

PRIVILEGE TO “GLORY” IN THE CROSS

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Baby Dedication

Aminah-Re Adutwumwaa Ampomah DOB:
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A little Jewish boy age 6 was fascinated by a Christmas tree. Not the ordinary ornaments and lights, but the little figurine of the Baby Jesus lying in a manger. He liked it so much that he took it off the tree, stole it if you please. When his mother had him bring it back, she kindly explained to him, “Son, some religions—like ours—are different; they don’t have the Baby Jesus.” His response: “Then why don’t we get the religion that has the Baby Jesus?”

I can only hope that his childish heart will always hunger for the religion that has Him.

“The religion that has the Baby Jesus” believes, understands, appreciates, is thankful, that the Son of God came to earth and began His life here as a Baby, subject to all the trials and heartaches that every human baby grows up to experience, “yet without sin.” Was He tempted from within, as we are tempted from within? Or was He tempted only from without, as the adult sinless Adam was tempted in the Garden of Eden? Thank God, He won *our* battle, not merely Adam’s battle. He tells us, Yes, He was tempted from within: “I can of mine

own self do nothing. . . I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (Jn. 5:30). “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (6:38). “Christ pleased not himself” (Rom. 15:3). You say that there was no inner conflict, that it was easy for Him to “seek not [His] own will but” the Father’s will for Him? Think of Gethsemane where the lid came off and we can see inside His tortured soul: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt” (Mt. 26:39). Only an outward struggle, not internal? What about the agonized bloody sweat that came with that prayer of self-surrender? He tells us He had or “took” a self as we have a self to contend with; but whereas we have *all* yielded to self and thus have been selfish, He perfectly denied self all His life - from His manger all the way to His cross. Thank God for “the religion of the Baby Jesus.”

“Glory in the Cross”

We men have all kinds of idolatry that we are embroiled in: cars (look at the alluring ads everywhere), speedboats, sports (see the sports section of every newspaper, think of the fascination at the arenas), even body-building wherein your physique becomes your “god,” and you love pictures of your body, or looking in your mirror. Face it: you worship yourself!

Is that any better than the ancient Israelites’ crazy idolatry that we moderns think is so abhorrent?

For all of us, idolatry is simply heart-devotion to anything between our heart-soul and God: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,” says the Lord in introducing His ten commandments. And there at the start we see ourselves in the raw sin of modern idolatry. We “glory” in almost an infinite number of obsessions (the wealthier we are the more we want), all “except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” that Paul “gloried” in (Gal. 6:14).

Then in enlightened moments the Holy Spirit gives us a glimpse of reality: no way are we going to feel welcome in the New Jerusalem if our hearts are still plagued by this “idolatry,” any more than the ancients with their naïve kinds of paganism. By nature we are sinners unworthy of heaven; idolatry and eternal salvation are opposites. The very first “commandment” has told us so. Face reality: we are lost unless we find deliverance from idolatry. No idolater will enjoy walking the street of gold in the New Jerusalem; he’ll go crazy asking everyone, “Where’s the exit?”

Here’s something else to face: there is no way any convicted idolater (that’s you and I) can find deliverance from this all-enveloping and miry quicksand “except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (same text). If we can get our poor little eyes opened we will discern a glory in the cross that outshines every allurement the glittering world can offer us.

Is it a mere coincidence? During this week when we celebrate the horrific mayhem that was “D-Day” 70 years ago, millions of Christians worldwide are

celebrating Isaiah’s description of the cross of Christ. It’s his chapters from 52:13 through 53:12—the story of how the world and how God’s people were “astonished at Christ.” Never had anyone even dreamed of what the Messiah would do when He came! “Kings will shut their mouths at Him.” The glorious Prince of heaven “in the form of God,” in the highest place of the great universe, became a man whose “visage was so marred more than any man.” The Father covered the earth with supernatural darkness to shield from anyone’s gaze the face of His innocent Son while He endured the unspeakable horror of God-forsakenness. Only an infinite divine/human Savior could endure on a cross the infinite hell of being “made sin for us who knew no sin” (see 2 Cor. 5:20, 21).

This week we ponder the world’s moment of truth—not only the fate of Europe and the civilized world 70 years ago, but the fate of the world, yes, of the universe, when it trembled at the cross. Nothing in the Bible probes it so deeply as Isaiah 53.

And we are “astonished” at what He accomplished on His cross: “He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.” The most awful blind misjudgment of 6000 years!

Whose is the “our”? Who is the “we”? The only answer possible: the human race, “all men,” “every man” (Rom. 5:18; Heb. 2:9). You and I, personally.

“He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.” Whose?

“The chastisement of our peace was upon Him.” There was a kind of divine *karma* that Hinduism has

never dreamed of: a perfect balance between every moment of human happiness ever known and the corresponding “chastisement” that was laid on Christ. He had to make a payment to cover every human pleasure, pay for every human breath. Hinduism is wrong to teach that we must pay a price in *karma* for our every sin or pleasure. Christ paid the price! The transaction has been done.

“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” That’s why we are “healed,” why we’re not now in hell itself. We can do nothing now but live for Him alone—that is, live a life of joyous obedience motivated by an at-one-ment faith.

“Our beloved brother Paul” (cf. 2 Peter 3:15) who frequently comes up with those brilliant insights into what it means to follow Jesus, said: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; . . . and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Of all the apostles, apparently only Paul could come up with this idea.

The cross was the focal point of human opprobrium and disgust; for a self-respecting man to imagine himself crucified naked on a cross—this was impossible.

Yet Paul climbs up on that cross “with Christ” to share the shame and hatred and disgust of the world.

Can you imagine the uphill battle that Christ’s disciples had—preaching salvation through that despised symbol of depravity? I don’t imagine what today would be equivalent!

If you can imagine the apostles of Jesus fanning out around the world holding evangelistic meetings, inviting the public to come in (as we do, maybe in a tent crusade!), can you imagine them “glorying” in that hated symbol of depravity? Even the great Moses, whom everyone revered, declared that “if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, . . . he that is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God” (Deut. 21:22, 23).

There was no way the early apostles could get around that pronouncement of Moses! It seemed on the surface that God had foredoomed their “evangelism” to be in vain!

Yet the apostle told the Corinthians, “When I came to you, . . . I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1, 2). The apostles lifted the heavy burden the Lord had laid upon them and rejoiced in telling the despised but glorious story! Dear brother Paul said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). And “I am crucified with Christ,” he declared, for all the world to despise me together with Him (2:20). What the Bible says about the cross has bothered me. I didn’t know what it meant to “glory” in it.

Someone asked an intriguing question: “How does the blood of Christ cleanse one from sin?” Is it by a cold-as-ice, dry-as-dust legal substitution of merit, like a bank transferring credit from one account to another? The merits of Christ’s perfection applied to the unworthy sinner so he goes scot-free? Like an insurance company’s policy? Is that the biblical

doctrine of Substitution? Many assume so, and don't wish to be disturbed into realizing that something far more profound is involved.

Let's face it: "the truth of the gospel" in Galatians is controversial, and has always stirred up the fires of persecution. Three (at least) passages in Galatians probe deeply into this idea of substitution and what the "blood" accomplishes (a) "I am crucified with Christ" (2:20). I identify with Him, says Paul; my heart is won; my heart is moved; He "loved me, and gave Himself for me." We "behold" Him so vividly that we identify with Him. A bond is established, we are "united" with Him. We empathize with Him; we realize that it is we who deserve to be crucified. "In Him" we kneel in Gethsemane with Him, intimately together. We are not like careless children who have no solemn appreciation of what it cost Him to save us. When a child suffers agony, does not a parent suffer too? A parent enters into his child, as it were, feels with him, "identifies." Christ on His cross dies our second death; what the word "faith" means is that we identify with Him, as though we are inside His own soul. We "reckon" ourselves "dead" with Him, says Paul (Rom. 6:11). It is clear in Ephesians 1: "in Him we have redemption through His blood," not a heartless exchange as when we sign an insurance policy, but a heartfelt identity as a Bride forever identifies with her Bridegroom (Rev 19:7, 8). Christ's command to "abide in Me" expresses that closeness of intimacy. But please note: ALL OF THIS IS BY FAITH ALONE, NOT AN IOTA OF MERIT ATTACHED THERETO. Our identity with Him is totally heart-

appreciation, not 1/99, in no way self-salvation even .00000000001 percent.

Getting to heaven is no longer my main concern; responding to that love has become "the life I now live in the flesh [that] I live by the faith of the Son of God." It's "not I, but Christ." He "lives in me."

A legal substitution? Yes, of course; but infinitely more than that. (b) Paul preached the cross so clearly, vividly, that the people saw themselves crucified with Christ (Gal. 3:1-5). That is, unfortunately, rare preaching today! It wasn't superficial emotionalism; it was heart-gripping truth as solid as granite. (c) "The truth of the gospel" produces in cold, selfish, world-loving, addiction-cursed hearts, a new passion: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross" (Gal. 6:14). Sometimes I "glory" in a Mozart Andante; it keeps going through my mind, night and day, I can't get it out. Well, without a trace of fanaticism (which cold, persecuting hearts like to attribute to "the truth of the gospel") the sacrifice of the Son of God has gripped the heart so that it has become the "new song" we sing night and day—a holy obsession forever. And here's some Good News: such a new song can be "learned" (Rev. 14:3).

Someone says we over-emphasize the Good News in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come unto Me. . . . I will give you rest. . . . Take My yoke. . . . My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." We don't give equal emphasis to what appears to be the opposite in Luke 13:24: "Strive [agonize] to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

(a) The NKJV mistranslates the parallel passage, “narrow,” in Matthew 7:14 as “difficult.” But the Greek word *thlibo* has the essential meaning of “narrow,” not difficult. Jesus says you can’t carry your baggage of worldly selfishness with you into fellowship with Him. You’ve got to drop your baggage. “Difficult”? No, a thousand times no—not if you are “yoked” by faith with Him.

(b) Paul makes plain the apparent contradiction. The answer is one-ness with Christ: “I am crucified *with* Christ,” he says (Gal. 2:20). You are never crucified alone (that *would* be “difficult!”). You sense your corporate fellowship *with Him* (read 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Read Paul’s portrayal of all the “agonizing” sufferings he endured for Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-30). You’ll be ashamed of yourself if you read that passage; and then he ends up saying, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory, . . . take pleasure” in all these sufferings for Him (12:9, 10). “Difficult? Agonizing?”

(c) Does dropping your baggage bother you as being difficult? Paul is Christ’s best defender: he says that if you can understand how good is Christ’s Good News (in Matthew 11:28-30, for example) you’ll consider all this love of self, this love-of-the-world baggage that has so engrossed you, as being so much “garbage.” You’ll drop it in a moment when you see the “excellency” of being crucified *with* Christ (read Phil. 3:7, 8; that word “dung” in the KJV means literally “what is thrown to the dogs”). Yes, let yourself feel ashamed—it’s a healthy experience. Then you can learn to “glory” in Christ’s cross.

(d) Is “agonizing” effort “difficult”? Not if you’re running a race, says Paul (1 Cor. 9:22-27). Flying up steps two at a time is fun if you’re healthy.

(e) Join the happiest man who has ever lived and died in 6000 years of history: the repentant thief who was literally “crucified *with* Christ” (he had the assurance, “You’ll be with Me” forever). As he waited in his physical agony, he rejoiced. “Crucified!? Are you kidding?” No; I’m serious.

Have you learned to *love* the Book of Galatians? Or is it dull, boring, confusing, to you? It has been the spark that has ignited glorious reformations in people’s lives since the time of Martin Luther. So you should learn to make friends with it, to love it, to let your heart revel in its powerful Good News.

The key is Paul’s vision of the cross of Christ and its effect on a proud, selfish, worldly human heart. He cries out, “I am crucified with Christ” (2:20), and says he can’t “glory” in anything else in the universe “save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). So white-hot was his burning devotion to the One who died on that cross that he tells the people in Galatia that he “set forth Christ evidently among you, crucified among you” (3:1). That fire in his soul lit a fire in their hearts.

As they listened to Paul, their eyes were fixed on his eyes; they forgot where they were or who they were—they saw Christ crucified before their astonished gaze. They forgot about their fear of hell-fire, and they forgot about their hopes of going to heaven and getting a great reward there. Only one idea possessed their souls: the eternal Son of God had gone to hell for them, died their second

death, gave Himself for them totally; they saw a “breadth, and depth, and length, and height” of this love of Christ that shattered their captivity to the love of self and the love of the world.

In 3:2, 3, Paul makes clear to them that they didn’t *do* anything or *work* any “works” to achieve this deliverance from the prison-house of sin—they simply *listened* by what Paul called “the hearing of faith” (3:2). And thus they stumbled on the exact experience of “our father Abraham,” who also “listened,” and “believed” by saying “amen” to the fabulous promises of God (3:6-14). Now, after this glorious experience the Galatians enjoyed in fellowship with Abraham “by faith,” they turned back to the petty legalism preached by the “brethren” from the headquarters of the church in Jerusalem! That explains Paul’s righteous indignation! Let this “key” open the book for you!

What does it mean to “glory ... in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” as the apostle says in Galatians 6:14—“God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”? To “glory” in something is to revel in it, to be absorbed in it, to think of it day and night, to live for it; we do that all the time when we “glory” in our speed boat, or in our wardrobe, or in our palace-like house, or even in our garden, or in our special abilities that make people envy us. How can we learn to “glory in the cross”?

To “glory” in earthly things is idolatry; and the end is boredom (the nursing homes are full of people who have spent their lives in various forms of idolatry and now have nothing to live for). I

overheard two elderly talking one day. The one said: What is today? What year is it? The other said: It’s December soon it will be the New Year. The other replied: I hope I’m dead by then! So many of the elderly have nothing to live for. They’re bored with life.

But to “glory in the cross of Christ” would be a delightful experience if one knew how to do it; but what does the cross mean to us?

To “glory” in anything means to love it, be obsessed with it, think about it all the time, You “glory” in your new Lexus, in sports, in your speedboat, in your new dresses, in your new house. But “glory” in the cross of Christ? How could that make sense to me? Paul must have been a fanatic; yes, the entire New Testament seems unreal.

Jeremiah has a special message on what *not* to “glory” in (his word “man” is in italics, that is, the original language means man or woman): “Let not the wise man [or woman] glory in his [or her] wisdom,” in other words, your keen wit and razor sharp repartee, maybe your doctorate. It’s such fun to keep people awestruck. “Let not the mighty [person], glory in his [or her] might [your outstanding personality that is so forceful at parties, in school, or in the office]. “Nor let the rich man [or woman] glory in his [or her] riches” [maybe that’s where your new Hummer comes into the picture]. “But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, . . . says the Lord”

(9:23, 24). Now something begins to make a little more sense.

“Who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it [as a sheer gift from the Lord]?” You man (or boy) with your impressive persona that women (and girls) gaze at; you lady (or girl) with your pretty face and figure that always draws male heads—what do you have that you didn’t receive from the Lord?

Some healthy sobriety comes from letting self be crucified with Christ (which happens when you simply “behold” Him there).

Let’s come like the pagan Greeks who told Philip in Jerusalem: “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21-33). It’s a prayer the Father won’t despise.

Christ suffered for us, but the soldiers who are dying in Afghanistan are also suffering; some of them lie in agony, wounded, for longer times than Jesus suffered on His cross. What is so special about the suffering of Jesus? When Paul “gloried in the cross” the world itself was “crucified to [him]” and he was “dead” to its alluring temptations; the cross of Christ had done something for him and to him. The love (*agape*) demonstrated there impacted him so deeply that “henceforth” he was “constrained” to devote himself to the cause and mission of Christ; he was “crucified with Christ” (2:20). It wasn’t because Paul was a super-hero; he was a sinner by nature as much as any of us; he said he was “less than the least of all sinners” (Eph. 3:8).

What the apostle “saw” we can “see” today: the death that Jesus died on His cross was not the ordinary “death” we know; He died “the second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:12-15), which meant under “the curse of God,” the horror of the endless darkness of hell; and Christ suffered it for every human soul on earth (Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:9). Let the solemn truth stretch your mind and “enlarge [your] heart” as David prays (Psalm 119:32), so you can “comprehend” its vast dimensions (Eph. 3:14-19).

Someday you and I will be in God’s eternal kingdom of glory, thanks to our Savior. We’ll look back on our earthly pilgrimage, wondering why it took us so long to overcome our worldliness, our selfishness, our sinful addictions, yes, our Laodicean lukewarmness. We will see that pure “river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

“The Lamb”? Yes, the crucified Christ. We will at last understand why Paul said long ago that he would “glory” in nothing else “save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14), why he “determined not to know anything among [us], save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). We will then begin to understand, “clear as crystal,” how Christ as the Lamb of God “tasted” our second death, endured the horror of hell in our behalf, endured being made the “curse of God,” “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin,” experienced in Himself all the agony of the total of all our human terror multiplied by the unspeakable agony also of divine terror, endured to the fullest the reality of

every man's worst nightmares,—and then at last we will sing with new understanding the anthem, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Heb. 2:9, Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21, Rev. 5:12).

But what a pity if we can't begin to understand all that today! Or can we? If we could, we would find the victory over our worldliness, our sinful addictions, yes, our deep-seated selfishness, not sometime far off in eternity but *now*, today. True, a little child can't appreciate what happened on the cross; he/she can only laugh and coo and enjoy his superficial level of life (thank God he/she can!). But who of us is content to remain a little child forever? Is it not time to begin to “grow up into Him,” to “come” into “the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown person, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13)?

Ask the Father to lead you to His Son's cross so you can begin to see what happened there. You'll never be the same person again.