

Bible Study

Drawing all Men

(edited transcript)

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John's Gospel records Jesus speaking of the cross. We may be familiar with His words, but things that seem familiar to us can very easily be missed so that the word of God does not become substantial in our lives. Merely knowing the words doesn't mean we are living them.

John records that certain Greek men, who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, approached the disciple Phillip and asked if they could see Jesus¹. Phillip told Andrew, and together they went and told Jesus.

"And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..."

(John 12:23)

Jesus didn't seem to answer what the two disciples had asked Him, which is often the way the Lord deals with us - we ask our question, but He answers with what *He* wants to say. We may be eagerly desiring some outcome or

other from His word when God's desire is to work something else in our lives. This is the case Paul describes in Romans Chapter 7. We hear the word not to covet, then start coveting the word and the good outcomes we want while all the while the Lord's desire is to deliver us from our covetousness.

Jesus, answering Phillip and Andrew, continued:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honour him." (John 12:24-26)

Participating in the cross of Christ

In answering, Jesus had gone straight to the word of the cross and the participation in it there would be for us with Him. For unless we participate with Christ in the cross, as opposed to merely believing in it, we will not bear fruit. We will be hearers and not doers of the word².

We need to understand the parable of the sower in this regard, for in this parable Jesus told us what must happen to the grain of wheat. It must go into the ground and die, just

¹ John 12:20-23

² James 1:22

as He did, and in so doing, drew all men to Himself³.

What did Jesus mean by saying that in His death He would draw all men to Himself? Well, He wasn't saying that everyone on earth would come to Him and become a Christian. What He meant was what actually happened: that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself⁴; that when He was lifted up on the cross, everyone was indeed drawn into that event, on one side of the cross or the other. The cross of Jesus Christ drew in everybody, without exception, so that now there are only two kinds of people and can only be two kinds of people: those who are dying under the curse while fighting in vain to save their own lives, and those who are dying with Christ, participating in His sufferings. We are all going to suffer, and even now we are all suffering in some way. The question is whether what you are suffering is producing cursing or blessing?

God is speaking to us all today about coming back to the simplicity of the gospel and to our participation in the cross. It is very easy to serve the Lord so far as we can cope and believe, but if we do that, we find no deliverance and no rest. You might cope as far as your tolerance for your current load goes, but when the next thing that goes wrong exceeds your tolerance, it will impact you one way or another. Either you will be offended, or you will come to true poverty of spirit, crying out to the Lord for His deliverance. One or other of these responses is happening in all our lives right now.

If, in the things we are suffering, we are joining Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings, then we are finding that He is working His circumcision in our hearts⁵, cutting away from

us our own law that brings us under bondage to the law of sin⁶.

Alternatively, in the things we are suffering, if we are responding like Job's wife, we will under pressure be offended and advocate cursing God and dying⁷, as did the unrepentant thief from his cross beside Jesus⁸. That is what life looks like for a person who lives to eat, drink and be merry, trying to hold suffering at bay; trying to balance the right mix of fun and satisfaction with serving God to some extent or other. It is easy to praise God when we are not suffering, but when we're under pressure we realise it's not so easy to thank Him in all things.

God knows what each of us is suffering. He understands the pain you may be in right now and the ways you may be trying to cope. But it is not God's desire that we cope with suffering. He wants us to stop hanging on to the doctrine of the unrepentant thief on the cross, demanding that if God be God, He get us out of our suffering⁹ or else we reject Him as God and curse Him. If we draw *that* line on God, we are lost.

Abiding and enduring with Christ

Job demonstrated the way in which you and I can abide in the offering of Christ even when we have no idea what's going on or why. Not cursing, not falling into sin, Job held fast to the Lord, declaring:

"Though [the Lord] slay me, I will hope in Him..." (Job 13:15).

Most of our Christian life is lived between a word coming to us from the Lord and its fulfilment; between the righteous outcomes promised by God, for which we hope, and the

3 John 12:32

4 2 Corinthians 5:19

5 Colossians 2:11

6 Romans 7:14-23

7 Job 2:9

8 Luke 23:39-43

9 Luke 23:39

bad outcomes we still produce. We live with the difference, somewhere in between what will surely be and what now is. We live seeing through a glass dimly¹⁰, not really knowing what's going on. We are perplexed, but with Job and the repentant thief, we are perplexed on the right side of the cross⁷ and do not therefore despair¹¹. If we take our stand on the wrong side of the cross with the unrepentant thief and Job's wife, we will come to despair. Hope will dwindle, the light will dim, and we will be in danger of being consumed by death in the fire of hell, having rejected the fire of Christ's offering.

The good news is that through His cross, Jesus has utterly defeated death, sin and the devil! Satan has been cast out, as Jesus made clear in His answer to Phillip and Andrew concerning the Greeks who wanted to see Him:

*"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, **"This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.**" (John 12:27-33)*

This is a wonderful interaction! Let's heed what Jesus was saying *for our sake*.

Death, sin and the devil are defeated

Now was the judgement brought upon the world. Now was the hour of judgment for those who are not in Christ. However, because the judgement being wrought looked weak, and we prefer fanfare, nobody then or now thought it *was* the judgement of the world. Nevertheless, it was. If we are in Christ, our circumstances are not now for judgement since judgment has already been passed. Jesus has already taken sin out of the way, so when He comes again, He will come without reference to sin¹². His judgment will be upon those who are not in Him.

In the Roman world, Caesar Augustus, the ruling emperor, was known as the son of God. In our world, a son of God is thought to be someone like Augustus - having dominion and ruling in apparent power. Jesus, the true Son of God, came in apparent weakness that to the human eye could judge nothing. Nevertheless, now *was* the judgement upon this world and now *was* the ruler of this world cast out. Jesus was putting Satan right on notice when He spoke these things to Phillip and Andrew.

Now, are these things true in your life, or are you still living under judgment? Is the ruler of this world still having a field day in your life? Being under judgement and subject to the devil is not the message of the cross! A Christian's testimony is not one of condemnation under judgement and doing battle with the devil every day. Please stop talking that way!

The death Jesus died

When Jesus indicated to Philip and Andrew the kind of death He would die, what did He mean?

10 1 Corinthians 13:12

11 2 Corinthians 4:8

12 Hebrews 9:28

What death *did* He die? The apostle Paul tells us:

“For the death He died, He died to sin, once for all;” (Romans 6:10).

In His death, Jesus conquered every element of power in the prince of the power of the air and every elemental principle that governs this world. He defeated them all, taking sin completely out of the equation. We can and do go back to sin, for we are not yet perfect, but sin is no longer the power that drives and owns those who are in Christ. In contrast, those in the world who are not in Christ are still under the power of sin, and their hearts are failing them for fear. We are seeing the world becoming more and more irrational and mad as people grasp after increasingly crazy solutions to the problems of life.

I'm not saying the issues facing the world aren't serious. I'm not trying to trivialise them. What I *am* saying is that men's hearts are failing them because they are saying, in effect, ‘Curse God and die.’ They are siding with the unrepentant thief on the wrong side of the cross of Christ, demanding that if God were any God at all, He would not allow suffering, and so they reject and curse Him.

But that very God whom they are rejecting on the grounds of His allowance of suffering has by His suffering Son made a way to rescue them from dying to living. If we reject suffering, we reject the cross, which Christ suffered for us. We cannot have the cross if we reject suffering.

None of us escapes suffering. In obedience to His Heavenly Father, Jesus drew *all* men to Himself and included them in the cross. Participation in the cross of Christ, in His offering and suffering, is the message. If our participation with Him is our testimony, then

we will share it with others, and it will have life for them.

Anyone, at any point in time, who is not under the Fatherhood of God is under the fatherhood of Satan, who in the Garden of Eden, through a lie, fathered in mankind a law other than God's law and made us all captive to the law of sin. In another garden called Gethsemane, Jesus Christ, who was not party to the events in Eden, who had no other law fathered in Him by Satan and who knew no sin, was made by God the Father to be sin for us¹³ so that by His death He could die to sin for us. In full and perfect relationship with His Heavenly Father, just as Adam should have been, Jesus became sin for us so that judgment could be passed on the world, the ruler of this world could be cast out, and sons of God could henceforth serve God with newness of life.

This is what He has done for us! *This* is the good news! What we could not do ourselves, God did in Christ. Why, then, like the Galatians, do we revert time and again to trying to do by ourselves what God has already done¹⁴?

Christ made sin for us

“[God the Father] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

How did the Father make the Son sin for us? By making every person who would ever be born a member of Christ's body, one side of the cross or the other, depending on our acceptance or rejection of participating with Him in His offering and suffering. If rejection, we will be left dying eternally in the fire of God's judgment that was passed there. If participating, we will drink and eat with Christ the cup and bread of the new covenant, dying

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁴ Galatians 3:1-5

with Him in the fire of God's offering and included in His resurrection to live eternally in Him.

We want to live with Him, so we have to learn, when suffering mounts up and we feel it's all too heavy for us to bear, to endure with Christ and not let go of our hope, not give in to feeling we are under God's curse, and not give way to despair and curse God in return, as the unrepentant thief and Job's wife did.

Enduring with Christ through suffering means, like a seed, going into the ground and dying. Waiting in hope. When Job persevered, trusting in the Lord and waiting in hope, what happened? He sprang up twice as fruitful as he had previously been, multiplying life to his family and friends. After all Job's self-remonstration and analysis, after all his comforters had canvassed every possible way of looking at the nature of evil and what Job might have done wrong or should have done to avoid his calamity, the Lord answered Job, and sent him to pray for his brethren¹⁵. He became a messenger.

The word of God comes to us like the seed in the parable of the sower¹⁶. What are we going to do with it? When the word of God came to Abram, he responded by preparing his offering as the Lord had asked him to, but he did not immediately receive the promised blessing. Instead of sending down fire and light and rejoicing upon Abram and his offering, God sent a horror of great darkness¹⁷. Abram, in faith, did not resort to cursing but persevered, protecting and guarding his offering, driving off the vultures that came to devour and destroy.

Guarding our participation

The offering of Christ stands unassailable, but our participation in it can be compromised and that is what we must guard and protect. Abram drove the vultures off his offering, and then the Lord sent fire between all the elements of it, sanctifying Abram's offering. But first, Abram had to wait through a great horror of darkness. That would not have been a nice experience, and neither is it for us when we are waiting through circumstances causing us to suffer. We can easily feel it's the end of us. It's all over. But this is just where God takes every person so that we can leave our own way and choose His. Which way will you choose?

God the Father included every person in the body of Christ through the events of Calvary. Everyone has a participation in the death of Christ, either to blessing or cursing. It was in Gethsemane that Jesus, by the grace of God, began to taste the suffering of death for every person¹⁸. In order to reconcile the world to Himself, the Father gave Christ the cup of sin to drink, and Christ obediently drank it all. He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him¹⁹.

"Now all things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

We have the word of reconciliation, the seed of the Father, but it must go into the ground and take us with it so that we come forth, like Job and like Abram, bearing fruit of the word God has sown. Not just mouthing the words of it;

¹⁵ Job 42:8

¹⁶ Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23

¹⁷ Genesis 15:12

¹⁸ Hebrews 2:9

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

not saying we believe it until things go wrong and we get flung into depression and unbelief; not moving under pressure from perplexity to despair.

When we walk in the way of the cross, we walk this way:

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not of us;” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

The power is not of us! Reverting to making the power of ourselves is the same problem the Galatians had²⁰ and leads to us giving up instead of enduring with Christ. With Paul, our testimony can be:

“...[we are] afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

If, when we are hard pressed, we are also crushed, we have gone from suffering with Christ to embracing our own failure and destruction, just as Job’s wife did. Thumbing the nose at God by throwing away our faith for participating in the dying and living of Jesus and reverting instead to our own ways is self-detonation. Believing, in effect, that Christ has not been raised makes us of all men most miserable, eating and drinking today for tomorrow we die²¹.

Holding fast to Christ

We are not believing *that!* We are joining Christ and allowing Him to constrain us to His offering and to abiding with Him through whatever difficulties we face. This is what the Lord is

calling us to want to help us with. If you have been worn down or demoralised by circumstances and feel crushed, despairing, forsaken or destroyed, the Lord wants to help you!

God wants you to pray to Him, to cry out to Him, because He does not want to leave you in that state, even if you have put yourself there. Things may have gone terribly wrong or become overwhelmingly difficult for you. God knows your history, and He is God over all those things. He has reconciled you to Himself and can reconcile all that is troubling you. Indeed, the package of your life is from His hand to deal with things you do not yet see, things that are harmful. His plan is to deliver you from believing that just because you’ve heard His word, just because you believe it, you are walking as a Christian. We are *not* saved by a belief system. God is delivering us from that old gospel so that day by day, minute by minute, we hold fast to Him, abiding in Him and walking relationally with Him.

You may for many years have been worn down by suffering, afflicted or self-inflicted. Living as one who is worn down may even have become your habit. God is granting to us all another season, inviting us to receive His ministry and His capacity to be delivered out from under our burdens. It is not too hard for Him!

It is pride that will stop us from receiving this from the Lord. Pride that hangs on to injustice, to feeling forsaken and to blaming God. When we blame God for our circumstances, we have nothing. But if we will kneel before Him and turn away from this victimised way of seeing ourselves, turning to Him and receiving His capacity, He will help us abide in Him. If we will cease from cursing Him and cursing our brethren, bagging them out or joining others

²⁰ Galatians 3:1-4

²¹ 1 Corinthians 15:19,32

bagging them out, God, who is love, will bring us back to the simplicity of His gospel and to His love.

We were dead because of sin and the other law within us, but the Father has included us in Christ, who was made the body of sin for us so that, participating with Him, we could be delivered from our body of death. Do you want to remain connected to the body of death? To cursing? On the contrary! We are joining His body, made sin, taken out and burned, returning a new creation alive from the dead. Christ has taken sin away, and we have a participation in Him who is the Righteous One. How else could we, a sinful people, participate with a God who is holy? Our uncleanness could never draw near. But Christ has done it, once for all²².

Captivity taken captive, setting us free

Jesus is not still being crucified every day for our sin. Everyone in the whole world was included by the Father in Christ, who was made to embody the principle of sin that had dominion over us all. By taking all sin into Himself and into death, He took captivity captive and set us free²³. And when you are free, you are no longer trying to self-manage everything that's wrong - you're free indeed²⁴!

When we were all included in Christ's body, made the body of sin for us, His circumcision was the removal of our sin and other law from His corporate body²⁵. That is why the corporate body of Christ is now the place of participation. If you try and claim, as an individual apart from His body, the freedom from sin that Christ wrought, you will violate your participation in His offering, and instead of His love being poured into your heart, you will abide either

alone or in a like-minded faction and the love of God will not be in your heart. This is important for us to understand!

Through His twenty-one-hour, seven-times wounded offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary, Jesus Christ made our eternal death His death, and He died it. By this means He changed the way that we are now to die, giving us a participation in His death instead of our own, and in His resurrection life out of death.

To understand this, we need the Lord to illuminate it for us and that will take time. Let's not imagine we have it all under control, for even if we understand the word, it will take the Lord's hand to make it real in our lives; to make it our life.

22 Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18

23 Ephesians 4:8

24 John 8:36

25 Colossians 2:11