

Christ the Redeemer

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What Is the Gospel?

This devotional is a sequel to a previous devotional written by me—The Cruciality of the Cross. As we reflect upon the Cross of Christ, we are immediately confronted with Jesus Messiah our Redeemer. When we tell the story of Jesus, we enlighten the story of the Gospel. If someone were to ask us, “**What is the Gospel of Redemption?**” What would we say? Surely, the answer is Jesus. Another way to spell the word *GOSPEL* is *Jesus*. He tasted death for every person. In the Cross of Christ, we see forgiveness for the sins of both men and women. In the acceptance of Christ as our liberator from condemnation, we endeavor to exemplify Christ in the way we live our lives. **Jesus is about how God breaks into our lives as Lord and seizes us through the proclamation of WHAT is preached.**

Have we imitated the kind of forgiveness exhibited by our Savior upon the Cross? Clemency is what Jesus offers to those who are willing to put their trust in Him. In His final moments upon the Tree, He cried out: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). This practice of amnesty is one attribute that lacks implementation among many Christians. Why is there so little warmth among us as believers in Christ our Redeemer? Why is it that Christ no longer radiates from our faces when differences exist within the Christian community?

Shortly Before His Crucifixion

Are we consciously aware of Jesus’ approval of His Twelve disciples in spite of their continuous failure to grasp the full import, or significance, of His teachings? **Shortly before His Crucifixion, He encouraged His followers to exhibit love in their lives. John records this conversation:** “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). **Again, Jesus says,** “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (15:12). Our redeemer laid down His life for the whole world (15:13), not just for His friends. When we allow ourselves to be seen by God “in” and “through” Jesus, we become more and more like Him in our lives and in our relationships with other Christians.

As we reflect upon Christ our Redeemer, we need to remind ourselves that the story of the Gospel is Jesus. God's answer to the problem of darkness is Jesus. Christ is the foundation charter for our mission to the world and for our unity among His people. With Christ upon the Cross, we witness God punishing sin and revealing His forgiveness. **His Crucifixion changed the relationship between God and humanity as well as a change in our relationship toward others. Paul writes to the Christians in Rome about the Redeemer:**

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—²the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-6)

The Cross of Christ: The Big Event

The **Cross of Christ** is not just one episode in history among a dreary catalogue of unrelated actions, but rather **it is the big event**. It is this event that gives meaning to the whole of life. In this central happening of history, we see the utter degradation of humanity as well as the deeper depth of God's holy love. The Cross of Christ reveals the real nature and meaning of evil in this world. In Christ's Crucifixion, we see sin acted out in all its naked blasphemy and ugliness. This act of crucifixion, in and of itself, is not the darkest deed in all of history since many had been crucified. **What makes this crucifixion the most heinous action in all of history?** This death is about the One who died there—the Incarnate God who is Righteousness and Love? **The One who created the universe dies for His creation.** Here was One in whose presence that many felt the presence of the eternal God.

What does His Death mean to us? What does His Cross mean to us? Are we, too, guilty of crucifying the Son of God afresh by our lifestyles? Sin is seen at its worse in this unique Crucifixion. It killed the Son of God. This is "absolute zero"; it is the very rock bottom of moral evil. Yet, in the Crucifixion of Christ, we see another story—God's love (John 3:16-18). **In this horrible death, we observe God's atoning and redeeming action for the rescue of lost humanity.** We also see the Passion of Jesus upon the Cross for a world headed toward destruction. Paul, once more, focuses upon the absolute necessity of the death of the Redeemer:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ **God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement [ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*], through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—** ²⁶ **he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.** (3:21-26)

The Cross Is Not a Theological Fiction

The Cross is not just theological fiction or just some historical fact, but rather it is the occasion of God’s amazing and costly wonder of forgiveness. The only way God could be just and, at the same time, justify sinful humanity was “in” and “through” His Son. He had to present Jesus as Atonement. **The Cross is not only an act of Pilate, but it is also an act of God—slain from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8).** God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). **It is this Gospel of love that has moved many in the world to accept Him.** Has this Gospel moved us in the way we live and act? Have we transformed our priorities in life? Have we renewed our minds toward Christ and a sincere development toward spiritual things? We can deny the benefits of the Cross by rejecting the social and moral implications of the Gospel. As believers, we act as “light” and “salt” in a world of darkness and corruption.

In the Cross: Righteousness and Peace Kissed Each Other

In the Cross of Jesus our Redeemer, we see righteousness and grace fused together. In the words of the sons of Korah (kō’rà), “**Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other**” (Psalm 84:10). This Scripture accurately describes the benefits of the Cross of Jesus. The Cross is something actual—it is love and peace Incarnate. Even though Christ submitted Himself for crucifixion, nevertheless, Christ is not a passive victim in this drama of sin and salvation, but an actor from Gethsemane to Calvary—all for the redemption of humanity (John 10-15-18). **On this Cross, we hear the cry of desolation**—“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mathew 27:45-46). He did this in order to prevent us from crying out—My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Was Christ saying “amen” on behalf of humanity to the rightful judgment of God upon the sins of the world? **This cry from the Cross reminds us, as believers, of the utter desolation of the Son of God—utterly alone.** Paul explains God’s part in this Death of His Son:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from **God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ** and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.** And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Jesus did something to human history. As we reflect upon redemption, **we need to keep in mind that what happened in Jesus flows from eternity.** God’s scheme of salvation “in” Christ belongs to eternity. Even before the creation of this Universe, we are reminded from Scripture that the eternal Word of God is disclosed in the Jesus event—Incarnation. Do we just talk about the mysteries of the Faith? **We may speak about religion by the hour, and yet it**

may not be the dominant and abiding motive of our lives. Unfortunately, Christ takes a back seat in the lives of numerous Christians. How do we react toward other believers who do not always agree with us in our interpretation of the Scriptures? **Do we make allowances for differences?** We need to bear in mind that the Church is not simply a body of people who possess absolute knowledge or understanding of the entirety of God's written Revelation. As believers, we need to love one another as Christ has loved us.

The church is concerned about our relationship to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit in our day-to-day walk. Yet, this relationship should also alter our relationship with other saints. As followers of Jesus, we will never deliberately set ourselves to spurn God's call for commitment. Are we **dedicated, faithful, loyal,** and **out-and-out** for the cause of Christ? If we reject God's grace, then God's grace is met with judgment when we refuse to repent. **We do not earn our salvation through repentance; repentance is a gift from God.** As we reflect upon repentance, we need to bear in mind that repentance simply means that we accept the Death of Jesus as a Divine judgment for our sins. **In repentance, we surrender our sinful actions and surrender our wills to God.**

In Christ: God Reveals Himself

In Christ our Redeemer, God reveals Himself as the God who approaches humanity. It is "in" Him and "through" Him that God does something for lost humanity. It is "in" Him that God reveals Himself. It is "in" Him that God reconciles the world unto Himself. In the Incarnation, God binds Himself to us. Yet, this binding from God "in" and "through" **Jesus requires a response from men and women.** This grace from God is not forced on humanity, but rather is submitted to the human race. Since grace is a free gift, it must be accepted by men and women. **If we wish to become a part of God's elect, we must accept Christ as our Redeemer.** God reveals His will to us and expects obedience and trust. As Christians, we not only condemn the "old Man," but we eagerly work toward putting him off. It is "in" and "through" faith that the old man dies and the new man lives through faith.

Are We Zealous Christians?

Where do we stand spiritually in our connection to God and to others? **As we face each day, hopefully, we will make a decision for Christ, which decision demands a RADICAL CHANGE OF DIRECTION.** Are we zealous Christians? **If we expect to grow in Christ, we must ever be mindful that there can be no growth until a decision is made to put Christ first in our lives. Countless Christians have been going around for years with Christ but without a commitment or loyalty to His kingdom. How do we want Christ in our lives?** Do we want religion-at-a-distance? **Such a faith will not produce a change in our lifestyles. If conversion is to be permanent, our resolution must lead to growth. God takes the initiative, but if any permanent turning to God is to take place, we must make our own personal declaration to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. It is only by an individual choice that conversion continues.**

How do we view Christ the Redeemer? Are we really and truly conscious of His great sacrifice? Have we looked at His person and His mission? Just who is the Jesus who is known as Christ the Redeemer? James R. Steward,¹ in his sermon, “Who Is This Jesus?,” sought to paint a picture of Jesus in which we see diversity that shatters a Jesus that is just “meek and mild.” He seeks to uncover the beauty of Jesus’ ministry and, at the same time, to call attention to sternness in dealing with the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. His comments concerning the mystery of the personality of Jesus unfold some of the inscrutability of the Son of God:

When I speak of the *mystery of personality*, I am thinking of the startling coalescence [to unite into a whole] of contrarities [a fact or condition incompatible with another] that you find in Jesus. He was the meekest and lowliest of all the sons of men: yet He said that He would come on the clouds of heaven in the glory of God [AD 70--RDB]. He was so austere that evil spirits and demons cried out in terror at His coming: yet He was so genial and winsome and approachable that the children loved to play with Him, and the little ones nestled in His arms; and His company in the innocent gaiety of a village wedding was like the sunshine.

No one was ever half so kind or compassionate to sinners: yet no one ever spoke such red-hot, scorching words about sin. **He would not break the bruised reed**, and His whole life was love: yet on one occasion He demanded of the Pharisees how they expected to escape the damnation of hell [annihilation--RDB]. He was a dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions: yet for sheer stark naked realism He has all our self-styled “realists” beaten. He was the servant of all, washing the disciples’ feet: yet master-fully He strode into the Temple, and the hucksters and traders fell over one another in their mad rush to get away from the fire they saw blazing in His eyes.

He saved others: yet at the last, Himself He would not save. There is nothing in history like the union of contrasts that confronts you in the Gospels. The mystery of Jesus is the mystery of a personality.²

CONCLUSION

Is Christianity Real to Us?

In my seventy years of ministry, I have witnessed countless Christians flaking-off and going over-the-hill, so to speak. Are we lacking in zeal? Do we still have our spiritual fervor (Romans 12:9-11)? Sometimes when Christians say the wrong thing, other Christians either quit the congregation or stop meeting with God’s people altogether. Has **love and forgiveness ceased to be a part of our devotion to God?** Does love still cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8)? Do we love one another in the same way Christ loves us (John 15:2)? Do we make allowances for the failings of others (Ephesian 4:1-3; Romans 15:7)? **Do we pray for forgiveness and, at the same time, refuse to forgive others?** Do we expect to be in heaven

¹ **James R. Steward** (1896-1990), minister of the church in Scotland, taught New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology at the University of Edinburgh, and served as chaplain of the Queen of Scotland from 1952-1966.

²James S. Stewart, *The Strong Man* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 72-73. I highly recommend this chapter, which chapter explores three mysteries—the mystery of a personality, the mystery of a power, and the mystery of a presence. (Emphasis mine—bold, underlining, and []). The comments in brackets represent my thoughts, not his. For my views on eschatology, see freedominchrist.net.

with some who have offended us? Do we really and truly love one another? Why not make each day a day of forbearance and love? **Is our Christianity real?** Does the attitude of Christ our Redeemer saturate our lives? Why not pray the Lord's Prayer right now!

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)