

# **JESUS' SECOND LESSON ON THE MEANING OF THE CROSS**

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Peter would be shocked when he had time to consider what he had done. He had actually dared to rebuke his Master, and had even laid hands on Him as on a fellow fisherman that he thought was out of his mind.

An awed and deeply impressed group listened as Jesus for the first time clearly unfolded the law of the kingdom of heaven. Here is the real point of what it means to follow Him:

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’” Matthew 16:24, 25.

It was as if He said, in effect: You are astonished that I, the Son of God, must go to My cross and die. Not only so, but you yourselves, if you will follow Me, must each one surrender to die upon his cross with Me. We are in this together, and the law of the cross is binding upon us all!

## **THAT “WHOEVER” IS ALL-INCLUSIVE**

*Neither God is excepted, nor man.* In the distant ages of eternity before sin began, Father and Son clasped hands in a solemn agreement that if man should sin, the Father was to give His Son, and the Son was to give Himself, that the universe might be saved from the ruin of self-seeking.

Further, in the end God would share His throne with all who would choose to share Christ's cross. For Him there must be a risking of everything in a dramatic expression of love, revealing depths and heights, as yet undreamed of by sinless beings. God has *His* cross!

Whoever you are, if you follow Jesus, you have *your* cross. You need not be a priest, a monk, a clergyman, a missionary, or even a church officer or religious leader, in order to be included in the “whoever” who otherwise must lose his “life.” The seed that would save its life will lose it; the seed that will die in the ground alone will bear much “fruit.” Here, says Jesus, is the genius of principle on which My kingdom is founded.

It is no surprise that when sin challenged the government of God, it zeroed in to attack this principle of self-surrender at the cross. In the war that followed, divine love could find no other way to conquer than the way of the cross. Love chose it instinctively because it is its perfect expression. No other course could the Son of God have taken than to surrender to the cross.

Whenever genuine love (*agape*) meets the problem of sin, a cross is erected on which self is crucified. No other decision could the Father have made than to give His only-begotten Son, because He “so loved the world.” In those dimly understood ages of eternity, the solemn agreement was entered into by the eternally preexistent Christ that He should become the Lamb of God. Because His heart was the infinite reservoir of love itself, He

chose that way. Thus He was “slain from the foundation of the world.” Revelation 13:8.

In whatever heart it enters today, divine love chooses alike when it meets the problem of sin. The principle of victory is the same whether it is the Creator wrestling with the problem, or you and I.

#### **HOW THE BOY JESUS DISCOVERED THE CROSS**

The TRUTH OF THE CROSS IS BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF Jesus when He came to earth. Although He was fully man, “in all points tempted like as we are,” yet His heart was without sin, and therefore pure. It thus remained—wonder of wonders!—the reservoir of love (*agape*). In that respect He differed from all other human beings who have been born into the world. He alone knew no sin, no *surrender* to egoism in any form although the temptation to self-indulgence was as real for Him as for us.

Yet we cannot suppose that any conscious memory of His preexistence remained with Him in His earthly childhood. As a babe in His mother’s arms in the stable at Bethlehem, He had no conscious intelligence beyond that of other human babies at birth. He could not acknowledge the adoration of the shepherds or the wise men from the East. As a child in Nazareth, did He entertain Joseph and Mary with tales of the glories of heaven which He knew in His preexistence there? Like a fortunate child who has been to the “big city,” did He tell his playmates in the rustic mountain village of His exploits as the Commander of the heavenly angels?

No; as a child, Jesus learned wisdom as we must learn. “The Child grew” and “increased in wisdom and stature.” Luke 2:40, 52. The wonder of Christ is the wonder of His birth, God in human flesh, subject to the laws of mental and physical growth as we are all subject to them, yet “without sin.” Certainly He was not born with any miraculous memory of His divine preexistence. All these divine advantages He laid aside.

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AGE OF TWELVE**

By the time a child reaches that age, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife.

Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. The latter mouthed phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp. For four thousand years God’s servants and offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth’s inquiring “Why?” no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is it possible, wondered Jesus, for the “blood of bulls and goats” to take away sin?

#### **A PRAYER OFFERED IN HEAVEN IS OFFERED AGAIN ON EARTH**

Even as a child, Jesus must walk alone. He turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as he came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed the same heart commitment He had made in heaven:

“For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: ‘You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but You have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said, “Here I am, to *do Your* will, O God.’” Hebrews 10:5-7, REV.

It was as He prayed, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts’ blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! *I* have blood that I can shed. Here *I* am, Father—let *Me* be the Lamb of God! *I will die for the sins of the world. My* blood will be the atonement! *I* will be that “suffering servant” of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let Me be wounded for man’s transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with *My* stripes he may be healed. Lo, *I* come—to do Your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Himself:

“So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all.” Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV.

#### **A BOY’S LOVE (AGAPE) BECOMES PROFOUND**

No memory of his preexistence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when “the counsel of peace” was “between them both” (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices “cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9), and that “the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” Hebrews 10:1.

This is all a *type*, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice. This was a

conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times “not discerning the Lord’s body,” this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the unresisted power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. *He will sacrifice Himself.* The Boy of twelve “saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.” Isaiah 59:15, 16. “Christ. . . through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.” Hebrews 9:14.

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of tender years, with the mysterious past all unknown to Him except by faith in the Written Word. He makes the same decision which as Commander of the heavenly hosts He made in the councils of heaven. *He chooses to go to the cross.*

#### **THE ONLY WAY OUR “LIFE” CAN BE SAVED**

When the love of God (*agape*) is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, we choose the way of the cross as readily as the Son of God chose it in the heavenly council ages ago, and again as a Boy of twelve in the Jerusalem temple. In each instance, whether in the heart of the Son of God or in the heart of a believing sinner, the results

lead to resurrection—which is as much a part of the principle as is the cross. There is Good News: “He who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal.” John 12:25.

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and the cross for you and me on which we die with Christ as did the penitent thief.

There was a third cross at Calvary, but there was no redemption for the impenitent thief who died on it. He was caught in a suffering and death to which he never surrendered. Rebellious, he cursed his fate and God unto the bitter end, *and perished.*

Shall we rebel against the principle of the cross and follow him to eternal darkness?

Bearing our cross is made easy through seeing that other cross on which our divine Example died. “My yoke is easy,” the crucified One tells us. Through understanding His cross, we can discern our own and find strength to bear it gladly.

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My riches gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a tribute far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

Isaac Watts

#### **WHO IS THE “OLD MAN” CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST?**

A dear Christian woman was stricken with blindness. While she lay on her bed trying to sense the meaning of her tragic plight, her well-intentioned pastor called to comfort her.

“Dear one, God has laid His cross upon you!” he said.

How would you feel if someone told you that a misfortune that came to you uninvited was your cross? Would you be tempted to feel resentful toward God for thus interfering with your plans for your life?

No one in his right mind would voluntarily choose the sorrows and heartaches common to humanity which we have so often thought to be our cross. The cross which the Savior bids us bear must be taken up as a freewill choice, just as much so as He took up His cross willingly. No one would choose to become blind, lame, a paraplegic, or even poverty-stricken. While it is good for us to bear these burdens cheerfully, such patient endurance comes short of fulfilling the principle of the cross *as Jesus taught it*.

More than any other of the apostle of Christ, Paul recognized the tremendous impact the cross has on human nature. Not only had he been well educated in Jewish thought; he had mastered also the ideas of Greek philosophy. The startling idea of the cross struck Jews and Greeks differently. To the Jews it was a “stumbling block;” to the Greeks it was “foolishness.” 1 Corinthians 1:23.

#### **CHRIST’S CROSS IS NO MORE WELCOME TODAY THAN ANCIENTLY**

It is NOT SURPRISING THAT THE Greeks saw the cross as “foolishness;” unenlightened as they were with that wisdom that the Jews ought to have given them. The Greeks had a word for “self”—*ego*. But what to *do* with *egoism*, they hadn’t the slightest

idea. When Paul came alone and said that self must be “crucified,” they thought his idea was “nonsense” (TEV).

On the other hand, the idea of a cross was repugnant to the Jews because they were blindly (though inexcusably) ignorant of a psychology of human nature. Had they seen the meaning of their own sanctuary service, they would have recognized the atonement of Christ the perfect answer to the need of all human nature the world around. But they were pathetically ignorant of the meaning of their own revelation.

Being familiar with Greek philosophy, Paul sensed how “the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8) in that they at least were aware that human nature needed something which none of the religions of their ancient world supplied. “The Greeks seek after wisdom,” Paul said (1 Corinthians 1:22); but he recognized that in the principle of the cross lay the wisdom they were vainly seeking and which the unconscious repression of human nature had obscured.

#### **PAUL’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CROSS EXPLAINS LIFE’S GREATEST PROBLEM**

Nothing in the New Testament claims to be a full, systematic outline of the teaching on the cross as Paul presented it to his audiences in Asia Minor. All we have is a collection of occasional letters, none of which Paul intended as a transcript of his ideas which turned the ancient world “upside down.” Acts 17:6. Therefore we find in these letters evidence of Paul’s dynamic concepts that split history in two.

Much comes to light that shows Paul's vivid idea of the cross as the only way to change selfish human behavior. The clearest explanation is found in his letters to the Roman and Galatians churches:

"Surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with His death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life. . . . Our old being has been put to death with Christ on His cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. *For when a person dies, he is set free from the power of sin.*" Romans 6:3-7, TEV.

"I have been put to death with Christ on His cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." Galatians 2:19, 20, TEV.

The King James Version describes "our old being" as "our old man." He is a strange figure. Who is he?

Is he Satan? Hardly, because Satan will never consent to be crucified with Christ, nor can God force him to be.

Is the "old man" our "sinful nature"? Paul had another term that he used when he spoke of our "sinful nature." He called it "sinful flesh." Romans 8:3. (Obviously, there is nothing sinful about one's flesh in the sense of physical body! "Sinful flesh" is "carnal mind" or "sinful nature." Verse 7. Compare NKJV with TEV.)

Paul's original idea of our "old man" is more than what our "sinful nature" means. What he is talking

about is not merely what *appears* to be bad. It may be what we would like to think is a good nature, unenlightened as we are concerning our true spiritual condition. Unless we are very careful we may say, "this must be crucified, but that need not be crucified," when in reality both aspects of our nature alike stem from a love of self. After we are proudly certain that the "sinful nature" has been thoroughly crucified today, tomorrow the "old man" may still be peeking at us from behind the curtains of our self-centered façade.

#### **GETTING DOWN TO THE ROOT OF OUR HUMAN PROBLEM**

For example, our "sinful nature" is thought to be revealed in sinful acts, so that the crucifixion of the "old man" is supposed to consist only of mortifying those *acts* of sin. But Jesus taught that it is the lustful thought, not merely the act, which is the sin of adultery; and cherished hatred even before the act of killing is murder. The sinful nature stems from the existence of the self, or ego. It shows itself in a love for sin. David recognized this truth when he said, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Psalm 51:5.

Sin is therefore not only what we *do*, but what we *are*. Sin is rightly understood to be "transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV; the word is *anomia*, which means hatred of the law, thus a hatred of God). But it must be remembered that transgression is much deeper than outward acts. The first sin was the cherishing of the "I" in the heart of Lucifer. The last sin of mankind that must be overcome is the same.

In our search to understand who the “old man” is, we are perplexed by another term: what is the “body of sin” which is destroyed when the “old man” is crucified? Is the “body of sin” the same as the “sinful body”?

We know that the physical cravings of our body are sometimes connected with acts of sin. Does that mean that the bodily cravings or instincts are themselves sin? In order to destroy the “body of sin,” must we continually repress our physical cravings?

The “body of sin” is not the physical body, but it is the root or source of sin, just as the “body” of this book is the text in the chapters aside from the covers. The “old man” is so important that once he is crucified, the “body of sin,” or source and taproot of it, is “destroyed.”

#### **WHO IS THE “OLD MAN” WHO IS CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST?**

Paul himself answers our question as simply as we can answer what  $x$  is in the equation  $x + 2 = 4$ . We simply answer:  $4 - 2 = 2$ ; therefore,  $x = 2$ . In Romans he says the “old man” is crucified with Christ; in Galatians he says that what is crucified with Christ is *I*. Therefore, the “old man” is simply “I”, or *self*. In Today’s English Version it is translated “the sinful self.”

To Paul the truth was as simple and obvious as sunlight: the love of self is the source of all sin; and self cannot be dealt with merely by punishment, beatings, or even denial. It cannot even be ignored. *It must be crucified.*

Forthwith, says Paul, the sin problem is solved, because in dealing with the source, or “body of sin,” we have dealt with its taproot. Pull out the root of a tree, and the tree is dead. “He who has died has been freed from sin.” Romans 6:7. Understood and accepted, the principle of the cross would go far to solve the psychiatric problems in our modern world as well as in the Greek world of Paul.

#### **BUT HOW IS SELF TO BE CRUCIFIED?**

Such an idea would have been worse than foolishness and utter vanity, were we not given an object lesson showing *how* it can be. The cross of Christ is our demonstration. Self can never be crucified by ourselves alone; it must be crucified *with* Christ.

In fact, for self to be crucified *with* Christ is as natural for the heart that believes as it is to say “thank you” to someone who does a gracious deed for us. The way of the cross is not difficult so long as we behold the Lamb of God on His cross. *Seeing* Christ crucified, comprehending what it means, leads to self being crucified with Him. “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” John 12:32.

Satan’s favorite scheme therefore is to envelop the cross of Christ in a hazy mist of confusion so that we cannot understand what happened there. He will then be free to taunt us with the suppose impossibility of our bearing our cross: “What foolishness the idea of the cross is in our modern, competitive world! How dare you crucify self? There’s nothing you can do but surrender to the popular and universal idea of self-love! Pamper

yourself! Get ahead! Walk over others!” So the enemy would bombard us everyday.

If the cross of Christ is hidden, Satan is right; without the clear vision of Christ crucified, there is nothing any of us can do but do but live unto self.

But let Christ’s cross emerge out of the mists, and it becomes the “power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18) to all who appreciate its worth.

#### **THE CLARITY OF THE TRUTH**

No involved, difficulties, or obscure process of doing battle with sin is the method of God. His plan is simplicity itself. In fact, sin itself is as simple a thing as God’s remedy for overcoming it—indulged love of self. Kneeling before the throne of God as the “anointed cherub who covers” (Ezekiel 28:14), Lucifer did not appreciate or love the principles of God’s self-denying character. His heart was lifted up with his own beauty, and his wisdom was corrupted by reason of his brightness. Verse 17. This lack of appreciation for the character of God is what the Bible calls “unbelief.” It is the precondition of sin. From that root in the heart of Lucifer came all the pride and passion of sin as we know it.

The “old man” simply being the cherished “I,” or self, it dies with Christ when the love revealed at the cross is seen for what it is. Christ has come in our flesh, your flesh, my flesh; He meets our problem of life precisely as we find it. Directly from our given situation wherein we find ourselves, His honesty, His purity, His selflessness, His love, His self-surrender, led Him to His cross. He takes the raw materials of our present life and adds the ingredient of love (*agape*). The result: His cross.

Christ crucified is simply *you* crucified if you have that kind of love. If you had love, you could no more evade the cross than could He have evaded it. When you see that He has come in your flesh, that is, has taken your place in your particular situation at this moment, you can see how love is set straight on the collision course of the cross.

As readily as you say “thank you” for a kindness done you, your heart responds with a deep sense of contrition. All your petty self-love stands revealed in its ugliness. As in ultraviolet light, all the motives of your heart suddenly appear different from what you ever saw them before. What you have seen in that light is the real you, the you that is without love. A light shines from the cross that illuminates your soul in the floodlights of heaven, and you see yourself as the beings of the unfallen universe look upon you.

And now it seems that every character-sinew and cell of your being stands out saturated with that sin of self-love. You feel as if you want to hide your face. But as this strange light of love bathes your soul, every little root of pride and self-esteem shrivels up. The sense of guilt that rises in the heart would kill you outright were it not that Christ already bears that guilt on His cross. You are never crucified alone, but you are crucified with Him. You live, but nevertheless the “old man” dies. Your love of self, your pride, your smug satisfaction with yourself, are shattered—well, there is no better word for it than “crucified.”

#### **AND THE TASK OF CONQUERING SIN IS DONE**

No OFFERINGS OF PENANCE, NO EXPENSIVE PILGRIMAGES TO Rome or here or there, no



beating yourself or starving yourself, no wearing haircloth, no grim gritting your teeth to shake off evil habit after evil habit while you tick off a check-list of assumed "progress." "He that has died has been freed from sin." The atonement of Christ does it; and nothing else in the wide universe can do it.

The best that any other so-called cure for the problem of egoism can accomplish is to suppress the symptoms in one place while they break out afresh in another place, to our embarrassment. So long as the root (the "body of sin") is there intact, we can lop off all the branches we like, but the love of self will go on bearing its fruit of passion, anxiety, worry, envy, lust, and even subtler pride.

But now Christ has drawn you by being uplifted before you. You sense the power in that drawing. Consider it well, for it is the power of love. It is stronger than the mightiest brute forces of nature. It is the principle of God's free universe. Look for yourself, realize for yourself. You don't need to take anyone else's word for anything!

Was it for crimes that I have done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! grace unknown!  
And love beyond degree!  
Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut his glories in,  
When Christ, the mighty Maker, died  
For man, the creature's, sin  
Thus might I hide my blushing face,  
While His dear cross appears,  
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,  
And melt mine eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
The debt of love I owe;  
Here, Lord, I give myself away;  
'Tis all that I can do.