

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

How many times have you and I said, “This is not fair, I don’t deserve to be treated this way?” It is a common occurrence in life. What happened to you may have even been illegal. It may have been so terrible you despised of life itself. How can we face such situations? Are there any examples of how to rise above the circumstances in which we find ourselves?

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . .” Jesus projected Himself toward the cross from the beginning of His ministry. Some three and a half years later, the time had come. This was the “watershed” event of all human history. This was the time when the price was paid for sin and for sins and the death grip Satan held on mankind was broken. Surprisingly, all that happened to Jesus was illegal. However, the purpose of God to redeem mankind was accomplished regardless of the legality of what happened to Jesus. God used the most unfair, the most illegal, and the most unlikely set of events to ever happen to demonstrate His grace and His love and His plan of salvation for the fallen human race.

Paul said the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks, but it represents the power of God unto salvation for those who are saved. How does what Jesus did on the cross cause us to be saved? We could say that Jesus paid the penalty for sin and we are saved from having to pay that penalty. But there is more to it than this. If we put the teachings of Jesus together with the passion of Jesus, then we can learn something of salvation beyond the obvious escape from the penalty of sin.

Jesus taught “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. We have come to associate the idea of “bearing our cross” as coping with the daily problems of living.

However, we don’t typically see our cross as having the same effect as the cross of Christ. His cross killed him. We just sort of “cope with” our cross. This kind of thinking is what is embodied in the concept of “cheap grace.” We cannot deal with the issue of the cross we have to bear apart from the cross of Christ. We have to face up to the fact that God’s invitation to “come to Jesus” is an invitation to “come and die.” All the emphasis we typically hear is that we are to come to Jesus so we can live. This is true, but we have to die before we can live. That is, we must die to self and the “old nature” before we can have the “new life” in Christ. On the surface, we think it would be great if we could be born again from above of the Spirit of God without having to die to self! I don’t think so! This condition would have been the situation of Adam and Eve if they had remained in the Garden of Eden and had eaten of the fruit of the tree of life after they had sinned and broken fellowship with God. Man living forever in his fallen nature is the worst kind of cruelty.

Some have attempted to sum up the salvation experience as follows: “If we are born once, then we will die twice. If we are born twice, then we will die once.” The meaning is obvious to most Christian. If the only birth we experience is physical birth, then we will die physically and then experience spiritual death in eternity. However, if we have also experience a spiritual birth from above, then we will still die physically but will enjoy eternal life with God. What this saying ignores is the death to self that must take place before the new birth can happen. So regardless of the situation, we will die twice, however the sequence of how these occur is most important.

The thing Jesus did for us secured eternal salvation for all who have faith in the work He did. If I have faith in what He did as

the means of salvation, then I will follow His example and submit myself to the “daily crosses” that assist me in putting the carnal or fleshly nature to death. Many of these crosses (perhaps all of them) are like the cross Jesus had to bear. They are usually unfair, they might even be illegal, and they are unlikely. The unlikely nature of the crosses we are to bear is that we will usually have the power to extract ourselves from the situation. When we are attacked or abused or ridiculed, then we can respond with similar attacks. Jesus could have called ten thousand angels, but He didn’t. How would we have handled the cross of Calvary? More importantly, how do we handle the unfair situations in which we find ourselves today?

JOHN 19:17-18 The means of death Jesus experiences has significance in what it communicates to us. The Old Testament tells us “cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.” The curse of the law (the soul that sins, it shall die) passed upon Jesus so that we are delivered from it. He was crucified between two criminals and thus fulfilled the saying “He was reckoned among the transgressors.” The number of prophecies fulfilled during the time of our Lord’s passion is truly amazing. The most graphic prophecy is the Psalm of the Cross recorded in Psalm 22.

JOHN 19:19-22 The Jews had caused Pilate much grief with this matter of what to do with Jesus. Pilate was determined to get even. This situation is somewhat ironic in that Pilate stated the truth though he did not believe it. The sign above Jesus was a not-so-subtle warning to the rest of the Jews of what might happen to them if they got out of line.

JOHN 19:23-24 The prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled even the seemingly insignificant acts of the Roman soldiers. A thousand years earlier, David had written about the events of the cross.

JOHN 19:25-27 Little did Mary realize 34 years earlier that it would come to

this when the angel announced to her she was going to have a son who would be the savior of the world. There were times when she sought Jesus to get Him to come back home because she did not understand what He was doing. However, at the last, she was there, probably confused and hurting because of what was happening to Jesus.

Jesus had promised His disciples He would send another Comforter after He was gone; however, there were other than spiritual concerns. Having someone He could count on to provide for the physical well being of His mother was not to be overlooked.

JOHN 19:28-30 During the final minutes on the cross, Jesus was physically weakened and our physical needs cry out. Jesus was in control of His emotions during this time. He did not lash out at those who were unjustly killing Him. He was even in control of His death. At the appointed time, He said “It is finished” and with that He released His spirit. His mission had been accomplished and He was to return to the Father.

So, how do we rise above the situations and circumstances in our lives? If we follow the example of Jesus, then we find that first of all we must be about the business of taking up our cross rather than avoiding it. We don’t call ten thousand angels when situations come in which we are to put self to death. If we recognize that God is at work in our lives to transform us into the likeness of Jesus, then we can also recognize that by accepting the cross we are cooperating with God in His work in our lives. We may seem to be defeated (as people thought Jesus was when He was on the cross) but we need to know the rest of the story. Jesus told His disciples He would rise again. If we die with Him, then we shall also rise with Him.