

The Way of the Cross

"It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30

In what appeared to be a victory for darkness, the life of Jesus ended on a cross. The One who had come in power now lay bruised and broken, overwhelmed by the sins of the world. It had to be that way in order to save us.

Sacrifice

The separation that sin brought between God and mankind required a remedy. None of us could ever bridge the gap that sin had carved. Someone needed to take up our cause, someone who was perfect, in order to break the cycle of sin in human flesh. Someone who loved us so much, that He would be willing to do it, even if only one person received the benefit of His actions.

But he was pierced for our transgressions . . .

Isaiah 53:5-8

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:24

In the eyes of the world, it would appear that Jesus had failed in His mission as He hung there lifeless on the cross. He didn't overthrow the Roman government as most had expected.

"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!"

Mark 15:31

What they didn't understand was that Jesus had not come to do His own will, but to fulfill the desires of His Father: To become the fulfillment of the law.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Luke 22:42

Jesus had to be willing to submit to the will of his Father. And that will was to take up the burden of our sinfulness, that we might know peace with God.

Obedience

The way of the cross for Jesus was the way of obedience.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:8

It will also be the same for us. We are no longer here to accomplish our own will and desires, but to achieve the will and purposes of Christ who died for us. And if you haven't noticed, His desires for us aren't quite like our desires for ourselves.

Our desires often resemble the following statements:

- I want to look better.
- I want to be successful.
- I want to be well-off financially.
- I just want to be happy.

Some of those statements don't sound too bad. But let's look at God's desires for us in those areas:

- I made you perfectly – be content with what I purposely created.
- You will enjoy success in the way that most satisfies when you follow Me.
- I promise to provide all that you need.
- I alone can fulfill you – look to Me for your happiness instead of looking to your world.

Do you see the similarities? Yet if we look closely, we see that our desires are things that are temporary, where as God's desires for us are lasting. As we seek to walk in His will for us, Christ brings about true fulfillment.

We are called to die to our fleshly nature. In order to know newness of life, we must intentionally put to death our sinful natures. God calls us to not just manage our problems, but to surrender them to Him.

Baptism

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:2-4

Our commitment to Christ calls us to identify with His death. Death is the process that God

uses to bring life. We must die to all those old ways of thinking and acting, in order to experience new life.

Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Luke 17:33

Forgiveness

My problem needed some serious help, but that meant telling someone. It took the severe mercy of HIV and AIDS to force me to recognize my absolute helplessness to resolve this conflict on my own. I had to fall at the feet of Jesus first. I was broken, and no amount of glue could patch this Humpty Dumpty. I needed healing!

Bob

In confession, the state of our soul is brought into the light of His presence. It isn't a pretty scene, as we honestly cry out to God for forgiveness and healing, but the reality of our situation brings soberness to us. He doesn't reject or shame us for not measuring up. He is fully aware of our need.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them ... everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible ...
Ephesians 5:11-14

God has made a way for our cleansing. He forgives us when we ask Him. He paid the price for all our sin once, for every time.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
I John 1:9

God separates us from our sin. He no longer counts it against us. Who else does that?

He will never remind us of our sin once we confess it. He will never bring guilt or throw it in our face when we fall. Each day is literally new, with no mistakes or sins in it.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
Psalm 103:12

Are you able to receive that kind of forgiveness? Will you allow yourself to reach out and take it, regardless of whether you deserve it or not? God does not get hung up on our behavior when we belong to Him – He has declared us worthy to receive anything He has to give when we've been adopted as His kids. Your parents may have taken away ice cream parties, nights out, or phone privileges when you were bad. But God does not withdraw a thing – His forgiveness extends to His children in any circumstance.

If life in Christ means dying, we must arm ourselves with this attitude:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!
Philippians 2:6-8

God calls us to walk in honesty and integrity. Confession is key to living a victorious life. At the cross of Christ we find liberation from our sinful past. Through relationships, we receive the encouragement to maintain a pure life.

The Cost

Surrender is the act of giving up. God calls us to surrender our earthly desires that we might receive His godly character and nature.

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in the body is done with sin. I Peter 4:1

There is no such thing as a bloodless crucifixion. Christ has paid the price for our redemption through His death. We must learn to walk in His death.

Arise, my soul, arise;
Shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears:
Before the throne my Surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.
My God is reconciled;
His pardoning voice I hear:
He owns me for His child;
I can no longer fear:
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

Charles Wesley

Day 2 – Obedience

Our response to the work of the cross and the salvation we have obtained should be one of gratitude. We have been given something we do not deserve and we can now enjoy the benefits of being a child of God. We have been “bought with a price” and yet, we may choose to continue to surrender our lives to the will of the Father or choose instead to be lord of our own lives. Jesus said: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching ...” (John 14:23) Often we want to offer God conditional obedience. We say to Him, “Please heal me, fix me, change me, and then I will follow you.” But we must first choose to follow Jesus because He is Lord.

Do you recognize places in your heart where you have drawn a line with God and said, in effect, “I will obey you to this point ... but no further?”

Often the reason we hesitate to surrender in obedience is because we lack faith in God’s ability to provide for us. We think we know what we need, and we have our own ways of seeking to provide for ourselves. In these beginning places of obedience it is so important that we *choose* obedience simply because of who God is and what He promises in His Word to do in us. As we grow in obedience we gain experience with God that further confirms His love for us and reinforces the truth that He only does what is in our best interest.

Are you willing to let go of the ways you have used in the past to find satisfaction or to relieve your pain in order to experience God’s provision? Ask God to give you faith to believe in His love for you and to give you hope as you step out in obedience.

Day 3 – Baptism

Baptism is a symbol of death and resurrection. Resurrection only comes after death. We must bring our sin to the cross and choose to die to self, to our ways of saving or providing for ourselves. Dying and surrendering is to give up everything that you thought was going to save you. For some, that may be self-protection, or control. For others it may be isolation or anger. Sarcasm, independence, overeating, alcohol, performance, even our appearance can be areas that need to be brought to the cross. Each one of us is different and the areas that need to die will be unique.

Our commitment to Christ calls us to identify with His death in ways that specifically address our attempts to save ourselves.

What are some of the old ways of thinking and acting that the Holy Spirit is currently bringing into the light? What needs to die?

Has there been and/or is there now a person(s) who you expected to be your savior instead of looking to Jesus to be your Savior? If so, who and in what way?

In Luke 17:33 it speaks of the necessity of losing our lives in order to find Life. This is another picture of dying to our old ways of providing “salvation” for ourselves. What does it mean to you to “lose your life”?

Day 4 – Forgiveness

Our culture today and many of our experiences growing up with imperfect parents have confirmed in our minds that there is no such thing as unconditional love and grace. We are punished for our sins and rewarded for our efforts. The concept of forgiveness without strings attached is difficult for us to accept. David Seamands expresses our tendency to feel we have to do something in order to win God's approval.

We will give up our sins, ambitions, money, name, fame, comfort – we are willing to sacrifice and surrender them all to God. But the most difficult, costly, and last thing we will give up is our confidence that there is something we can do which will earn us a right relationship with God. *Healing Grace*

God's word tells us that forgiveness was accomplished at the cross. It is done. It cannot be added to. Past sins and future sins were forgiven at that point in time. Nothing can be added to what Christ extended to us. We must simply choose to accept His forgiveness. However, as we walk through life this side of Heaven we still struggle with sin.

In I John 1:9 we read that as we continue to confess our sins He is faithful to forgive us and purify us. The word "confession" means to agree with God about our sins. It is the opposite of rebellion or defending our actions. We simply agree with God that what we have done is wrong. This can be a verbal response or simply a moment of thought that recognizes a particular action or thought as sin.

As the Holy Spirit brings conviction to our hearts we confess our sins to Jesus. This is how we maintain our fellowship with Him – by walking in agreement and submission to Him. Each time we agree with God about our sin we are again accepting His forgiveness. He is not asking us to do penance, to punish ourselves, to condemn and berate ourselves or to repay Him with self-sacrifice. These things are attempts at self-atonement and insult the work of the cross. At the core of these efforts is pride.

Do you often find yourself plagued with feelings of guilt even after you have agreed with God about your sin?

Is there something that you tend to *do* in order to pay for your sin? Do you feel uncomfortable with the idea of grace?

The accuser of the brethren finds great delight in robbing us of the peace and joy that should be ours as a result of God's grace. The enemy of our souls wants us to walk in guilt and condemnation, or in the pride of performance, rather than enjoy God's unconditional love.

In the exercise below are some statements that we often believe about God's love. Fill in the blanks where appropriate.

I love you because ...

I love you since ...

I will love you if ...

I will love you when ...

I will love you after ...

David Seamands goes on to say that:

Any such statement would make His love conditional, would mean His love was caused by something in us – our attractiveness, our goodness, our loveliness. The reverse of this would mean there could be something in us which would stop God from loving us ... *God's love is an action toward us, not a reaction to us.* His love depends not on what we are but on what He is.

Healing Grace, p. 115

