

Facing The Cross

I. We'll Understand It Better Bye And Bye

16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

The disciples did not understand what Jesus had been teaching them. The interesting thing is that Jesus could have been much more clear, but He chose not to give full detailed explanations. Rather, Jesus allowed the disciples to discover the truth for themselves in due time.

That seems to be a very common method God uses. He reveals just enough about something to make us aware, but He doesn't tell us enough for us to fully understand everything about it.

How many times have you said – or heard someone say – “I know God is doing something, I just don't know what it is yet.” We have hints, but we can't put the entire picture together.

Paul alluded to this in 1 Corinthians 13 when he said, “For now we see through a glass darkly”, like looking in a mirror but getting a fuzzy image, like trying to see through a fog. That is what our understanding is right now, we just can't quite put the puzzle together.

That is part of the ongoing frustration of life. And compensation for that is God calls us to trust Him and follow Him by faith. Sometimes it seems we can't see more than one step at a time, but it is all by God's design.

As with the disciples, there will come a time when it will all come into clarity for us.

II. Introducing the Cross

27 “Now my soul 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. 28 Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

A. The humanity of Christ

1. Jesus agonized over the prospect of the Cross before Him.

The mental, emotional, and spiritual pressure was indescribable. The word, “troubled” is too mild to convey the unspeakable strain Jesus was under. We see evidence of the weight Jesus carried when He agonized in the Garden and prayed for His Heavenly Father to spare Him from the cup of death. We see the evidence when the unbearable stress caused the capillaries to rupture and blood oozed from his pores. We see the evidence in this passage when Jesus was tempted to pray, “Father, save me from this hour.” We sometimes try to imagine how men and women on death row cope with their

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appointment with execution. I often wonder, “What is this last meal all about? Who could care anything about eating anything with mere hours to live?” I would be too sick to eat anyway. But nothing compares to the agony that gripped Jesus. He knew the depth of the suffering that lay before Him. He was well aware of the torturous whip that would rip the flesh on his back. He knew of the beating, the crown of thorns, the handfuls of hair that would be ripped from his face, and the agony of bearing his own cross to Golgotha. He knew of the spikes that would be driven through his hands and feet to fasten him to the wooden planks, and then being raised up and forced to suspend the weight of his body on those nails. He would not be able to find any position that would afford him a moment’s relief from the burning pain that wracked his body, hanging in torture for the entire afternoon. Even so, nobody else would bear the weight of the sins of the world upon themselves like Christ did. Nobody else would ever know the agony of feeling deserted by the Heavenly Father, though they were guilty of nothing.

2. Jesus wrestles with those tough questions.

It is no accident that John provides us a glimpse into the mind and emotions of Christ as he pondered the Cross. Even though John very forcefully presents Jesus as the Son of God in his gospel, he also displays the human side of Christ very clearly. We see his humanity as he was thirsty at the well. We see it when He wept at the grave of Lazarus. We see it as he passionately cleared the temple of crooked moneychangers and kicked over their tables. There will be even more examples of his humanity in the upcoming chapters.

The human thing Jesus does here is wrestle with the same kinds of questions we wrestle with when we are faced with difficult situations.

Jesus is agonizing over the coming days and he says, “What can I say?”

That is more or less where we start when in stress. Words fail us. We don’t even know what to say. When we get a bad doctor’s report, or any kind of devastating news, or when we suddenly lose our job or lose your home, we ask, “What am I going to do now?” There is nothing bad about asking the tough questions.

But the defining point is how we answer those questions. Like He did when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus provided his own answers to his doubts. As he pondered, “Should I pray, Father save me from this hour?” That would be the human temptation. That would be what each one of us would want to do. He was showing us he faced the same kinds of emotional battles any human would face under such circumstances. The difference is, He possessed the answer to his own questions. “No. I can’t pray for an escape. I have to go through this. It was for this very reason that I came to this hour. This is my purpose. This is my calling. This is the path the Father has laid before me. I will not shrink from it.”

There is nothing like facing the most difficult circumstances in life to force you to evaluate your life and to determine what you are made of.

In the 9th chapter of his gospel, Luke records that Jesus suddenly revealed his impending crucifixion to His disciples.

“Listen carefully. The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.”

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His disciples were shocked and confused and too afraid to ask him to explain.

But the significant point is this. Shortly after giving some clues about his crucifixion, Jesus set out for Jerusalem. The NIV says, he “resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” The KJV says, “He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

The phrase “set his face” was a shortened version of Isaiah 50:7 –

“Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”

This was the kind of determination Jesus was demonstrating when He asked the question,

“Shall I ask the Lord to save me from this hour? No! It was for this very reason that I came to this hour.”

His face was set. His mind was made up. His heart was fixed. There was no turning back and no getting around it. It was full steam ahead.

If you don't have your face set, your trials will knock you off course. If you don't have your mind made up before entering your season of trials, you are basically preparing yourself to go where the wind blows you. You are sailing a ship without charting a course. You are building without plans. Whatever happens, happens. That is no way to live your life. You have to set your face. Do you plan on making it to Heaven or not? If you have made your plans, you will fight every day to do whatever it takes to reach your goal. Nothing the enemy does to you will knock you off your course. You may be forced into a detour, but you will make the necessary adjustments and get back on track because you have set your face.

B. The devotion of Christ

Father, glorify your name.

This was the motivation for what Jesus did. He wasn't on a personal mission, he was about His Father's business. He was about His Father's business since he was twelve years old and his parents thought he was lost and found him in the temple. They scolded him for not staying with the caravan, but the Christ-child replied, “Don't you realize I must be about my Father's business.” His entire life was about taking care of his Father's business.

III. Know The Enemy

31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

We learn things about satan from New Testament writings that we never learned in the Old Testament writings. In the OT we learned satan was the original tempter in the Garden of Eden. We learned he could cause great harm and loss as he did to Job, but only as far as God would allow. We learned he was once a perfect angel, but fell due to pride.

But Jesus is the first to call satan a prince, specifically the prince of this world. Paul picked up on that and called him the prince of the kingdom of the air. John called him the Dragon, the ancient serpent, the deceiver, and the accuser. Peter called him a

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roaring lion seeking to devour anyone in his path. Jesus called him the prince of this world, the evil one and a murderer.

But even more fascinating is what Jesus said was being accomplished as a result of his sacrificial death (and subsequent resurrection): the world is judged and the prince of the world is cast out. While there is an eschatological (futuristic) fulfillment to this, there is something powerful about the word “Now”. The cross is the dividing point. Before the cross the enemy was at large. After the cross he is judged and condemned. Before the cross, he roamed freely with no official sentence on his head. After the cross, he is determined to be a criminal in Heaven’s courts and he is cast out. It does not mean from the cross forward there would be no more effects of evil, but it does mean the enemy has officially been condemned. It is now only a matter of time and process until he is completely finished. The sentence has been rendered. He is a convict on the run.

Now! At the lifting of Christ. At his crucifixion, at the sacrifice of Heaven’s perfect Lamb. Jesus proclaims complete victory even before the actual crucifixion because he was determined He would not fail. He was going through and it was as good as done. If God says it, you can put it in the bank!

IV. The Confused Reaction

34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

A. Poor Interpretation of Scripture

This didn’t make any sense to these people. If Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, how could he then be “lifted up” or crucified? After all, they were experts in the scripture and they could quote Messianic references.

The Psalms say that the line of David would continue forever.

Isaiah said the Messiah’s kingdom and the reign of peace would see no end.

Daniel and Ezekiel spoke of a kingdom established by the Son of Man would hat would never be destroyed.

“How can you call yourself the Messiah and speak of your impending death?”

But Jesus did not directly answer their question. Instead, He warned them of the temporary light in their midst and how important it was to take advantage of that light. When the light would depart from them they would be lost in their darkness.

B. Some refused to believe

37 Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. **38** This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

“Lord, who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

39 For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

40 ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.’”

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We know many refused to believe Jesus. This must have been the greatest puzzlement to John. After all the signs Jesus performed, how could these people continue to be so blind and stubborn? We can almost sense John's indignation.

One thing for sure. If they do not believe in Jesus, it is not Jesus's fault. It is their own fault. Yet John quotes this passage from Isaiah which sounds like God is the one who blinded their eyes and hardened their ears so they could not believe.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? It is the age old question of cause and effect. We have a similar problem here. Certainly God had a part in their blind, calloused condition, but the part he played was after the fact that these people had willfully rejected their Messiah, even in the face of all the indisputable proof. God's hardening of their hearts did not cause their unbelief; it was the consequence of their unbelief. They brought it upon themselves by their stubbornness.

C. Many did believe

1. But some were afraid to publicly testify

42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

2. Those who truly believed discovered following Jesus was the same as following the Father. You can't have the Father without the Son, nor the Son without the Father. It is a package deal.

44 Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. **45** The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. **46** I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

3. Those who refuse to believe will have to answer to the Father.

48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.

That is the day we have to keep in mind. People tend to think they can do whatever they want in this life and when they are dead and gone, that will be the end of it. But those who refuse to accept Christ will be required to answer to the Father for their resistance to the truth. Why did you not surrender when the Holy Spirit was calling? Why did you not commit your life to Christ when the invitation was given? Why did you not heed the call? Why did you resist? What possible answer could you give to God the Father that will excuse you?

Today is the day of salvation. Today is the time to make it right. There is no escaping the fact that everyone must make a decision regarding Christ. What is your decision?