

John 12:31-50

### Introduction

There is so much depth and fullness and mystery in the Cross of Christ that is impossible for human lips to express or mind to comprehend. Last time we considered how the Cross was the Son of Man's glory, and the means whereby fruit was borne. Jesus gives further teaching about the Cross in the rest of this chapter, and impresses the urgency of acting on God's revelation, in the light of coming judgment.

### Jesus' revelation about Himself

Firstly Jesus speaks of casting out the prince of this world (John 12:31). "Good Friday" may have seemed at the time more like "bad Friday", as it seemed to mark the triumph of Christ's enemies, the Devil and evil. That awful crucifixion, and the shame of the Son of God. Seemed to be the end of everything. No wonder the disciples forsook Him and fled. But it was not a triumph for the Devil, it was really his defeat.

In being the means of bringing men to God, it meant their deliverance from Satan's power. The seed of woman bruised the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), and the strong man's house was spoiled and therefore he was the first to be bound (Mark 3:27). Satan was defeated at the moment of his apparent triumph. He was a defeated foe, but not fully destroyed. An animal grievously wounded can be most dangerous. Yet the Cross was a triumph for Christ, and Satan's doom was sealed. The hymn by Martin Luther, *A safe stronghold our God is still*, celebrates Satan's defeat.

Secondly Jesus says His death was the means of drawing all men unto Him. **I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself** (John 12:32).  $\upsilon\psi\omicron\omega$ , the Greek word for "lifted up", or "exalted". Same word was used in John 3:14 for the Son of Man being lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Various interpretations of this statement of Christ. None of these interpretations would suggest that all men will be saved. The first interpretation is that the Cross of Christ is the drawing power for all men who hear the Gospel, because it meets their needs as nothing else does. But many resist its power and magnetism. (This view held by C.H.Spurgeon, and Alexander Maclaren). Others say its power is for men of all races. Universal salvation in the sense that men of all races have been saved through it. (This view held by J.C.Ryle). Yet others see that some are drawn to the Cross for salvation and the rest for judgement. A day will come when every knee shall bow before the Lamb who was slain, and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10,11). He who was lifted up on the Cross will yet sit on the throne of glory, and before Him all nations will be gathered. Friends and foes will all be drawn, and appear before His judgement seat.

There are elements of truth in all three interpretations. Take the second, for example. The power of the Cross to attract men of all races. Since Pentecost, God's family has not been confined to the Jews, but increasingly to all races under the sun. Wherever Christ crucified has been preached, men have been drawn to Him as iron filings to a magnet, in every part of the world.

What is it in the death (not the life) of Christ that is so magnetic? It draws, because it is the answer to our major problem – our sin, guilt, rebellion, tyranny and eternal punishment. Man-made remedies are unable to cleanse or give assurance. Nowhere else is found peace of conscience or rest of heart. There is attractiveness in love. Why should the Son of God love me and give Himself for me? There is attractiveness in the change which the Cross works in men. The proud become humble. The immoral become chaste. The dishonest become straight. No apology for preaching the Cross as the answer to the world's ills.

Moravian missionaries to the Greenlanders were full of zeal and self-denial. They did not preach Christ at first, but started with the fact of God, His attributes and works. They made no impression for years. Then one day, the story of the Cross was read to the Greenlanders, and on hearing “whosoever believeth”, they asked for it to be read again. Did Christ die for them, they asked. The natives clapped their hands. “Why did you not tell us that before?”. The change in their response to the Gospel from that point onwards was rapid.

Has the Cross drawn us to Christ? **To myself**, says Jesus, not to the church, or to certain ideas, but the Christ Himself. This is our confidence in preaching Christ crucified. It must achieve results. Some will be drawn. We have the confidence that we preach a message which will affect men for good as nothing else can.

#### Urgency of coming to the light

Christ goes on to explain that He is the light of the world. By His death He brings men to God. He banishes darkness of sin, despair, lostness, fear and uncertainties. Men have to respond. Firstly they have to believe in the light, put their confidence and trust in the light, and lean their whole weight on Him. **Put your trust in the light while you have it** (John 12:36). Then they have to go on to walk in the light. **Walk while you have the light** (John 12:35). Henceforth the whole of life is to be lived in His light. They must progress in Christ Jesus. Inward faith, and outward walk. The effect when we open the shutters and lift up the blinds – divine light floods into our souls.

Believing and walking in the light, we become children of light, i.e. when Christ is Saviour and Lord. But there is urgency here. The light will only shine for a period. It is here only for a little while. Must seize opportunities while they are here. Time is limited. The sun will soon set. The decision to trust life and everything in it to Christ as Master and Lord and Saviour must be made in time.

In life, all things must be done in time or not at all. There is some work which we can only do while we have the physical strength to do it. Some study can only be carried out while the mind is keen and the memory is retentive enough. Things have to be done at the right time, else time has gone forever. As years go by, we are less likely to respond to the Gospel. The more a man gets fixed in his ways, the harder it is to change, and unlearn, and relearn, and adapt to a new lifestyle.

In Christ, supreme blessedness is offered to men. In one sense it is never too late to grasp it. Yet on the other hand it must be grasped in time. Limited time, uncertainties

of life, fact of death, possibility of Christ's return within our lifetime – must grasp the opportunity while it is still day. Decisions in this life have eternal consequences.

Importance, urgency and need to act on the Gospel is vital to realize. The door of salvation will not always be open. The day is coming when the last opportunity will have come and gone.

### Certainty of judgement

Christ accepts that there will be some who will not believe. He says He is not going to judge them now, because His purpose on earth at that time was not to judge the world but to save. **I did not come to judge the world but to save it** (John 12:47). (Hard to fit in with particular redemption). Primary purpose of His coming is salvation. Yet for the rejecters and those who do not receive Christ's words, there is judgement. Judgement will take place at the last day. The grounds on which judgement is made is on Christ's words, i.e. invitations and offers. **There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day** (John 12:48).

The last day is coming. The world will not always go on as it does now. All will come to an end at last. The world had a beginning and will have an end. Business, trade, etc and all normal life will cease. Men have reckoning days, and God at last will have His. The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and the living will be changed. Everyone has to go before His judgement seat. Books are going to be opened and evidence brought forth. Our true character will be known. There will be no concealing, evasion or false colouring. All to give account of selves to God. The result is eternal blessedness or eternal woe and loss.

The touchstone is Christ, His words, and His sacrifice. This, together with our response, the reality of which will be seen in our lives. This is a fact to be reckoned with. It cannot be evaded, toned down or explained away. Christ's words are God's words. **The Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it... Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say** (John 12:49,50).

The more we know, and the greater our understanding, the more serious our responsibility. Take this fact seriously. Cannot remain indifferent to the claims of Christ or be casual about the Christian life. Cannot trust Christ too earnestly or serve Him too whole-heartedly. We can never do too much for Him.

### Conclusion

We are in a bog. He stands on firm ground and puts out His hand. If we clutch it, we will be able to say with the Psalmist **He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand** (Psalm 40:2).