

THE CROSS OF CHRIST 4-23-17 ***THE GOAL OF THE CROSS***

We have looked in recent studies at the nature of the cross, at what was achieved there, at the glorious salvation that was won for us by Christ. The last couple of studies we have emphasized the completeness, the sufficiency of what Jesus has done. We have tried to show that our favorable standing with God is assured by the work of Christ and has nothing to do with our being good. The cross testifies that it is not our lives but Christ's death that gets us into heaven; but is there more to see, is there something about the cross that gives direction to my conduct today and tomorrow? Does the work of Christ, does the cross say anything about how we live? The answer is that it has everything to say about how we live.

We begin today in Titus Chapter 2. It is the notion of some that if we are to be grace-centered people, if we are to be true to the gospel of free grace that honors the work of Christ and presents salvation as a free gift that we must not therefore lay any expectations on believers. To do so, I am told, is to remove our vision from Christ and put it on self. And certainly, that is a danger; but to suggest that the grace of God which is ours thru the cross makes my lifestyle of no importance is an error that has proven highly pernicious and harmful in the church. It is also a teaching that truncates the impact of the cross and even fails to discern its purpose which goes way beyond saving us from hell. We sing in one of our hymns of grace, God's grace, that exceeds our sin and guilt. Grace that was poured out at Calvary and grace that does two things according to the refrain. It is grace that pardons and grace that cleanses within. See what God's word says about that grace Titus 2:**11** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.* The term "all" when used like this refers to all types of men. It could be men of all races, or, in the context of Titus 2, men of all walks and stages of life. "All types of men," **11-12a** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.* Wait a second! What is it that is doing this instructing, this preaching, this exhorting to a lifestyle of self-denial? It must be some legalistic preacher, right? No, it is the grace of God itself. **12** *Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.*

Point #1 today is the connection between grace and living. Don't believe that grace says nothing about how we ought to live. Don't believe that grace says it matters not how you live. Grace, while denying that your obedience will save you, does say that an obedient, faithful lifestyle

is utterly critical as the outcome of Christ's work in your soul. Look at our text again 11 *The grace of God has appeared* **12-14a** *instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us.* And here we get to a very important statement about the purpose of Christ in giving his life, about the goal he had in mind **14** *who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.* Do we see in that verse a connection between grace and our lifestyle? Absolutely. This saving grace of Christ is grace that is designed to make a change in the one it affects. The slogan of one Unitarian Church was fascinating to me. The Unitarian church is the church for people who don't believe in anything particular and this one church advertised, "Come as you are we don't want to change you." But the message of Christ's ambassadors is, "Come as you are and our loving Lord will change you."

But, but, but. How can we expect people to change if we are telling them that salvation is a free gift, if we tell them that Christ took care of our guilt? Haven't we lost the leverage to move men away from their sins? This was the complaint of the Roman church to Martin Luther five hundred years ago. They said, "Luther, if you tell people they are justified by faith apart from church sacraments, apart from their own good works, then you have stripped them of any motivation to righteous living. They will just continue in their sin with this protestant gospel as their comfort." Luther's response was that when we trust Christ He takes care of the motivation, and He takes care of making the changes. Whom Jesus saves from guilt, He saves from a lifestyle of sin. This is evident from Titus 2:14 and from many other clear statements of Scripture.

So, look with me now at point two and the goal of the cross, the goal of the cross, which, according to Titus 2:14, is what? A special people who belong to Jesus and who have been purified and made passionate or zealous, or as the NIV puts it, *eager about doing good*. Far from creating a church-full of indifferent, indolent, fat and satisfied but redeemed persons, the apostle says that the gospel of free grace thru the cross, when properly understood, results in our becoming more holy and more concerned than ever about righteous living. Titus 2 speaks of what is Christ's goal. And, I ask, is Jesus successful? Does His atonement accomplish what He intended? How many vote *yes*? Certainly it does. And our text says that His intention for all that he redeems is to make them pure and passionate about holy living. Therefore, when we find someone without an interest in holiness, and with no evidence at all of being changed by Jesus, what must we conclude about them? Either Jesus has failed or that person is not redeemed, no matter what is claimed.

Listen to the fuller testimony of Scripture. Luke chapter 1, the inspired word of Zacharias, in his famous hymn. It says Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke these words Luke 1:**68-69** *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant— **74-75** to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.* At the dawn of the New Testament era, this prophet announces a salvation the goal of which is our fearless, instead of fear-based, fearless service to God in the context of a life of holiness and righteousness. You see, God had worked with his Old Testament people for generations, calling them to righteousness without any lasting results. Israel failed to be the city set upon the hill, the light to the nations that God commanded them to be. But God was going to change that. Thru Christ a new people would be raised out of the earth who would abide in the grace and the challenge of the cross to live by God's word. Changed lives are the goal of the cross. II Corinthians 5:**14-15** *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* What was the end of his dying for me? That I would no longer live for myself. That is where we all are by nature aren't we? Every child I've been around has this basic makeup. It's all about me. And strangely, we can never be happy that way. The death of Jesus is to change that for us. The goal of His dying in my place goes beyond freeing me from hell, it is to give me a whole new orientation to life. I Peter 2:**24** *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.* Once again we read a purpose statement regarding the cross. And almost every time we do we are confronted with the implications of Christ's death for our living. Here again the goal of the Lord's sin-bearing sacrifice is to end our attachment to sin and begin a new devotion to righteousness. Romans 8:**3a** *What the Law could not do.* What is it that the law could not do? The law could not solve our sin problem, could not make us right with God. Why? Is there something wrong with the law? No, but there is something wrong with us. **3ab** *What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh,* namely our sinful flesh. **3abc** *What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did.* The barrier of sin that separated us from God could not be overcome by our obedience, but it could be overcome by God's cross-shaped mercy. **3** *For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, In whose flesh did God condemn sin? In the flesh of His*

Son. This is referring to the crucifixion, to the atonement and the next verse gives us the purpose clause, tells us what God's goal was in the atonement **4** *So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* This is fascinating! The Jews looked to the law as a way to establish a righteousness of their own, a way to get themselves justified. The gospel comes along and announces that justification is not earned, but is a gift to all that believe. And once that gift is accepted, once we have a Christ-based, not a law-based, righteousness the result in our lives, ironically and beautifully, is obedience to that law which we claim will not save. So, on the one hand, Christians say that we are saved by grace, not law-keeping; on the other hand, that grace leads us to keep the law more truly than do the legalists. And the glory goes entirely to Christ for His grace, His power, His wisdom.

But how does the cross of Christ result in this? We see that our personal holiness of life is the Savior's objective in His death, but how does He achieve that objective? Let me offer three answers to that.

First, the goal is achieved thru the supply of the Holy Spirit. This is not a direct work of the cross, but again the cross is one aspect of the saving activity of God. And that saving activity is all of one piece. There is a unity of the Trinity in our salvation. Those whom the Father elected before the foundation of the world, the Son redeemed at Calvary, and the Holy Spirit draws and regenerates in the timing of His choice. John Gerstner writes: "The infinitely precious atonement would be of no value for sinners utterly hostile to God unless something was done to them in grace that corresponded to what was done for them in the atonement." And the work done to them or in them is normally attributed to the Holy Spirit, also called the *Spirit of Christ*. Look again at Romans 8:4 *That the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* And the New Testament teaching is that believers in Christ become such by the Spirit's work, and that once we are joined to Christ in salvation the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in us. Ephesians 1:13 *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.* Galatians 4:6 *Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* Romans 8 again **9** *You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.* There is perfect unity between Christ and His Spirit. All those purchased by Christ are perfected by the Holy Spirit which explains Titus 2:14, which explains John 10 where Jesus says, John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.* But

something else is done by our Great Shepherd, He sends forth His Spirit giving us ears to hear His voice and hearts to follow His lead. John 10:27 *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.* The Lord knows this will happen because the sanctifying Holy Spirit works with Him to call and to purify everyone for whom Christ has died.

Secondly, the goal of Christ's atonement is achieved thru the defeat of the devil. There is considerable confusion on this point in the church. I find large numbers of people who believe that the death of Jesus was a great victory for Satan. To them, the drama of passion week is that on Friday Satan was victorious, but on Sunday Jesus made a dramatic comeback to defeat the forces of darkness. One popular TV preacher said this: *Satan conquered Jesus on the cross.* I feel defiled even to quote such blasphemy. That is not at all the way the New Testament portrays it. In fact, in the New Testament we find the devil trying to keep Jesus from the cross. Remember how early on Satan tried to get Jesus to set up his kingdom by a miracle instead of by suffering. That was the temptation in the wilderness. Then, when Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die the Lord said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." The devil did not want Jesus to bear away to Calvary the sins of the world. Who wanted that? God. It was the Father who called Jesus to the cross. And Jesus went voluntarily. There was no defeat in His death at all - only victory. Wait, I take that back. There was defeat in Christ's death. It was a colossal defeat for the devil. Hebrews 2:14 *Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.* You see? It says that by Christ's death the devil was disarmed. Colossians 2:13-15 *When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.* These terms, "rulers and authorities," - these refer to the powers of darkness that have sway in the earth. Paul says that God disarmed them thru the cross. How? Well, He did it by cancelling out the certificate of debt, by dying for our sins. You see, Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. His name, *Satanas*, means *accuser*. How do you disarm an accuser? By removing guilt which is exactly what Christ did. The result is that if you are in Christ by faith the devil has no leverage with you. There is no guilt there for him to manipulate you with; your sins are covered in the blood. And the word of God for you is James 4:7 *Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* We are not to be afraid. His show of power is a

bluff. He's been disarmed at the cross. Call his bluff and move on in obedience to Christ the King. Christ gave his life Luke 1:74-75 *To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.*

So, then the goal of the cross, namely the transformation and purification of the redeemed, is achieved thru the supply of the Spirit, the defeat of the enemy, and finally thru the provision of endless motivation. The most motivating thought in the world for me, and I expect for any well-taught Christian, is the cross. To me, that explains the great popularity of the hymn by Isaac Watts, "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." The favorite verse of many is verse 4: "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." And when you perceive the greatness of Christ's sacrifice you can sing that with gladness. In like manner we sing "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe." There is motivation in the cross. The New Testament writers tell us the same thing. We've seen II Corinthians 5:14-15 *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* That is Christ's purpose and that is our motivation. We live for Him precisely because He died and rose again on our behalf. There is never-ending gratitude and devotion which Christ has won from his disciples. My favorite passage on the motivation of the cross is Hebrews 12. Look there where Paul describes the Christian life as a race. Running is very uncomfortable. Running for distance is highly painful. To do it, to endure the pain, you need some motivation. That is what this chapter is all about. Look at where we are pointed to find that motivation. **1-2ab** *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.* And notice next that it is fixing our eyes on Jesus in the state of his suffering. **2-3** *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* And I love this next line **4** *You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.* What were your trials this week? How hard was obedience this week? Did you lose any blood in your striving against sin? But Christ laid it all on the line, shed his blood, gave His all. Look unto Him for strength to endure, motivation to press on. Whatever the temptation I endure, whether it is to

indulge my flesh or flatter my pride or seek revenge, nothing slices thru the temptation like a reminder of Christ and His suffering. I'm reminded of what He did for me and what He deserves from me.

In 1983 Carmen Swain of Virginia Beach was sentenced to a year in jail for trafficking in cocaine. After being sentenced she learned she was pregnant. Her husband, Bruce, asked and received permission from the judge to serve her term for her. Permission was granted. After six months in jail, Mr. Swain was released and went home to discover most of the furnishings gone and a note from his wife that she was divorcing him because she didn't love him anymore. What shocks us about that story is the subhuman, almost unnatural lack of gratitude in such a person. That shows how wretched sin can make us. But such a thing can never be in someone born again by the Spirit of God. In the children of the Lord there is a profound devotion engendered by the cross. In the first sermon in this series I mentioned the closing scene from the movie, Saving Private Ryan. It was at the cemetery at Normandy and that closing scene raises great questions about the cross. Just prior to that scene, in the movie, we witnessed the death of several soldiers in order to rescue Private Ryan. One of those soldiers with his dying breath looked at Ryan and said, "Earn this." It was an exhortation to make the life they saved of some value. It was a man crying out on the brink of eternity, "make the things you live for worth my dying for." And my friend, Jesus says the same thing to you today. We could never earn what Christ has done - no way. But we can find in His sacrifice motivation to make our lives something He can be happy He died for.

One of my favorite hymns says this: *O that He fulfilled may see, the travail of His soul in me.* You ladies know what travail is don't you? That's the pain of childbirth, which in the first moment of meeting your newborn is richly rewarded. The hymn writer uses that as an apt picture of Christ's suffering for our redemption. "*And oh that He fulfilled may see the travail of His soul in me, and with His work contented by, as I with my dear Savior.*" That verse expresses the heart cry of the believer that we may live in such a way that honors the Savior for all He did. That what we are living for be worth His dying for. Then verse 5 sums up the powerful motivation for obedience found in the cross: "*Yes, living, dying, let me bring my strength, my solace, from this spring, that He who lives to be my King, once died to be my Savior.*"