	“ <i>Peradventure</i> I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30)- and he prayed 40 days and nights for it.

And note too:

2:19 = Num. 16:5,26

2:20 = Num. 12:7

2:21 = Num. 16:37

2:22 = Num. 12:2; 16:3

2:26 = Num. 16:33

This is quite something. The height of Moses' devotion for His people, the passion of his praying, shadowing as it did the matchless intercession and self-giving of the Lord, really is our example. It isn't just a height to be admired. It means that we will not half heartedly ask our God to 'be with' brother x and sister y and the brethren in country z, as we lie half asleep in bed. This is a call to sustained, on our knees prayer and devotion to the salvation of others.

Having said all this, note just one more thing. When Moses sees the apostasy of the people, his anger "burns hot" just as God's anger had done (Ex. 32:10,19). But his grace is far less than God's. Moses pleaded with God on the mountain not to break His covenant with Israel, and God agreed. Yet when Moses actually saw the people's sin, he broke the tables of the covenant. His grace was marvellous, willing even to give his place in the Kingdom for his faithless people- but *even then* it still was inferior to God's grace and patience.

## The Love Of David

This kind of logical extension can be repeated in the consideration of David's love for Saul. Saul was his enemy, he drove David to absolute despair, his senseless persecution of David was articulated in every way he knew how. In all this we see played out the prototype of the hatred between the Jews and the Lord. Yet when Saul was slain for his sins, David's love for him was overflowing, to the point that his people saw that this was no political theatricism (2 Sam. 3:36,37). His lament over Saul was taught to the children of Judah (2 Sam. 1:18); and the chapters of 2 Samuel are full of examples of David's expression of love for Saul in every way he knew how. But it was not only at Saul's death that David had these feelings; after all, it's a lot easier to love someone when they're dead. Psalm 35 is David's commentary on his feelings for Saul: " They laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul (spiritually). But as for me, when they (Saul and his family, in the context) were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother (i.e. Jonathan, 2 Sam. 1:26): I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother" (Ps. 35:11-15). Bowing down heavily as a man weeps at his mother's graveside is a powerful image. A man's grief for his mother must surely be the finest picture David could have chosen. That sense of infinite regret that he didn't appreciate her more. " As one that mourneth for his mother" . But David goes on: " But in mine adversity, they rejoiced..." . It's as if David realized that he had reached the point where he knew that he really did truly love his enemies. *He wept for Saul as a man weeps at his dear dear mother's graveside.* And he did this for a man who was utterly worthless. And this is a poor, poor shadow of the Lord's peerless love for Israel. And *how much more does He love us, who at least try to make up for Israel's cruel indifference?*

And finally, consider how thanks to David building an altar at his own expense and asking God to kill him and his family, God stopped the plague upon Israel (2 Sam. 24:16,17- the stretched out hand of God in destruction was what David asked to be upon him and his family). Israel were suffering the effect of their own sin, in not paying the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16); but in the spirit of Christ, David was willing to die for them. He seems to have sincerely felt that their sin was his sin (25:17). And his dominant desire was counted as if it had been done, and thanks to his self-sacrificial spirit, the people were saved when they personally were unworthy.

## The Love Of Jeremiah

There are so many descriptions of the pain of Jeremiah for an Israel who plotted to take his life, who " devised devices against me, saying...let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be no more remembered" (11:19), an Israel whom he would fain run away from in despair (9:2). Yet in response to this, " for the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt...oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night (in prayer?) for the slain of the daughter of my people" . And I could go on and on with passages like this. He broke into a new paradigm of grief and love for Israel, which his people couldn't understand: " Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by (as he sat by the wayside weeping)? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done *unto me*" (Lam. 1:12). God thrice forbid him to pray for Israel (7:16; 11:14; 14:11), yet they asked him to do so (21:2; 37:3), with the possible implication that they knew he was willing to do so. Finally, after all the Jews had done to him, they asked Jeremiah: " Pray for us unto the Lord thy God...then Jeremiah the prophecy said unto them, I have heard you, behold, I will pray unto the Lord" (42:2,4). Jeremiah went right against the specific prohibition of God because He so loved them. And Jeremiah's love, the real deep seated feeling,

right deep in the very centre of his soul, was for a nation hardened against the Lord their God. And the love of Christ far, far exceeds anything Jeremiah reached.

### **The Love Of Caleb**

Caleb was a Gentile who became adopted into the tribe of Judah and became a leader of the tribe. Yet he was graciously given an inheritance in the land of Israel. By his spiritual ambition, he was granted Hebron as his inheritance. He went up there and drove out the tribes with a faithful zeal unmatched in Israel. And yet, he gave away that city- for Hebron became a priestly city for the Levites to live in. He gave his place in the Kingdom to others (Josh. 14:12)- that was the level of love this great man reached.

### **The Love Of Paul**

Paul had the spirit of Moses when he could say that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for the sake of his Jewish kinsmen. He was willing in theory to give up his salvation for them, even though he knew that in actual fact this is not the basis on which God works. He emphasizes that he is not using mere words: " I say the truth in Christ, I lie not [note the double emphasis], my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 9:1-3). The Holy Spirit confirmed that what he felt in his conscience for them was in fact valid; this really was the level of devotion Paul reached for a nation who systematically worked for his extermination, and even more painfully, for the infiltration and destruction of his lifetime's work. The Jewish infiltrators had indirectly had their effect on Corinth, who mocked and denigrated the Paul who would have laid down his life for them. And yet time and again he calls them his brethren, he sees them as an innocent Eve in Eden, about to be beguiled by the snake of the Jewish infiltrators; he sees them as a chaste virgin. But remember how they denigrated him, in the cruellest ways. Yet his love for them was surpassing. And now with intended repetition, I make my point again: the love of Paul for Israel, for Corinth, the love of Jeremiah and Moses for Israel, the love of David for Saul...all these fantastic peaks of human love and sacrifice were only dim, hazy shadows of the love of Christ for wayward Israel, for whom primarily He died (Gal. 4:4,5). If this was his love for those who rejected Him, how much higher is His love for us who follow in weakness.

" Greater love..."

In the New Testament, we see the love of Christ directly, openly displayed. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond (Jn. 13:1). He knew that in His death, He would shew " greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, " that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (Jn. 17:26). " Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us (in that) he hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). " Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.). The death of the cross was therefore the very definition of love; love is a crucifixion-love, a conscious doing of that which is against the grain of our nature. And you will have noticed that all these references add that we *must therefore* respond by showing that love to our brethren. It is not an option. To be unloving is to deny the very essence of the cross of Christ. Paul states that because of the Lord's death " as an offering for sin" , thereby the 'commandment [" requirement" RVmg] of the Law is fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:3,4). But in the practical part of that same letter, Paul defines the requirement / commandment of the Law to be one thing- simply " love" (Rom. 13:10). Love as God understands it is that we keep or fulfil His



commandments (1 Jn. 5:3). What, then, is the connection? How could the Lord's death on the cross lead to the fulfilment *in us* of the Law's commandment / requirement of love? Quite simply, because it is now impossible for a man to be passive before the cross, and not to be inspired by Him there towards a life of genuine love. Paul isn't simply making some mechanistic, theological statement—that the cross fulfilled the Law, because it fulfilled all the types etc. It fulfilled the Law in that the Law intended to teach *love*; and the cross and dying of the Lord Jesus is now the means by which we can powerfully be inspired to the life of love which fulfils the entire Law.

He died as He did so that the love of God, the real meaning of love, might be displayed in a cameo, in an intense, visual, physical form which could be remembered and meditated upon. Observing the memorial meeting is the very least we can do to this end; and this itself is only a beginning. "The love of Christ *constraineth us*" not to live for ourselves, but unto him that died for us, and to show this by our concern for our brethren (2 Cor. 5:14 and context). Marvin Vincent has a telling comment on the Greek word translated "constraineth" : "The idea is not urging or driving, but *shutting up* to one line or purpose, as in a narrow, walled road" (*Word Studies Of The N.T.*). We shouldn't be driven men and women; we are not urged or driven by the cross, but shut up by it to one purpose. There are only two ways before us, to death or life; and we are shut up by the cross in that road to life. In this lies the sustaining and transforming power of the cross, if only we would meditate upon it. It is an epitome of every facet of the love of God and of Christ. There the Name of God was declared, that the love that was in the Father and Son may be in us (Jn. 17:26).

You may know that I am an enthusiast for reading through a Gospel record in one or two sittings. One theme that jumped out at me once when going through was that *whenever the Lord starts talking about His impending death, the disciples change the subject!* And so it is with us. There is something that makes us turn away from the real import of the cross. The way exhortations so often stray from the essential point, the way we return *so* quickly to the things of here and now after breaking bread... we all know our guilt. Isaiah laments that despite the wonder of the atonement God would work out on the cross, scarcely any would believe it, and men would turn away their faces from the crucified Christ (Is. 53:1,3). And so it happened. Men and women went out that Friday afternoon to behold it, they saw it for a few moments, beat their breasts and returned to their homes (Lk. 23:48). My sense is that most of that crowd still died in unbelief, untouched by what they saw that day. And so it is with us. We break bread, and we rise up and go on our way, we return to the pettiness of our lives, to a spirituality which often amounts (at its best) to little more than a scratching about on the surface of our natures. But let's not look away, and change the subject; let's see the love of Christ, behold it, and by this very act be changed into that same image, from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

And then we will come to know the mind of Paul, as he penned, albeit under inspiration, what to me are some of the finest pieces of writing of all time: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life...nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord...*the love of Christ constraineth us*...the love of Christ, *which passeth knowledge*...the *excellency* of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things...God forbid that I should glory, save in *the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by whom *the world* is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Rom. 8:37-39; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:19; Phil. 3:8; Gal. 6:14). Passages like these reveal the spiritual climax Paul reached as he meditated upon the real import of the love of Christ; they are written in what I would call *intellectual ecstasy*, Paul's inspiration notwithstanding, in deep personal realization of the height and depth and breadth of the love to which we stand related. And that ecstasy of realization,

that mountain peak, is there for each of us to reach.

## The Maturity Of Love

To achieve a lifestyle and way of thinking dominated by the love of Christ and the love which this inevitably brings forth in us *is the absolute crowning climax of our Christianity*. This is God's ultimate intention for us. I believe, seriously believe, that God is working in the lives of each of us towards this ultimate goal, through every niggling frustration of today and yesterday and tomorrow, and through every major blow on the anvil which we occasionally receive. We may die having fallen short of fully realizing this goal, our innate bitterness and selfishness may be that strong, we may be that lazy to tackle it; yet by His grace we will still be accepted into His Kingdom- in the same way as men like Jacob and David still had some evident aspects of spiritual immaturity in them at the time of their death, and yet they will still be accepted. There are verses enough which indicate that knowing the love of Christ, seeing the real meaning of the cross where that love was so intensely and publicly paraded, is the ultimate climax of our walk in Christ:

- The end of the concept of commandment is love out of a pure heart (1 Tim. 1:5). This is where it all leads. All commandments are "briefly comprehended" in that of love (Rom. 13:9).
- "Above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14); love is the ultimate spiritual maturity.
- "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected (matured) in us" (1 Jn. 4:12). This is maturity; to grow to a point where the love of God dwells in us, and our love for each other has let that love reach the maturity it is intended to produce.
- If love is made mature, we may have boldness in the day of judgment; a mature love will cast out all fear of rejection (1 Jn. 4:17,18). These words are a real challenge. The fear most of us have of the judgment is because we have not yet reached that maturity of love. But then that, presumably, is why we are still alive, living through this process of development.
- Our experience of tribulation leads to the development of patience, then real hope of salvation, and above all, as the final stage of maturity, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). 2 Pet. 1:5-7 describes a similar upward spiral of chronological development, again culminating in brotherly kindness and then, love. And then, Peter goes on, we will *know* the Lord Jesus Christ (v.8). This is not to say that we cannot show love in our days of spiritual immaturity, but "love" in the sense of that final state which is saturated with the experience of Christ is the ultimate end which God is working in us to achieve.

All this explains the constant emphasis on the supreme importance of reflecting the love of Christ: "Above all these things, put on charity" (Col. 3:14); "above all things have fervent charity among yourselves" (1 Pet. 4:8). This is why John so often drives home the point that if we have reflected the love of God, then we are assured of salvation, for we have assimilated the essence of the Gospel and Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not for me to explicitly exhort you how better and more enthusiastically to reflect the love of Christ in your life. You will see how. For if you seriously behold it, the love and cross of Christ *of itself* will *constrain* you.

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## Notes

(1) It is difficult to interpret the Hebraism here. Moses *may* have meant: 'If you bar them from the Kingdom, then take my part out of it too; I don't want to be there without them'. Considering how they had treated him, this likewise shows his great love for them. A lesser man would have reasoned that being without that rabble of apostate renegades was what he looked forward to in the Kingdom.

### 14. The Judgment Of The Cross

There are times when for all the Bible reading in the world, the sincere prayer, the attendance of meetings- the flame of a true faith burns dim, the fire of real devotion flickers. And there may not be any particular omission or slip in our spiritual lives which is responsible for it; it simply happens. I would imagine every one of us are bound together by an assent to this. It's simply so. Reader and reader and reader, from black Africans to the chain of believers strung out through the vastness of Russia, from little Indian congregations to the huge ecclesias of North America, from reader to writer- we're all bound together in this realisation and admission. We hear words, read articles; and sometimes nothing can really reach us, nothing and nobody shakes us any more. And we are in that state of numb indifference more often and more deeply than we might care to admit. I read recently of how the Church of England interviewed people leaving church on Sunday mornings, asking them what they remembered from the sermon. The results were shocking. And when they were asked what was said the week before, or the month before, or how many sermons they remembered in their lives- it was pathetic. And we shouldn't be too complacent. People in the world around us don't remember sermons, and they don't act on them. And with us, for all our listening to and reading of Christian words, are we really better people? In this lies the limitation, it seems to me, of all platform speaking and article writing. We just don't remember, we rarely act- although, thankfully, we *sometimes* do. But it would be wrong to imply that our forgetfulness is of itself sinful. It would be like saying sneezing was a sin. It's just how we are. But all the same, realising this, we need something to shake us, right to the bone. Thankfully, there is just such a thing, something far beyond human words.

### The Voice Of The Cross

The blood of Christ is personified as a voice that speaks to us, a better word than the voice of Abel's blood which *cried out* its message (Heb. 12:24 NIV; Gen. 4:10). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on "the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony" (Num. 7:89 NIV). The ark was made of shittim wood- from a root meaning 'to flog, scourge or pierce', all replete with reference to the cross. And it was there on that wooden box that Yahweh was declared in the blood sprinkled upon it. Note how there is an association between the blood of atonement and the throne of judgment in 2 Sam. 6:2 and Is. 37:16, as if we see a foretaste of our judgment in the way we respond to the Lord's outpoured blood for us. The Lord Jesus in His time of death is the "propitiation", or rather 'the place of propitiation' for our sins, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat...of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). The blood of Christ is therefore to be associated with the commanding voice of God, such is the imperative within it. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterised by the blood of His cross. His blood is His word. The blood of both old and new covenants enjoined the obedience of God's *word* upon those sprinkled with it (Heb. 9:19,20). The blood and God's word were linked. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's

title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterised by the blood of His cross.

Hebrews 12:25-29 goes on to draw a parallel between the voice of the Lord's blood and the sound of the earthquake and voice of God when the Old Covenant was inaugurated, a noise that made even Moses exceedingly fear and quake (Ex. 19:18 LXX). The voice of the Lord's blood shakes *all* things, the only thing unshaken by it is the Hope of the Kingdom. It shows forth, as a voice, God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25,26 RV). When 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of "the preaching (Gk. 'the word') of the cross", we have the same idea; the word of the cross, the word which is the cross, preaches to us of itself, as we behold it. Paul declared unto Corinth "the testimony of God", i.e. "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). This message was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power", "the wisdom of God", "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:17,23,24; 2:4,5). Indeed, "the cross of Christ" is put for 'the preaching of His cross' (1:17). All these things are parallel. The cross is in itself the testimony and witness of God. This is why, Paul reasons, the power of the cross itself means that it doesn't matter how poorly that message is presented in human words; indeed, such is its excellence and power that we even *shouldn't seek* to present it with a layer of human 'culture' and verbiage shrouding it. In the context of commenting on His impending death, the Saviour said that He came to bear witness unto the Truth; for this cause He came into the world (Jn. 18:37 cp. 12:27, where the cross is again "this cause" why He came). His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God. "The work that the Father gave me to finish...testifies" (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when "it[was] finished" in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God's word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). The Lord's blood was thus a spoken testimony to all men (1 Tim. 2:6 AVmg.). Beholding the cross and the water and blood that flowed from it, John struggled with the inadequacy of human language: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true" (Jn. 19:35). Years later he described himself, in allusion to this, as he "who bare record [in the past tense] of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). He had earlier commented that the Spirit, water and blood of the cross bore witness (1 Jn. 5:8). John seems to be saying that the Lord's final death which he had witnessed was the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. And as he had been a faithful witness to this, so now he would be of that further revelation he had now seen in the Apocalypse.

The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it. Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service. And yet notice how the Lord took that bread of life and gave it to the disciples as His guests at the last supper. To take the bread is to show our acceptance of the gift of life which is in Jesus. The Lord had taught that His crucifixion would confirm the truth of the Father's word which had been spoken by Jesus (Jn. 8:28); again, the cross is associated with a voice.

The Lord was "the word made flesh"; having spoken to us through the words of the prophets, God now speaks to us in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2 RV). His revelation in that sense hasn't finished; it is ongoing. Right now, the Lord Jesus speaks with a voice like many waters and a sword of flame-according to John's vision of the Lord's post-resurrection glory. John exalts in the fact they touched and saw "the word of life"; the Lord Jesus personally was and is the voice of God's word. When John writes that "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:3), he doesn't mean to say that he is simply giving a transcript of the Lord's spoken words. He is telling men about the person of Jesus, the man he personally knew, and in doing this he was declaring God's word to them. If the very being of the Lord Jesus was the expression of God's word, it is little to be marvelled at that the cross, being as it is the crystallisation of all He was and is, should be in an even more intense sense the voice of God to us. And the same process of the word becoming flesh must be seen in us too. We have the witness within ourselves; for the witness is the word and life of Christ, His eternal life, which lives in us (1 Jn. 4:10,11). The Lord Jesus didn't witness to His word by giving out bits of paper or teaching a catechism; He was, in person, the constant exhibition of the word He witnessed to. And with us too. I'm not saying don't write books, give out literature, speak words from platforms...but the more essential witness to men is that of our lives, that witness which wells up from the word and life of Christ within us. The way God's word is made flesh can be seen in Hosea. His going and marrying a worthless woman is prefaced with the statement that this was the beginning of the word of the Lord (Hos. 1:2). The command to go and marry her was not so much "the word of the Lord" to Israel as his marriage and example of true love to his wife. Hosea's example in his marriage was the word of the Lord to Israel. He made the word flesh. The Lord did this to perfection, and yet like Hosea we in principle must do the same.

### **The Cross And Self-Examination**

As a man or woman seriously contemplates the cross, they are inevitably led to a self-knowledge and self-examination which shakes them to the bone. A number of passages shed light on the way the cross leads to self-examination.

As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:35). The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasises the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts" (Prov. 20:27); our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the exhortation, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe- then we simply don't know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 further suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the lord's judgment of us: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the

Lord". We expect Paul to say: 'But when we judged ourselves, we are chastened...'. But he doesn't; our judgment is what reveals us to the Lord, and is therefore the basis of His judgment of us. Even if we flunk conscious self-examination from an underlying disbelief that we will attain the Kingdom, then this of itself reveals our hearts to Him. Because of this connection between the breaking of bread and judgment, it would seem that the first century church experienced the physical chastising of the Lord in terms of being struck with sickness and even death *at the memorial meeting* (1 Cor. 11:29,30). Thus at ecclesial meetings- particularly the breaking of bread- the early church confessed their sins and prayed for healing from the afflictions some were smitten with as a result of their sins (James 5:14-16).

Those who beheld the cross "beat their breasts", Luke records (23:48). The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because "that sight" convicted them of their own sinfulness? Their "return" to their homes uses the Greek word usually translated 'to repent'. The cross inspired their repentance. The records of the crucifixion are framed to focus upon the response of individuals to the cross. The response of those who beat their breasts is very similar to that of the Centurion:

Centurion	Crowds
Having seen	Having observed
Happening	Happenings
Was glorifying	Returned / repented
Saying	Striking breasts

The parallel is between his glorifying God, and their returning / repenting. The need for repentance is a strong theme in Luke (10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 16:30; 17:3,4)- as if he perceived that the ultimate motivation to repentance was in the cross. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* 4.5 claims that "all the crowds who were gathered together for the observation of this...returned striking their breasts and weeping awful tears". And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, "these things" = the record of the cross). The humble man "smote his breast, saying, God, be *merciful* to me a sinner". "Be merciful" translates the word elsewhere translated "make propitiation", in describing the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2:17). The man's sinfulness drove him to plead for the cross: 'Please God, make a propitiation for me' was his plea. He realized his need for the cross. And we should look back at the cross and feel and know the same need.

Serious meditation upon the Lord's work ought to have this effect upon us. Can we really see his agony, his bloody sweat, without a thought for our response to it? It's impossible to passively behold it all. There is something practically compelling about it, almost in a mystical way. *Because* "Christ died for the ungodly", because in the cross "the love of God" was commended to us, *therefore* "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5,6,8). As the smitten rock gave out water, so the smitten Saviour gave out the water of the Spirit. This link between the shedding of the Lord's blood and the shedding of love in our hearts is surely because an understanding and relation to His sacrifice brings forth in the believer a response of love and spirituality. As the love of God was shown in the cross, so it will be reflected in the heart of he who truly knows and believes it.

1 Cor. 11:29 invites us to *discern* the Lord's body at the memorial meeting. The same word occurs in v.28: "let a man *examine* himself". It's too bad that the translations mask this connection. We are to examine / discern the Lord's body, and to do the same to ourselves <sup>(1)</sup>. The two are inextricably related. Meditation upon and analysis of *His* body will lead to *self* examination and discernment. In this lies the answer to the frequent question: 'What should we examine at the breaking of bread? Our own sins, or the facts of the crucifixion / resurrection?'. If we think about the latter, we will inevitably be led to think of the former.

In Isaiah 6:1-4 we have a vision of "the Lord high and lifted up", enthroned in the temple, with an earthquake, the temple filled with smoke, the doorposts that held up the veil being shaken (with the implication that the veil falls; 6:4). Note how Rev. 15:5-8, building on this passage, has the veil being removed, the Most Holy opened, and the temple filled with smoke. This sends the mind straight to the rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion and the earthquake (Mt. 27:51). The Lord "high and lifted up" (6:1) is a phrase that occurs later in Isaiah (52:13), concerning the crucified Lord, lifted up and exalted "very high" by the cross. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". The vision of God's glory as it would be in His crucified Son convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness to a very fine degree. The vision occurred "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Is. 6:1)- and he died of leprosy, smitten of God for his sin. Isaiah would've known Uzziah, and prophesied against him. And yet now, after the vision of God's glory, Isaiah declares that *he* is a man "of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). And it was lepers who had to cover their upper lips (Lev. 13:45). He felt no better than Uzziah, the well known smitten-by-God king of Isaiah's time. Likewise before the experience of God's glory as it was and is in Christ, we shouldn't feel that we are any better than the most famous sinner.

And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. So once again, the vision of the cross convicts men of their sin, and yet inspires them to go forward in service. In passing, it should be noted that the vision of Isaiah 6 has evident similarities with those of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4. These likewise show something of the glory of God in the crucified Christ, and they likewise inspired men like Ezekiel and John in their work of witness and living the life of the spirit in the midst of apostasy. The only other time the phrase "high and lifted up" occurs in Isaiah is in 57:15, where we read that He who is the exalted and lofty one (AV- the same words as 'high and lifted up') dwells with those who are crushed (Heb. *Dakka*- cp. Is. 53:5,10), i.e. those who share in the Lord's crucifixion in their lives. This passage is talking about God Himself in the first instance- just as Yahweh is spoken of as walking on the waters, and yet the Lord Jesus did this in manifestation of the Father. Likewise many NT passages appropriate words true only of God Himself to the Lord Jesus, in that He manifested the Father. And so it seems the same principle operates here. The one "high and lifted up" was the Lord Jesus in Isaiah chapters 6 and 52. Here in chapter 57 it is God Himself, and yet in that the Lord Jesus knew the depths of the cross, so He came to manifest the heights of His Father. And *through this* God through Him is able to dwell with the crushed. In a sense, the suffering servant has been exalted to the throne of God and yet is able to know the feelings of those who are still the suffering servants. The same idea is found in Rev. 4- the one who sits enthroned is as it were a slain lamb. There is a connection between His present glory and His previous suffering on the cross.

Rev. 4:9 alludes to the Isaiah 6 vision, and applies it to the future judgment. Yet silhouetted within

the vision of the judgment throne is a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6), as if before the judgment, all will be aware of the Lord's sacrifice. The accepted will utter praise immediately after realising the wonderful verdict pronounced for them- in terms of praising the Lord Jesus for his sacrifice, and recognising their eternal debt to the blood of His cross (Rev. 5:9). The cross and the judgment and reward are connected. This is why the Sephardim called the Day of Atonement, with all its typology of the cross, "the day of judgment". Just as the cross was a declaration of God's Name, so will be the final judgment. Having outlined Israel's coming condemnation at judgment day, God comments: "I will do this unto thee...for...the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name" (Am. 4:12,13). The Name of God will be articulated and glorified in the judgment.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. Mark's account, for example, has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John's record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19:22; 23,24; then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John's charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end...and that he, John, was honoured to have been there and seen it all.

## **The Cross And The Judgment**

So Isaiah 6 shows the Lord Jesus as *enthroned in glory* upon the cross. John says that Isaiah saw the Lord *in His glory* at this time. Yet He will sit on His throne of glory when He returns in judgment (Mt. 25:31). So there is a connection between the cross and the judgment. There the Lord sat (and sits) enthroned in judgment. There, "The Lord reigned from the tree" (Ps. 96:10 LXX- the context is of the final judgment, and yet the image is so appropriate to the Lord's death). Men smote "the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1). The RVmg. of Mk. 14:65 says that the Lord was hit with "strokes of rods". Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him (cp. "all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28). It is also worth musing on 1 Pet. 2:23, which speaks of the Lord in His time of dying committing Himself "to him that judgeth righteously". It's as if the Father judged the world as unworthy and His Son as worthy in the time of the Lord's death. It is possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24. The Gospel of Peter 3:7 actually says this happened: "And they clothed him with purple and sat him on



a chair of judgment, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel". That the cross was the judgment of the world is further brought out by reflecting upon the prophesied judgment upon Egypt [common symbol of the world] in Ez. 32. There was to be darkness at noon, and "I will make many peoples amazed at thee" (Ez. 32:7,8,10 RV), just as they were by the cross (Is. 52:14). The judgment of Egypt / the world had some elements of fulfilment in the 'judgment of this world' which occurred through the cross.

We have suggested above that there was a *sedile* or seat affixed to the cross, on which the victim sat in order to get temporary relief. Thus some accounts of crucifixion describe the victim as mounting the cross as one would mount a horse. This would make the cross capable of interpretation as some kind of seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. It is possible to translate the repentant thief as telling the other: "Do you not fear God *when* you stand condemned?". Before Jesus crucified, we all stand condemned. And he stresses that "we are condemned justly" (Lk. 23:41), for it was evident to all that here hung a just / righteous man. He, there, the just hanging for the unjust, convicts us of sin. Somehow the repentant thief came to know Jesus in the deepest possible sense. Truly could he address him as "Lord", perceiving already how the cross had made Him "Lord and Christ". The thief knew that judgment day was coming, and asked to be remembered for good there. He was surely alluding to Ps. 106:4: "Remember me, Lord, in the course of favouring your people. Visit me with your salvation". And this connection between the cross and the judgment was evidently impressed upon the thief. Doubtless he also had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: "Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- "when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross.

Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord. Reflect for a moment upon the fact that the women wept, and amongst them were the Lord's relatives (Lk. 23:27). Lamentation for criminals on their way to die was not permitted in public. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61) reports that "the relatives [of the crucified] were forbidden to go into mourning". Likewise Tacitus (*Annals* 6.19), Philo (*In Flaccum* 9,72) and Josephus (*Wars Of The Jews* 2.13.3,253). This is all quite some evidence, from a variety of writers. So why did they make this great sacrifice, take this great risk? The cross has power. Whether we feel it is impossible for us to be emotional, given our personality type, or whether we feel so lost in our own griefs that we cannot feel for Him there, somehow sustained reflection on the cross will lead us out of this. We will mourn, come what may. Yet the tragedy is that those women who risked so much didn't necessarily maintain that level of commitment to the end. For the Lord had to tell them that they should weep for themselves given the calamity that would befall them and their children in AD70- for they would not listen to Him.

The language of Is. 63:1-5 applies with equal appropriacy to both the cross and the judgment. It is

the time when the servant gains salvation and redemption for His people, alone, when all others have failed, with stained clothes reminiscent of Joseph's, with all their reference to the death and resurrection of the Lord... and this is far from the only example of where prophecies can apply to both the crucifixion and the final judgment. We are justified by the blood of Christ; but *dikaioo* is a word of judgment- we are declared acceptable, as in a court decision. And this occurs because of the cross; there we were declared acceptable to our judge.

There seems to be a link made between the Lord's death and the judgment in Rom. 8:34: "Who is he that judgeth / condemneth? It is Christ that died...", as if *He* and His death are the ultimate judgment. The OT idea of judgment was that in it, the Lord speaks, roars and cries, and there is an earthquake and eclipse of the sun (Joel 3:16; Am. 1:2; Jer. 25:30; Ps. 46:7; Rev. 10:3). Yet all these things are associated with the Lord's death. God will judge every man's work "forasmuch as ye know that ye were...redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb slain..." (1 Pet. 1:17-19). The link between our judgment and Christ's death needs to be reflected upon here. Our appreciation ("forasmuch...") of the cross is related to how we will be judged. The Lord's death should influence our works and therefore it is intimately related to our final judgment. We will be judged in accordance with how far we have let the cross influence our daily works.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed* (Lk. 2:35); and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

When the disciples got carried away wondering where the future judgment would be and how ever they would get there, the Lord replied that where the body is, thither the eagles naturally gather. One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body...realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn

between:

- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in its most crystallised form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this word is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain...an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. The same Greek word is used in describing how the jailor asked for a "light", i.e. a blazing torch, in order to inspect the darkened prison (Acts 16:29). Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, Jesus would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the ensign / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to the Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). Lk. 1:78,79 foretold how the Lord would be a lamp to those in darkness- and this had a strange fulfilment in His death. His example there on the cross was a light amidst the darkness that descended on the world. In the light of His cross, true self-examination is possible. Significantly perhaps, the Greek word for "light" occurs in Lk. 22:56, where Peter sits by the "fire" and was exposed. It was as if Peter was acting out a parable of how the "light" of association with the suffering Christ makes our deeds manifest. The day of "light" is both the crucifixion, and the last day of judgment, when all our deeds will be made manifest before the light (Lk. 12:3). By coming to the cross and allowing it to influence our self-examination, we come to judgment in advance.

Is. 45:20-24 speaks of how "all the ends of the earth" will look unto "a just God and a Saviour

[Jesus]" and be saved- evident reference back to the brazen serpent lifted up for salvation. The result of this is that to Him "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess" his moral failures, rejoicing that "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength...in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory". These words are quoted in Phil. 2:11 in description of the believer's response to the suffering Saviour. And yet they are quoted again in Rom. 14:10-12 regarding our confession of sin before the Lord at judgment day. The connections mean simply this: before the Lord's cross, we bow our knee and confess our failures, knowing the imputation of His righteousness, in anticipation of how we will bow before Him and give our miserable account at the judgment. And both processes are wonderfully natural. We must simply allow the power of a true faith in His cross to work out its own way in us. At the judgment, no flesh will glory in himself, but only in the Lord Jesus(1 Cor. 1:29). And even now, we glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14).

<b>Is. 45:23-25 cp. Rom. 14:11,12, about our reaction at the judgment seat</b>	<b>Phil. 2, about our reaction to the cross of Christ today</b>
:23 every knee shall bow	:10 every knee shall bow
:23 every tongue shall swear	:11 every tongue shall confess
:24 in the Lord	:11 Jesus Christ is Lord
:25 shall glory	:11 to the glory of God

Clearly our response to the cross is a foretaste of our response to the judgment experience.

There is a powerful practical result of this connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "For (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now. On the cross, the Lord Jesus was 'manifested', shown as He really and essentially is (Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:19,20; 1 Jn. 3:5,8; 1 Tim. 3:16). But the same word is also used about the final manifesting of the Lord Jesus at His return (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2). This explains the link between the cross and His return; who He was then will be who He will be when He comes in judgment. There He endured the spitting and hatred of men in order to save them. And the same gracious spirit will be extended to all His true people, whatever their inadequacies.

The second coming will be our meeting with the Lord who died for us. To come before Him then will be in essence the same as coming before His cross. Rev. 16 describes the events of the second coming, and yet it is full of allusion back to the cross: "it is done", the temple of heaven opened (16:17); an earthquake (16:18), a cup of wine (16:19). We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our "day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are "justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day.

## **The Breaking Of Bread And The Judgment**

The Lord Jesus clearly saw a link between the breaking of bread and His return. He not only told His people to perform it "until he come", but He said both before and after the last supper [putting together the Gospel records] that He would not keep this feast until He returned. Our breakings of bread are therefore a foretaste of the final sitting down with Him in His Kingdom- for He had elsewhere used the idea of feasting with Him as a symbol of our fellowship with Him at His return. The Rabbis had repeatedly taught that Messiah would come at Passover; the first century Rabbi Joshua said that "In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed by Messiah". Much evidence could be given of this<sup>(2)</sup>. For this reason Josephus records how the Jewish revolts against Rome repeatedly occurred around Passover time.

Yet all the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord's second coming from Heaven bearing our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: "At four times in the year is the world judged"<sup>(3)</sup>. Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat. Our attitude to the cross *and all that is meant by it* is the summation of our spirituality. I normally dislike using alternative textual readings to make a point, but there is an alternative reading of 1 Cor. 11:29 which makes this point so clearly: "He who eats and drinks ['unworthily' isn't in many manuscripts], eats and drinks discernment [judgment] to Himself. Not discerning the Lord's body is the reason many of you are weak and sickly". The Corinthians were not discerning the difference between the Lord's body and a piece of bread, for they were eating the bread as part of a self-indulgent social meal, rather than discerning Him.

The eating and drinking at the memorial meeting is a judging of ourselves. It's a preview of the judgment. 1 Cor. 11 seems to be concerning behaviour at the memorial meeting. Time and again the brethren are described as "coming together" to that meeting (:17,18,20,33,34). Believers 'coming together' is the language of coming together to judgment. Where two or three are *gathered*, the Lord is in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20) uses the same word as in Mt. 25:32 concerning our gathering together unto judgment. We should not forsake the "assembling of [ourselves] together" (Heb. 10:25)- the same word as in 2 Thess. 2:1 regarding our "gathering together unto Him". The church being assembled (Acts 11:26), two or three being gathered (Mt. 18:20)- this is all a foretaste of the final gathering to judgment (Mt. 25:32 s.w.). The command to *examine* ourselves (11:29) uses the same word as in 3:13 concerning the way our works will be *tried* with fire by the judgment process of the last day. If members of an ecclesia break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). This is after the pattern of the brethren at the first breaking of bread asking "Is it I?" in response to the Lord's statement that one of them would betray Him (Mt. 26:22). They didn't immediately assume they wouldn't do. And so we have a telling paradox: those who condemn themselves at the memorial meeting will not be condemned. Those who are sure they won't be condemned, taking the emblems with self-assurance, come together unto condemnation. Job knew this when he said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock...for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the

earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross. David's example helps us understand something of how this paradox works out in practice. He of all people appeared confident in his relationship with God and his personal hope of salvation. And yet he frequently felt at times "cast off" (Ps. 43:2; 44:9; 60:1; 74:1; 77:7; 88:14; 89:38; 108:11), using a Hebrew word elsewhere commonly used about God's final rejection of sinners. David genuinely felt a condemned man- and yet he rejoiced in God's salvation. Few of us get the balance so right.

More positively, because we know God's judgment, we can have some knowledge of our acceptability with God as we face the emblems. Whilst it may be hard to believe, Gal. 6:4 says that we can prove / judge our own works, and thus have rejoicing in ourselves. Although self-examination is fraught with problems, and even our conscience can be deceptive at times (1 Cor. 4:4), there is a sense in which we can judge / discern ourselves now.

This connection between the breaking of bread and judgment day is in fact a continuation of an Old Testament theme. Three times a year, the Israelite had to 'go up' to present himself before the Lord at the feasts (Dt. 16:16). He was to 'appear' there- a Hebrew word elsewhere translated approve, discern, gaze upon, take heed, look upon oneself, perceive, shew oneself. His very presence before the Lord would have this effect: he would be revealed openly to God, and he would see himself as he was. This was the intention; and yet Yahweh went on to warn them not to appear before Him "empty", vainly, 'to no effect'. Behold the intense relevance to our appearing before the Lord at our Passover: we can *so easily* present ourselves there 'to no effect', when the intention is that we should be manifesting ourselves to ourselves and to God. The familiar order of service, the well known hymns, the presence of familiar and often family faces...these factors (not wrong in themselves) all encourage us to 'appear' there to no effect. David describes the going up to keep the feasts in unmistakable judgment-seat language: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go [up] into the house of the Lord...the tribes go up...unto the testimony of Israel [cp. the Lord Jesus, the faithful and true witness], to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set [AV mg. 'do sit'] thrones of judgment, the thrones [an intensive plural- the great throne] of the house of David [i.e. that of Christ]" (Ps. 122:1-5). David wrote this well aware that Messiah was to sit on his throne in Jerusalem at His return and final judgment. Is it going too far to suggest that David saw in the tribes going up to Zion a type of God's people going up to meet the Lord at the final judgment? If so, he understood their response to the invitation to go there as one of *joy*; we go to judgment to praise, joyful at the invitation.

Another OT anticipation of these things is found in the way the "water of separation" granted cleansing, in prophecy of the effect of the blood of Christ (Num. 19:21). But the Hebrew for "separation" is also translated 'uncleanness' (Lev. 20:21; Ezra 9:11; Zech. 13:1). Touching this water for any other reason made a man unclean. Only if used in the right context did it make him clean (Num. 19:21). This is why it is described with a word which has these two meanings. Thus the RSV gives "water of impurity", the Russian: 'water of purifying'. And so it is with our contact with the work of the Lord, symbolized in the emblems. We are made unclean by it, we drink damnation to ourselves, if we don't discern it. Only if we properly discern it are we cleansed by it.

The most evident link between the breaking of bread and the judgment / second coming is in the

fact we are to do it "until he come". The Jews expected Messiah to come at Passover, and the Lord seems to have plugged into that fact. 'Until he come' was an allusion by Paul to the contemporary Passover prayer for the coming of Messiah at the Passover meal: "May the Lord come and this world pass away. Amen. Hosanna to the house of David. If any man is holy, let him come; if any man is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen". Joachim Jeremias translates the phrase: "'Until (matters have developed to the point at which) he comes', 'until (the goal is reached, that) he comes'" <sup>(4)</sup>. He points out a similar construction in other passages relevant to the second coming (Lk. 21:24; 1 Cor. 15:25; Rom. 11:25). Thus each memorial meeting brings us a step closer towards the final coming of Jesus. It would therefore be so appropriate if the Lord did return during a breaking of bread. One day, the foretaste of judgment which we experience then will be, in reality, our final judgment. As we break bread, each time we are 'reminding' the Father as well as ourselves of His Son's work and the need to climax it in sending Him back.

## The Cup

The whole story of Joseph is one of the clearest types of Jesus in the Old Testament. The way His brethren come before His throne and are graciously accepted is one of the most gripping foretastes we have of the final judgment. The rather strange way Joseph behaves towards them was surely to elicit within them a true repentance. He sought to bring them to self-knowledge through His cup. Joseph stresses to the brethren that it is through his cup that he "divines" to find out their sin. He also emphasizes that by stealing the cup they had "done evil" (Gen. 44:4,5). And yet they didn't actually steal the cup. The "evil" which they had done was to sell him into Egypt (Gen. 50:20). They had "stolen" him (Gen. 40:15) in the same way they had "stolen" the cup. This is why he says that "ye" (you plural, not singular, as it would have been if he was referring merely to Benjamin's supposed theft) had stolen it (Gen. 44:15). And the brethren in their consciences understood what Joseph was getting at- for instead of insisting that they hadn't stolen the cup, they admit: "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants" (Gen. 44:16). Clearly their minds were on their treatment of Joseph, the sin which they had thought would not be found out. And this was why they were *all* willing to bear the punishment of becoming bondmen, rather than reasoning that since Benjamin had apparently committed the crime, well he alone must be punished. The cup was "found" and they realized that God had "found out" their joint iniquity (Gen. 44:10,12,16). The cup was perceived by them as their "iniquity" with Joseph. They had used the very same Hebrew words years before, in telling Jacob of Joseph's garment: "This have we found..." (Gen. 37:32).

The cup made them realize their guilt and made them acceptive of the judgment they deserved. And it made them quit their attempts at parading their own righteousness, no matter how valid it was in the immediate context (Gen. 44:8). The cup made them realize their real status, and not just use empty words. Behold the contradiction in Gen. 44:9: "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my Lord's bondmen / servants". The Hebrew words translated "servants" and "bondmen" are the same. Their mere formal recognition that they were Joseph's servants was to be translated into reality. Thus they say that Joseph had "found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we *are* my Lord's servants". Describing themselves as His servants had been a mere formalism; now they wanted it in a meaningful reality. And the Lord's cup can do the same to us. The way they were "searched" (Gen. 44:12) from the oldest to the youngest was surely the background for how the guilty men pined away in guilt from the Lord, from the eldest to the youngest. The whole experience would have elicited self-knowledge within them. The same word is

found in Zech. 1:12, describing how God Himself would search out the sin of Jerusalem.

Joseph was trying to tell them: 'What you did to the cup, you did to me. That cup is a symbol of me'. And inevitably the mind flies to how the Lord solemnly took the cup and said that this was Him. Our attitude to those emblems is our attitude to Him. We have perhaps over-reacted against the Roman Catholic view that the wine turns into the very blood of Jesus. It doesn't, of course, but all the same the Lord did say that the wine *is* His blood, the bread *is* His body. Those emblems are effectively Him to us. They are symbols, but not mere symbols. If we take them with indifference, with minds focused on externalities, then this is our essential attitude to Him personally. This is why the memorial meeting ought to have an appropriate intensity about it- for it is a personal meeting with Jesus. "Here O my Lord, I see thee face to face". If it is indeed this, then the cup will be the means of eliciting within us our own realization of sin and subsequently, of our salvation in Jesus.

The brothers' words are exactly those of Daniel in Dan. 10:15-17, where in another death and resurrection experience, he feels just the same as he lays prostrate before the Angel. Our attitude to the Lord in the last day will be our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread- just as our "boldness" in prayer now will be our "boldness" in the day of judgment. In the same way as the brothers had to be reassured by Joseph of his loving acceptance, so the Lord will have to 'make us' sit down with Him, and encourage us to enter into His joy. There will be some sort of disbelief at the extent of His grace in all those who are truly acceptable with Him ("When saw we thee...?"). The brothers grieved and were angry with themselves in the judgment presence of Joseph (Gen. 45:5)- they went through the very feelings of the rejected (cp. "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in self-hatred). And yet they were graciously accepted, until like Daniel they can eventually freely talk with their saviour Lord (Gen. 45:15). And so the sheep will feel rejected at the judgment, they will condemn themselves- in order to be saved ultimately. The same words occur in Neh. 8:10,11, when a repentant Israel standing before the judgment *bema* (LXX) are given the same assurance.

The Hebrew for "divineth" means literally 'to make trial'; their taking of the cup was their trial / judgment. Thus we drink either blessing or condemnation to ourselves by taking the cup. The word used by the LXX for "divineth" in Gen. 44:5 occurs in the NT account of the breaking of bread service: 'everyone should *examine* himself, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup' (1 Cor. 11:28). The Lord examines us, as we examine ourselves. There is a mutuality here- the spirit of man is truly the candle of the Lord (Prov. 20:27). He searches us through our own self-examination. He knows all things, but there may still be methods that He uses to gather than information. Our hearts are revealed to God through our own self-examination. And is it mere co-incidence that the Hebrew words for "divination" and "snake" are virtually identical [*nahash*]? The snake lifted up on the pole [cp. the crucified Jesus] is the means of trial / divination. Through the cross, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed (Lk. 2:35), just as they will be at the last day (1 Cor. ). Thus the breaking of bread ceremony is a means towards the sort of realistic self-examination which we find so hard to achieve in normal life.

## **A T-Junction**

The very nature of the breaking of bread brings us to a T-junction in our lives. The Corinthians were told that they would "provoke the Lord to jealousy" by breaking bread and yet also worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:22). This is surely an allusion to the "trial of jealousy" (Num. 5:24). A curse was recited and then the believer drunk a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drunk to their condemnation. Paul's allusion suggests that each day we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ



are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives in the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup.

The breaking of bread brings us before the cross, which is in a sense our judgment seat. There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19) <sup>(5)</sup>. Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. Indeed, the Lord's supper is a place to which the rejected are invited (Zeph. 1:7,8; Rev. 19:7), or the redeemed (Rev. 3:20). Like the cup of wine, being invited to the Lord's supper is a double symbol. Another double symbol is to be found in the figure of a woman in labour. This symbolizes both condemnation (Is. 13:8) and also of spiritually coming to birth (Is. 37:3). Through the experience and recognition of condemnation for sin in this life, we can come to spiritual birth. Another is to be found in the idea of God looking upon men- He looks upon the righteous (1 Pet. 3:12 RV), and yet He looked upon the Egyptians at the Red Sea to their condemnation. God will 'look upon' each of us at judgment day- either to our condemnation or salvation.

And there is no escape by simply not breaking bread. The peace offering was one of the many antecedents of the memorial meeting. Once the offerer had dedicated himself to making it, he was condemned if he didn't then do it, and yet also condemned if he ate it unclean (Lev. 7:18,20). So a man *had* to either cleanse himself, or be condemned. There was no get out, no third road. The man who ate the holy things in a state of uncleanness had to die; his eating would load him with the condemnation of his sins (Lev. 22:3,16 AV mg.). This is surely the source for our possibility of "eating...condemnation" to ourselves by partaking of the breaking of bread in an unworthy manner. And so it is with us as we face the emblems. We must do it, or we deny our covenant relationship. And yet if we do it in our uncleanness, we also deny that relationship. And thus the breaking of bread brings us up before the cross and throne of the Lord Jesus- even now. It brings us to a realistic self-examination. If we cannot examine ourselves and know that Christ is really in us, then we are reprobate; we "have failed" (2 Cor. 13:5 G.N.B.). Self-examination is therefore one of those barriers across our path in life which makes us turn to the Kingdom or to the flesh. If we can't examine ourselves and see that Christ is in us and that we have therefore that great salvation in Him; we've failed. I wouldn't be so bold as to throw down this challenge to any of us in exhortation. But Paul does. It's a powerful, even terrible, logic. 1 Cor. 11:26 AVmg. makes the act of breaking bread a command, an imperative to action: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, shew ye the Lord's death, till he come". If we are going to eat the emblems, it is axiomatic that we will commit ourselves to shewing forth His death to the world, like Paul placarding forth Christ crucified in our lives (Gal. 3:1 Gk.). The Passover likewise had been a 'shewing' to one's family "that which the Lord did unto me" (Ex. 13:8), the redemption we have experienced.

When the people ratified their covenant with Yahweh [cp. the breaking of bread], they had to confirm their agreement that they would be cursed for disobedience to it; and "cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them" (Dt. 27:26). They couldn't opt out of bringing this curse upon themselves for disobedience- if they did, they were cursed.

The Passover was another foretaste of the bread and wine service we participate in. If it was eaten unclean, the offerer ate condemnation to himself. He was to be cut off from the community if he opted out of keeping the Passover; and yet he was also rejected if he kept it unclean. So he couldn't

just flunk his need to keep the feast. He *had* to keep it, and he *had* to keep in a clean state. And so with us. To simply not break bread is to deny our relationship with the Lord. But once we commit to doing it, we *must* search our houses for leaven, for those little things which over time will influence the whole direction and nature of our spiritual lives. The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it*, after that sign of the Lord's *especial love* for him, "satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

Judging / examining ourselves is made parallel with discerning the Lord's body: as if discerning His body on the cross inevitably results in self-examination, and vice versa (1 Cor. 11:28,29). We must *discern* the Lord's body, and thereby *examine* ourselves (these are the same words in the Greek text). Yet the Lord's body in the Corinthian context is the ecclesia, the body of Jesus. To discern ourselves is to discern the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29,30 RV). By discerning our brethren for who they are, treating them as brethren, perceiving our own part in the body of Jesus, our salvation is guaranteed. For this is love, in its most fundamental essence.

If we examine / judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, God will not have to do this to us at the day of judgment. If we cast away our own bodies now, the Lord will not need to cast us away in rejection (Mt. 5:30). There is a powerful logic here. If we pronounce ourselves uncondemned, we condemn ourselves (Tit. 3:11); if we condemn ourselves now, we will be uncondemned ultimately. This is why the Greek word translated "examine" (1 Cor. 11:29) is also that translated "approve" in 11:19 (and also 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Tim. 2:15). By condemning ourselves we in a sense approve ourselves. Our self-examination should result in us realising our unworthiness, seeing ourselves from God's viewpoint. There is therefore a parallel made between our own judgment of ourselves at the memorial meeting, and the final judgment- where we will be condemned, yet saved by grace (James 2:12; 3:1). If we don't attain this level of self-knowledge now, we will be taught it by being condemned at the judgment. This makes the logic of serious, real self-examination so vital; either we do it in earnest, and realise our own condemnation, or if we *don't* do it, we'll be condemned at the judgment. Yet as with so much in our spiritual experience, what is so evidently logical is so hard to translate into reality. The process of judgment will essentially be for our benefit, not the Lord's. *Then* the foolish virgins realise that they didn't have enough oil / spirituality; whilst the wise already knew this (Mt. 25:13). As a foretaste of the day of judgment, we must "examine" ourselves, especially at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). The same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:13 concerning how the process of the judgment seat will be like a fire which *tries* us.

## **Practical Conclusions**

So, in the light of all this, *break bread*. Many readers of these words are isolated or only occasionally meet with their brethren for formal memorial meetings. But *break bread alone*, weekly if you can. I know, from years in semi-isolation myself, how terribly tempting it is to let it slip from

a weekly habit. 'I'll do it tomorrow, next week, well soon we'll have a visit / meeting, I'll do it then anyway...'. Whenever the Lord started to speak about His death, the disciples invariably turned the conversation round to another tack. And it seems, from a careful analysis of the crucifixion records, that those who came to behold Golgotha's awful scene couldn't watch it for too long, but went away. And so with us, we have a tendency to defer facing up to the message of the cross as the emblems portray it; and even while we are doing it, to concern ourselves with anything *but* the essential essence of the cross; the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the exhortation... all these things we can so eagerly crowd out the essence of the cross.

When you're in isolation, nobody ever asks you point blank: 'Do you break bread alone every week?'. We may meet together with others occasionally, and when we do we all act as if *of course* this is the norm of our spiritual lives; when it can so easily not be so at all. If the above reasoning has been followed, the breaking of bread is a vital, God-designed part of our spiritual growth. It should shake us to the bone, as it brings us face to shame-bowed face with the crucified Saviour. It isn't a ritual which somehow shows us to be a keen Christian; it's a vital act within our very personal spirituality. And so I will ask you point blank: 'Do you break bread each week?'. Not that actually there's any specific command to do it weekly; but it's so evidently a vital part of our relationship with the Lord that we must ask ourselves why *shouldn't* we do it weekly.

And break bread *properly*, not just to salve your conscience or because it's expected of you, or because it's your psychological routine. Be aware that there is a psychology of religious experience; all religious people like to have some physical symbolism (e.g. bread = body, wine = blood), and especially, some solemn rituals that they observe; and they feel calmer, satisfied, fulfilled after keeping them. On one level, we are religious people like any other religious people, and have the same features. But on another level, true Christianity is *the one and only ultimately true religion*, which by grace we have come to know. Our breaking of bread is *far far more* than *just* religious ritual, although on one level it is that. But we must rise well above this. Israel kept the Passover (cp. the breaking of bread), and yet to God they never *really* kept it. The Corinthians took the cup of the Lord and that of the idols; they broke bread with both (1 Cor. 10:21). But they were told they *could not* do this. They took the cup of the Lord; but not in the Lord's eyes. They ate the Lord's supper; but they had to be told that they were *not* really eating it (1 Cor. 11:20). They turned *His* supper into their *own* supper. They did it, but for themselves. And so in spiritual terms, they didn't do it (1 Cor. 11:20,21). Just as the "Lord's passover" became by the time of the NT "the feast of the Jews". They turned His passover into their own. Likewise they turned the house of God into their own house (Mt. 23:38); and the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now "their law" (Jn. 15:25). And so we must just accept the real possibility that we can break bread on the surface, but not break bread. We've probably all done this. Don't let it become the norm. Likewise Israel had to be asked the rhetorical question: "*Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years?*" (Am. 5:25). Because they *also* worshipped Molech, their keeping of the feasts wasn't accepted. So I can ask again: Do you *really* break bread?

So not only must we break bread by all means; we must allow ourselves the time and collected mind to enable us to do it as we are intended to. Like baptism, we can't keep in mind at the same time all the wonderful, high things which the service means to us whilst we perform it. But we should try, as far as we can, to be as aware as possible of all these things. So may I say some things which ought to be obvious:

- Don't noisily dash in to a memorial meeting late. Try to take your place with as little disturbance

of others as possible. Bring your kids with you by all means; but try to make every reasonable effort to keep them from unduly distracting others. Try to remove all distractions, as far as you can, and minimise the possibility of interruption if you are breaking bread alone at home.

- Prepare your mind before the meeting. Realise something of what you are about to do. We could *all* ensure we sit in silence for at least five minutes before the meeting starts.

- If you are making comments on the readings or giving an exhortation, or simply seeking exhortation for yourself from the readings, concentrate on the things of the Lord Jesus and His cross. He is to be found in all the Scriptures. Don't use this time as a platform for airing your crotchets or hang ups about others (even if only within your own mind).

- Don't start talking (or thinking) about the things of this life the moment the last prayer finishes.

- Be sober, in view of the seriousness of what we are doing. Don't allow a spirit of levity to creep in to the proceedings. We are going through a dummy run of judgment day. We stand before the Lord's cross.

- And yet be joyful, as far as you can be. But don't let the expression of that joy in music take you away from the focus of the meeting. Intricate part-singing in the Western world and repetitive, rhythmic choruses used elsewhere aren't wrong *per se*; but if glorified in themselves they *can* take us away from the focus, the Head, which is the Saviour Lord Himself, and our desperate gratitude for His love.

- Don't hold yourself back during the meeting; allow yourself to make those mental commitments you are moved to. Our flesh almost makes us feel embarrassed or insincere if we resolve to make a major (or minor) change in our lives. Let true devotion and response rise above this. We must just accept that the memorial meeting *is* an emotional experience; it can be nothing else, to the devoted heart. And there's nothing wrong with this. Don't be too proud (brethren) to shed a tear.

And especially. *Don't separate the act of breaking bread from the rest of your life.* It should be the natural flow-on from your daily meditation on the Lord's love. The mind set we have in that quiet hour should in principle be that which we have all our hours and days; for we live as men and women under judgment, ever confronted and comforted by that love of the Father and Son, so great, so free. It demands by its very nature and existence our self-examination and response, far more than just one hour / week.

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## Notes

(1) In the Corinthian context, the body of Christ is to be understood as the ecclesia. 1 Cor. 12 is full of this figure. The need to discern the Lord's body at the breaking of bread means that we must go beyond reflection upon His physical body. We must recognise / discern His ecclesia too. The immediate context of 1 Cor. 11 is of unbrotherly behaviour at the memorial meeting. If we fail to recognise / appreciate / discern the Lord's physical body, we will fail to recognise His brethren. And if we do this, we have made ourselves guilty of His body and blood, we have crucified Him again. This is why I plead with those who use the breaking of bread as a weapon for division within the Lord's body to think again. The body which we must discern at the breaking of bread evidently

has some reference to the ecclesia. We thereby place ourselves in a dangerous position by refusing to share the emblems with others in the body, and disfellowshipping those who do so.

(2) See Joachim Jeremias *The Eucharistic Words Of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1973 ed.,) p. 206.

(3) Quoted in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching Of The Cross*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 266.

(4) Joachim Jeremias, *op cit* p. 253.

(5) The very structure of the Hebrew language reflects this. Thus the Hebrew 'baruch' means both 'blessed' and 'cursed'; 'kedoshim' means both 'Sodomites' and 'saints'.