

## Salvation Session 7

### Living by the Cross – Suffering and Glory

As we come to the last session of our series on the cross, let's begin with a recap of what we've covered so far in this series.

We began by looking at the centrality of the cross, and we saw that the cross is absolutely fundamental to our Christian faith. Indeed without the cross there is no Christianity. From the human perspective death on a cross is absolutely disgusting, but Christians have always refused to abandon the notion – because without the cross we have nothing to say.

Christ's death is the basis of every spiritual blessing:

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32 NIV)

Christ was sent to the cross by the opposition of the Jewish leaders, by the betrayal of Judas and the condemnation of a weak Pontius Pilate, but more importantly because he knew he must fulfil his destiny in accordance with His Father's will. Christ knew that he must die for us, for the forgiveness of our sins, he made that abundantly clear at his final meal with his disciples, the Last Supper. He said:

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:26-28 NIV)

John puts it beautifully in chapter 3 of his gospel and also links the cross to the OT:

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” (John 3:14-18 NIV)

I wasn't present for Session 2, but we were looking at the need for Christ's death. Well, we know that we're all guilty of sin:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23 NIV)

and God's just punishment for sin is death:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23 NIV)

but why couldn't our loving merciful God just forgive our sins? The answer is that He IS a loving merciful God, but he's also a just, righteous and holy God and his just and righteous nature wouldn't permit him just to forget about our sins, to sweep them under the carpet as it were. God is faithful to all the elements of his character all of the time.

Modern theologians such as John Murray have argued that God could have decided not to save mankind at all, or he could have done what he did – create humanity, permit the Fall and then save many of them through the death of His son. On the basis of a number of gospel

texts Murray concluded “there is stated to be a necessity that can be met by nothing less than the blood of Jesus.”

In sending His son to be abused and killed God acted in the way that was most in accordance with all aspects of his nature. As Augustine said “this way whereby God deigned to liberate us through the Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ was both good and befitting the divine dignity ....” God acted to save this sinful race in the way he did precisely because of who he is. Christ’s sufferings and death are completely congruent with the character of God. As the writer to the Hebrews put it:

“ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Hebrews 2:10).

I believe that Christ died for all mankind, but that not all mankind will actually be saved. The idea of universal salvation is simply not in accordance with scripture. We must turn to Christ in faith to obtain the benefit of the pardon he won for us on the cross – remember my George Wilson story. All *can* come – the “whosoever” of John 3:16 – but not all will come because not all will turn to Christ. There’s a conflict here between predestination and election and our freewill to choose to come which can’t be fully resolved by human minds, but I think it can somehow be fully resolved in God’s kingdom.

In session 3 we looked at satisfaction and substitution. The OT makes the idea of substitution clear. On the day of atonement a goat – the scapegoat – was burdened with the sins of the Israelite community and died in place of that whole community. Jesus’s death satisfied the penalty for our sins because Jesus was uniquely 100% man and 100% God. As man he was able to be a representative man who could die in substitution for us all and as God he could pay the penalty for our sins because he was without sin and thus able to pay the penalty for our sins.

In session 4 we looked at salvation in terms of five images – justification, redemption, propitiation, reconciliation and covenant. We saw that Christ’s death propitiated God’s wrath at our sins, because Christ died the death that we deserved to die for our sins in substitution for us. We saw that Christ’s righteousness has been credited to us and that we have been given a legally (but not actually) righteous standing before God. Christ’s death has redeemed us from our slavery to sin and we have been reconciled to God for the first time since the Fall and we have been adopted into God’s family, given the status of children of God. On the cross Christ made a new covenant with us in his blood which is a final covenant completely replacing the old Sinai covenant, because it is the best possible covenant.

In session 5 we looked at being a part of God’s family, being adopted as his children:

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13 NIV)

and what a fantastic privilege that is.

We looked at sanctification, how we’re really being made holy, being made like Jesus Christ, as opposed to having been justified or given a legally right standing. We saw that this is a gradual process worked out in the power of the Holy Spirit which will not be fully completed in this life:

“ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

and that we can help and accelerate this process by co-operating with the work of the Spirit.

We looked at how God chastens or disciplines us as his children, always for our good, to help the process of our sanctification.

We looked at how we must take up our cross and follow Christ, dying to our old sinful nature:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

We saw that on the cross Christ triumphed over Satan and all evil powers. This is a further achievement of the cross. The cross appeared to be the defeat of goodness by evil, but was actually the defeat of evil by goodness:

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2:13-15).

Finally last time, in session 6, we looked at how we should respond to God’s wonderful provision for us. We saw that we need to show our gratitude for God’s love and mercy by living holy lives and by conducting ourselves in a way that’s honouring and pleasing to our Father – not to earn our salvation, but out of gratitude for the fact that we’ve already been saved. We learned that we are ambassadors of God’s reconciliation through Christ and that we must therefore be reconciled to others. This will lead us into a life of service.

We saw that as Christians we are called to be peacemakers and to live in peace with our enemies in so far as this depends on us. Christian peacemaking exhibits the love and justice – and so the pain – of the cross. We saw that we must hate what is evil and cling to what is good, but that we must not repay anyone evil for evil but rather overcome evil with good.

We need to remember that on the cross God did not refuse to punish evil, but rather accepted the punishment himself in the person of his son. At the cross human evil was both punished and overcome and God’s justice and mercy were both satisfied.

### **Living by the Cross**

So let’s move on to look at living by the cross: suffering and glory.

The problem of pain and suffering is probably one of the greatest challenges to our Christian faith. The age old question is: How can a good all powerful God permit pain and suffering which in many cases seems totally random and unfair. The devastation caused by earthquakes, volcanoes tsunamis and the like seems to fall into this category. French writer Voltaire raised the conundrum – either God is good but not almighty or he is not good. We ask why? or why me? and rage against God accusing him of injustice or indifference.

Unfortunately the Bible provides no solution to the problems of evil, suffering and sin.

However, I do think the book of Job makes it clear that suffering is an intrusion into God's world and will have no part in the world following the second coming. So do Jesus's rebuking of disease, Paul's reference to his thorn in the flesh as a messenger of Satan and Peter's portrayal of Jesus's ministry as healing all who were under the power of the devil: "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" (Luke 13:16 NIV)

and

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." (2 Corinthians 12:7 NIV)

and

"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." (Acts 10:38 NIV)

This may end in good but it is good out of evil.

In many ways our current evil situation results from mankind's original rebellion against God, resulting in the Fall, which blighted the whole of creation.

Of course, some of our suffering is due to our present stupidity and sin. If we drive whilst we are drunk or recklessly court danger we bring evil upon ourselves. But Job rejects the idea that this is the explanation for all sin and Jesus repudiated it too:

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (John 9:1-3 NIV)

and

"Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:1-5 NIV)

The cross is the path to mature holiness through suffering:

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Hebrews 2:10 NIV)

and

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9 NIV).

If suffering was the means by which the sinless Christ became mature, how much more must we need it? James tells us this:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4 NIV)

God is disciplining his children, refining his silver and gold and pruning the vine:  
“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:5-11 NIV)

These things all bring good – well disciplined children, refined pure gold and healthy productive vines. Suffering is rarely creative in itself, but we are rarely creative without suffering.

The cross of Christ is the symbol of suffering service and we see in Christ's sacrificial death the ultimate creative service:

“Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” (John 12:23-33 NIV)

Paul shows his understanding of this principle:

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—”  
“I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.” (Eph 3:1;13 NIV)

and

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.” (Colossians 1:24 NIV)

and

“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:8-10 NIV)

Finally the cross of Christ is our hope of final glory. We may suffer now as Christ suffered on the cross, but in due time we will be raised like Christ to enjoy eternity with our Father and his Son. As we share in Christ's sufferings so we share in his glory. This hope of glory makes our present sufferings bearable. As Paul says:

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Romans 8:16-21 NIV)

The hymn by Margaret Clarkson declares:

O Father you are sovereign  
The Lord of human pain  
Transmuting earthly sorrows  
To gold of heavenly gain  
All evil overruling  
As none but conqueror could  
Your love pursues its purpose—  
Our souls' eternal good.

If God left us alone his love for us would not be greater but lesser.

Yet in the end we must return to the book of Job. Job was a blameless and upright man, yet it is hard to comprehend the magnitude of the disasters which overwhelmed him. He is deprived of his livestock, his home, his sons and daughters and his health. Job's response is a mixture of self pity and self assertion. He claims he has been unjustly afflicted and it is grossly unfair since he is so feeble in comparison to God. He maintains his innocence and is confident that one day he will be vindicated. Job's friends – his comforters – maintain that he is being afflicted because of his wickedness. That his afflictions are the divine penalty for his misdeeds. Job will have none of this and talks of them as worthless physicians and miserable comforters. Eventually God confirms Job's verdict and talks of the folly of his friends. Yet Job is humbled and converted from self assertion to self surrender.

If Job should have trusted the God whose power and wonder was revealed in creation, how much more should we trust a God whose power and wonder are revealed in the cross. No one is more trustworthy than the God of the cross. As Paul says:

"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies." (Romans 8:31-33 NIV)

Since God has demonstrated his holy love and loving justice in the historical reality of the cross no other historical event can override it. This is why the scroll of history is now in the hands of the Lamb and why only he can break its seals reveal its contents and control the future. Also let us not forget that in sending his son to die the most horrible death God has

demonstrated his solidarity with us in our suffering. If God were incapable of suffering he would also be incapable of love.

We need to press on relentlessly to our goal of becoming like Christ and attaining glory with him and the Father in the kingdom of heaven. As Paul says:

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:7-11 NIV)