

Adventuring with God

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The Glory of the Cross

The cross of Calvary is a profound mystery, even for Christians. It's hard for us to decide how to respond to it since we're both repelled by and drawn to it. Its ability to transform anyone—even the world's vilest sinner—places it in a category all by itself. Nothing the world offers can effect such radical change in the human heart.

One of the problems for us in coming to terms with the cross is its reach. It's not the kind of thing we can take or leave, casually interact with, or slough off once we've become aware of it. Paul was so captivated by Jesus' death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection that nothing else mattered. The implications of it, for all practical purposes, possessed Paul and defined all that he was and all that he did.

He wrote to the Corinthian church, *"I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Corin. 2:2). Nothing else mattered? What about all your education, Paul, your rabbinical training in Judaism, your higher learning under the Greek and Roman scholars? *Isn't there anything else about the world that you'd like to share with us, Paul?* Apparently not.

"We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew: for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (2:7-8). Through revelation Paul had come to understand something so superior to the wisdom of the world that he figured its value was worth whatever he needed to give in exchange for it. Like the parable told by Jesus, Paul sold everything he had to purchase the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46).

"What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:8, 10).

God's hidden wisdom, so profoundly beyond the reach of men's wisdom, found its greatest expression at Calvary. In recognition of this, Paul made the decision that he would glory in nothing else: *"God forbid that I should glory 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). From the point of his conversion on the Damascus Road, Paul had only one ambition: to proclaim the mysteries of the cross and the glory of His Savior.

One of the tragedies of modern day evangelicalism is that we have made the work of the cross a foundational truth without giving it the attention it deserves. When we look at Jesus' teaching and the writings of the apostles, the work of the cross is not seen as a fact to be embraced at salvation and then ignored as we move on to find "our best life now." The work of the cross is supposed to define us, as it did Paul, and become the motivation of our hearts for the rest of our lives. Its work in us is to be ongoing and radical, rooting out the effects of our sin nature and enabling us to live brand new lives that are intrinsically different from the rest of the world.

To be "separated unto the gospel" is not just Paul's calling. It's something all disciples are called to experience, although God never forces us to sign up. We must make the decision that we will embrace the lifestyle of the cross, identifying with our Savior as we follow on to become like Him. Jesus clearly laid out the conditions for discipleship: *"If anyone desires to come*

after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

Our cross? Isn't the cross on which Jesus died sufficient for the expiation of our sins? How could we add to that? Isn't our faith in *His* work on the cross sufficient for our salvation? Yes, it is. But in this passage Jesus is not laying down the conditions for salvation; He is explaining what our lives will look like if we genuinely want to follow Him and do the works on the earth that He did. It's the lifestyle we will choose to adopt if we want to be effective and fruitful servants in His kingdom on earth.

Our cross is obviously not the same as His cross—we don't bear the sins of the world in our obedience to the Father, as Jesus did. When we deny ourselves and take up our cross we are deciding to adopt His attitudes—to suffer or be inconvenienced without complaint, to endure persecution and misunderstanding with patience, to be wronged without seeking to retaliate, to trust the Father in all circumstances, to forgive and love others freely, and to share the Good News of the kingdom even if we are rejected or mistreated in the process.

Here's how Paul described this heart attitude so beautifully modeled by Jesus: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who ... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. 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, 7-8).

If we choose to take up our cross each day, we will experience the joy of Jesus' fellowship and the Father's pleasure. Those are rewards of a different kind from what the world offers. We will also find the power to put to death the impulses of our sin nature as the Holy Spirit enables us to live according to our new nature, “to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24, NIV).

This is God's greatest desire for us—to finally receive all that Calvary and Christ's resurrection bought for us: “that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

These are the rewards and the glory of the cross. They cannot be valued or understood by anyone who has not been born again, but for the redeemed, they are great and precious promises. If we will embrace the process, like Jesus, we'll reap eternal spiritual benefits (for others as well as ourselves). Paul understood the implications of the cross and gave his life to make them known to the world. Hopefully, you and I will do the same.

In his book *Of God and Men* A.W. Tozer writes, “No Roman officer ever pointed to a cross and said, ‘If any man will, let him.’ Only Christ said that, and by so saying He placed the whole matter in the hands of the Christian. He can refuse to take his cross, or he can stoop and take it up. The difference between great sainthood and spiritual mediocrity depends upon which choice he makes.”

Paul had such an encounter with the cross of Christ that he was forever changed by its glory and power. Only God could take such a wretched thing and turn it into the greatest blessing the world has ever known. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33). This Easter, let's make a fresh commitment to stoop down and take up *our cross* so the world may know the incomparable value of *His cross*. Once we make that decision, God will make sure we have the resources to make it happen. Paul's rewards were great and eternal. Ours can be too.

But we mustn't fool ourselves. The rewards come at a cost. Tozer pointed out: “**To be crucified means, first, the man on the cross is facing only one direction; second, he is not going back; and third, he has no further plans of his own.**”

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

“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 a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Words by Isaac Watts, 1707