

Chapter Six

Boasting in the Cross

We come now to the conclusion of this series on the meaning of the cross of Christ. And I pray that you have realized what good news the message of the cross brings. It doesn't matter what your sins are. It doesn't matter how many sins you have piled up in your life. It doesn't matter how guilty you feel. It doesn't matter how many skeletons you have in your closet. It doesn't matter how hopeless you think life is. The cross of Jesus Christ is God's answer to your deepest needs.

Just before Christ died on the cross, he cried out, "It is finished!"¹ And he meant that the penalty for sin had been paid in full. What Christ accomplished on the cross was so complete that it can never be repeated. The Word of God declares,

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.
(Hebrews 10:11-14)

When Christ died on the cross he provided for all of us the final and full sacrifice for our sins. You are perfected forever. There is nothing that God must do to save you. There is no plan B because plan A worked! It was more than sufficient. This is why the apostle Paul wrote what he did near the end of his letter to the Galatians.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
(Galatians 6:14)

In this deep and profound statement the apostle Paul declared that he boasted or exalted or gloried in the cross of Christ. Boasting in the cross of Christ? This has a strange sound to us. Boasting in the cross? Is this like boasting

¹ John 19:30

in the electric chair, or the gas chamber or lethal injection or the hangman's noose? Is that what the apostle is really saying? In one sense, the answer is no. Paul was not proud of the wooden beams that made the cross. But in another sense, the answer is yes, because there on the cross the sacrifice of Christ took place to redeem us from sin.

In the first century the cross, the act of crucifixion, spoke of unspeakable shame, horror and disgust. It was punishment criminals and evil doers. As we saw from 1 Corinthians 1:18-23 the Gentile world saw a crucified savior as foolish and moronic. The Jews saw it as a scandal and an offense. How could a crucified criminal be the Savior of the world?

So why boast in the cross? Here's the answer for us redeemed sinners, for us who are now children of God. Every good thing, indeed every bad thing that God overturns for our good was obtained and secured for us by the cross of Christ. Apart from the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for us, we stand as enemies of God and under His holy wrath.² Therefore every good thing we enjoy in Jesus Christ, every blessing, every mercy, every gift and miracle flows from the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Every hope we have in God flows from the blood of Jesus Christ.

This is why the apostle Paul said, in effect, "When I look upon the cross, the lure, the power, the deception of the world no longer attracts me. The world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Now, verse 14 is set in a context, so let's read it.

See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! 12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
(Galatians 6:11-14)

You see, Paul had founded the Galatian church on the pure gospel of the sacrifice of Christ for our salvation. But false teachers had come into the church who said, "Christ's sacrifice is god. But you need to be circumcised. If you really want to be saved you need to follow our rules. You need to go back under the

² John 3:36; Romans 5:6-9

old Mosaic law." Today, in our time, someone might say, "hey, I'm glad that you have faith in Jesus and read your Bible. But you need to be water baptized as an adult. You need to follow our rules," and on and on. In other words Christ's sacrifice on the cross was not sufficient to save you. You need to do some religious ritual or work. And this was all motivated by religious pride. They wanted to boast in their own works. Now I'm all for good works. So is God. But good works flow out from your salvation in Christ. They do not earn you salvation. And this is why the apostle Paul declared what he did in verse 14.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

There are a lot of things Paul might have boasted in. he could have exulted in being a Jew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He could have gloried in his work, in his knowledge or his authority as an apostle. But no, it was unthinkable that Paul, it is unthinkable that I, that we should boast or glory in anything but the cross of Jesus Christ.

The central truth that matters above everything is the sacrificial death and then the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can teach on the power of prayer, and we should. You can teach on moral living and the renewed mind, and we should. You can teach on the power of the holy Spirit and the coming of the kingdom of God, and we should. But none of it matters if Christ did not die for my sins and rise up again to life!

The miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ were powerful and wonderful. His teaching and preaching was inspired, moral, noble and good. But if Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for our sins, then none of it matters at all. Christ had to die on the cross.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

¹⁴ So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

(Matthew 16:13-17)

Peter understands some very wonderful truths. Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed King, and the Son of the living God. This is great. But now let's read on.

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. ²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"
(Matthew 16:21, 22)

After Christ reveals that he must die, Peter said, "No Lord! You're a great teacher. You're a miracle worker. You are the anointed King. You cannot die." But Jesus responded,

Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.
(Matthew 16:23)

When Peter rejected Christ's death he was unwittingly an agent for Satan. And Satan still works diligently to prevent people from understanding the truth and power of the message of the cross. He works to cause people to ignore the message or to believe that it is irrelevant. Some people say as long as you are sincere, as long as your good intentions or good works outweigh your bad, then you are safe before God. The truth is we are not. We need to be redeemed from sin by the death of a sinless substitute.

Still others will say that Christ's death on the cross was merely an example of selfless love to motivate us to love God. And there are those who claim that Christ was a victim. He was not meant to die. The cross was an accident or someone else died in his place. But Jesus Christ's death on the cross was ordained from the foundation of the world.³ The cross was no accident. Isaiah 53:6 prophesied that it was God's intention to lay upon Christ the iniquity of us all. Every spiritual blessing we receive is founded upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Revelation 13:8 declares that the death of Christ for us was planned before the foundation of the world.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him

³ Revelation 13:8 states that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. This does not mean that Christ was literally slain from the foundation of the world. But that God planned the necessity of the sacrifice long before the first man sinned.

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace
(Ephesians 1:3-7)

Our redemption from sin and every spiritual blessing that we receive is not the result of our own works, but through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The very foundation of Christianity is the message of the cross. Take away the cross, take away the sacrifice of Christ, and no matter how good you think you are, you are still an enemy of God.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.
(Romans 5:6-9)

As long as we live beware of churches and ministries in which the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is minimized. Be leery of churches that ignore Christ's shed blood on our behalf. Be cautious around those who focus solely upon Christ's authority. Yes, I know Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. Yes, I know he is seated in glory with all authority. And yes, I know he shall return as King of kings. But even now when he is praised in Scripture it is based upon his sacrifice on the cross.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:
Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings[b] and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
(Revelation 1:4-6)

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is not to be ignored. It is the reason for Christ's glory and it is our reason to boast.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of
our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified
to me, and I to the world.
(Galatians 6:14)

By the cross the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. I no longer fear the world or desire what it desires. And I am no longer deceived by the world. My mind and my affections are set on Jesus Christ and the glory that I will share with him when he returns. I understand that every blessing I enjoy and every hope I have is blood bought mercy.

The message of the cross is the foundation of our faith and hope. In the message of the cross there is the power of God to save men and women from sin and give them life. Let us sing in our hearts the words of Revelation 5:12.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died;
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ, my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.⁴

⁴ Isaac Watts

