

What the Cross meant to Jesus Christ

The Two most important events in human history so far, are the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. At the cross Jesus made it available for the whole human race to be brought into a right relationship with God. He redeemed us from the power and penalty of sin. And in the resurrection he made a way for all of us to gain everlasting life. In the words of Psalm 85:10, "Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed."

In the first chapter we saw what the cross meant to God. It declared Him to be a righteous judge. It demonstrates that He loves us and that He initiated the events that reconciled us to Himself. Now, our focus is on what the cross meant to Jesus Christ. And I pray that we will be strengthened in our faith, hope and love by what we learn.

Understanding the meaning of the cross is not designed to give us mere head knowledge, but a heart full of love. The more we think about the cross and the more we understand it the greater our love will be for the Lord. It is clear that although Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that God might spare him from drinking the cup of wrath.¹ It is also clear that understanding the will of God Christ then went willingly.

There is a view that Jesus went to the cross, because circumstances compelled him to do so. That if more people in Israel believed in him then Jesus would not have faced the cross. But when you read the gospels you will see that there never was a time that Jesus did not face the cross.² And every step toward the cross meant "I love you."

What the cross meant to Jesus Christ was that he was able to prove two things. First, that he loved God with all of his being. And second, that he also loved us. He was fulfilling the first and second great commandments. And he was as conscious of this as his suffering was intentional. After his last meal with the disciples, before his arrest, Jesus said,

But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.

¹ Luke 22:42

² Mark 8:31; 10:45; Matt. 16:21; 20:17; Lk 18:31-33; John 10:11; 15:12-18

(John 14:31)

And as his last meal began we read of Christ,

Now before the Feast of the Passover,
when Jesus knew that His hour had come
that He should depart from this world to
the Father, having loved His own who were
in the world, He loved them to the end.

(John 13:1)

Jesus went to the cross to prove that he loved God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. We will see this from Philippians 2.

Therefore if *there is* any consolation
in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any
fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection
and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-
minded, having the same love, *being*
of one accord, of one mind.

³ Let nothing be done through selfish
ambition or conceit, but in lowliness
of mind let each esteem others better
than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out
not only for his own interests, but also
for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind
be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
(Philippians 2:1-5)

These verses encourage us to think and live like our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord loved people. He loves us. He was united in this purpose with God. Therefore, he served others. He did not come to be served but to serve. And he did nothing through selfish ambition. Here was the mindset of Jesus Christ. He loved and served others. And our greatest need was to be ransomed from the power and penalty of sin and this need of ours took Jesus Christ to the cross. Therefore,

Let this mind be in you which was also
in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form
of God, did not consider it robbery to
be equal with God,
(Philippians 2:5, 6)

This sixth verse has been mistranslated to foist upon us the unbiblical doctrine of the Trinity. It is translated to impose upon us the idea that Jesus is God. Trinitarians assert that since Jesus was in the form of God then he must be God. But if this were true, the logic of why it would be robbery, or wrong for Jesus to be equal to God escapes me.

And it makes the encouragement for us to be like Christ, esteeming others better than ourselves and thus to love our neighbors nonsense. To esteem others better than yourself is the definition of true humility. And God does not think of others better than Himself.

The word “form” in verse 6 means the outward appearance.³ In John 1:18 we read, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.” In other words, we can see what God is like in Jesus Christ. When Christ loved we could see the love of God. When Christ was compassionate we could see the compassion of God. Jesus was holy and righteous in his character, in his words and deeds. This is how Jesus was in the form of God. God was at work in Christ.⁴

The second phrase “did not consider it robbery to be equal to God” should more accurately read, “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”⁵ What this verse is really saying is that although Jesus Christ made God known by his words and deeds, he did not clutch at a status that was not his.

Jesus was not like Satan who desired to be like the Most High God.⁶ He was not like Adam who believed that by sinning he could be like God.⁷ There was no selfish ambition in Christ’s heart. He was concerned for the interests of others—our salvation and God’s glory. This is what the cross meant to Christ.

Let this mind be in you which was
also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in

³ The word “form” in verses 6, 7, is translated from the Greek word *morphe*, meaning the special characteristic or feature of someone or something. What is the special characteristic or feature of a servant? Is it a physical feature like how tall he is or what ethnicity he may be? No, the special characteristic of a servant is that he serves! He is obedient to his master. In the same way, Jesus was in the form of God, not that he was an eternal person in the deity, rather his character was godly; he was holy, loving and righteous in all his ways.

⁴ Acts 2:22; 10:38

⁵ Revised Standard version – “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped at”; English Standard Version – “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”

⁶ Isaiah 24:14

⁷ Genesis 3;5

the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

In the form of God Jesus was holy and righteous and loving. In the form of a servant he was obedient to the point of death on a cross. Jesus went to the cross willingly. At Gethsemane Jesus was not struggling to discover God's will. He battled against sin to accept God's will and he did. Jesus was not driven to the cross by unexpected circumstances. He knew the will of God and he obeyed it.

In one sense escape from the cross was possible for Jesus. In Matthew 26 when Jesus was arrested and Peter drew his sword Jesus told Peter to put it away. If Christ had asked, God would have sent 12 legions of angels to fight for him. A Roman legion consisted of six thousand soldiers. So 12 legions would be 72,000 angels! In 2 Kings 19:35 one angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Just think what 72,000 angels would have done.

But in another sense there was no escape from the cross for Jesus. In Hebrews 10:7 speaking of Jesus it is written, "Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God." Jesus Christ went to the cross in fulfillment of the whole law. He loved God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength and his neighbor—us, as himself. The second thing the cross meant to Jesus Christ is much darker and this profound truth is revealed in 2 Corinthians 5.

For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The sobering fact that Jesus had to face was that on the cross he would become sin for us. This is one of the clearest verses on the doctrine of substitution and imputation. Christ who knew no sin, who always obeyed and loved God, became sin for us, so we could be made righteous. And he knew that this would happen. The prophet Isaiah foretold it in Isaiah 53:6 where he wrote,

All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

This is almost too hard to take in. And this is why some Bible translations, like The New Living Translation soften the blow of this truth by saying that Jesus became "the offering for sin." That is not the whole truth. Every sin from the so called white lie, to every act of rebellion against God and every cruel and hateful and destructive thing we do to one another was laid on Christ. And the New Testament affirms this in a most serious and sober manner.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),
(Galatians 3:13)

Jesus Christ took upon himself the sins of the world, all of our sins. He became sin for us and became cursed for us. He suffered the penalty of God's terrible judgment against sin for us. First, in obedience to God and second that we might be saved and blessed.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
(Galatians 3:13, 14)

Jesus went to the cross so that we could be saved and born again. He suffered the curse so we could receive the gift of the Spirit and inherit everlasting life in the coming kingdom of God. Here is what Peter wrote.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:
(1 Peter 2:21)

This does not mean that we need to bear the sins of others, but sometimes we need to patiently bear with one another. Sometimes life will be tough and

we will be resented or persecuted as Christians. And like Christ we need to love God and obey Him even when it might bring us pain and suffering.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

²² "Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;
²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—
by whose stripes you were healed.

²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
(1 Peter 2:21-25)

Jesus bore all of our sins in his own body and suffered an agonizing death. Christ took our place in judgment so that we could be free and un-condemned. What the cross meant to Christ was that he would suffer and die on my behalf. The wrath of God was exhausted on him so that it would not fall on me.

On the cross Jesus hid my unrighteousness with his righteousness. He covered my disobedience with his obedience. He drank the cup of God's fury against sin so that I would not have to drink it. On the cross Jesus Christ became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. We now stand before God as holy and beloved children without blame, because Jesus Christ loves God and loves us.

If you have never come to the cross of Christ by faith and said, "I understand what it means. Jesus Christ died for me. He took all of my sins so I could be in fellowship with God. I now accept him as my Lord and Savior" do so now! John 3:16 declares that,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not

perish but have everlasting life.

On the other hand verse 36 warns us, "he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." At times we forget how powerful the good news is and how easy it is for sinners to be saved because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Let's return for one more look at Philippians 2.

Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus
(Philippians 2:1-5)

If we have found any encouragement in Christ, if we have been comforted in divine love, if we understand that we are united to God and Christ and with one another by God's Spirit in us, then let us see the beauty of Christ in one another and serve one another just as our Lord loved God and served us.