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THE NATURE AND INTENSITY OF CHRIST'S AGONY AND SUFFERING (2) SPIRITUAL PRESSURES AND AFFLICTIONS

The Cross – glorious triumph and accomplishment and
supreme manifestation of moral and spiritual strength and quality of life
– the nature and intensity of Christ's agony and suffering
– spiritual pressures and afflictions

A Review

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ and the circumstances surrounding His death raise many important issues that can speak to us in a powerful way and with wide-ranging implications for our personal lives.

We have considered in the previous two messages that what seems a pathetic picture of failure, defeat, weakness and helplessness is in reality the most beautiful picture of glorious triumph and accomplishment. The Cross supremely manifests the moral and spiritual strength and quality of life of the Lord Jesus. It shows His steadfastness and unwavering perseverance in the path of truth, His obedience to the will of God the Father, and His love for fallen mankind.

I mentioned in the previous message that we will be reflecting on three points to help us appreciate more clearly and deeply how the Cross is the supreme manifestation of moral and spiritual strength and quality of life of the Lord Jesus, and the nature of the triumph and what has been accomplished. The three points are:

1. That the Lord Jesus went to the Cross voluntarily, in the path of truth and in obedience to God the Father.
2. The nature and intensity of the agony and suffering.
3. The significance of what was accomplished at the Cross.

In that message, we concentrated on the first two points. We spent much time examining the nature and intensity of Christ's agony and suffering on the cross. In relation to this, we considered the first three of four sub-points:

- a. The physical pain and agony of crucifixion.
- b. The humiliation of the sinless Son of God.
- c. The Lord Jesus bearing our sins and the punishment due to us.

We have also considered how, when the Lord Jesus bore the sins of mankind, He cried out in great agony and anguish, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

and how there was a disruption to the eternal, deep oneness and fellowship between God the Father and God the Son.

In this message, I shall consider with you the fourth sub-point (2d) which relates to the *spiritual pressures and afflictions* that came upon the Lord Jesus from Satan and the powers of darkness during this period.

Although it is not feasible for us to fully grasp this subject, we can observe and learn something about the reality that exists. The Lord desires us to understand these things and it is therefore not an exercise in futility. Remember the illustrations I used in the last message about a man who tries to fly and about one who looks at the universe through the telescope. The second analogy is applicable to this area that we are now considering.

Bruising of the Heel

We will begin with a passage in Genesis 3 that has been generally recognised as a prophecy regarding what took place at the Cross. The context of this passage is that of the time immediately after the Fall of man. God was pronouncing judgement. Having addressed Adam first and then his wife, Eve, God was now addressing the serpent.

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.

God said that the serpent "shall bruise him (the Lord Jesus) on the heel." "Bruising" communicates the idea that it was not just some pressures coming upon the Lord Jesus, but that He was hurt or injured.

Sometimes we may read verses like this without much further thought. But we should ask ourselves this question: Here the Scriptures talks about Satan bruising the Lord Jesus on the heel; but how could it be possible for the evil one to bruise the Lord Jesus? After all, isn't the Lord Jesus the Son of God and the evil one only a creature with limited power? So how could it be possible for him to succeed in bruising the heel of the Lord Jesus who is the all-powerful Creator?

The Scriptures tells us that God created all things through the Lord Jesus. In the Gospel of John, we read:

John 1:3

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being

All creation, and that would include Satan and the powers of darkness, have come into being through the Lord Jesus, although when first created, Satan and the powers of darkness were not evil beings. They later fell as a consequence of their rebellion against God. As a creature, how could Satan wound and bruise the heel of the all-powerful Creator?

In the temptation scene recorded in Matthew 4, we see that Satan tried very hard to hinder, oppose and destroy the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and if he could, to even destroy Him. But in that account, there is not a hint that the evil one was able to hurt the Lord Jesus. In fact, at the end of the temptation, Satan departed when the Lord Jesus commanded him to. Yes, he did try to tempt the Lord Jesus, but he never got anywhere near hurting or bruising Him. Yet in Genesis 3:15, we are told that Satan would bruise the Lord Jesus on the heel. How could this be so?

Why Satan Could Bruise the Lord Jesus

The likely explanation is that on the cross, the Lord Jesus was bearing the sins of mankind and the punishment due to us. Because of this, Satan and the powers of darkness had relative freedom to afflict, torment and attack the Son of God in a way that they otherwise would not have been able to.

As was mentioned earlier, the context of Genesis 3:15 is that of the Fall of man and God pronouncing judgement. At the same time, there is in this verse the prophecy of God's solution to man's plight. The Lord Jesus bore our sins to accomplish what was needful for man's salvation; He suffered on our behalf. And in that context, Satan was able to bruise Him on the heel. Bear in mind the testimony of the Lord Jesus in John 14:30.

John 14:30

"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me."

The ruler of the world is all the time in this world. But the Lord Jesus said, "The ruler of the world is coming." Why did He say that? As I see it, the implication here is that Satan was going to manifest himself and work in that situation in a way that is not usual. He was going to come in a powerful way.

But the Lord Jesus also said, "Satan has nothing in Me." The meaning is that in the being of the Lord Jesus, there is no sin, no guilt, no ground for the evil one to operate or to have that kind of freedom to afflict Him.

We know that sin gives ground for the evil one to operate. When we sin, the evil one has greater freedom to afflict us, attack us, hurt us and harm us in a way that he would not have been able to had we not given ground. It does not mean, however, that when we do not give ground, the evil one cannot attack us or cannot cause pressure to come upon us, but the nature of the attack and its effect on us would be different.

Even though Satan had nothing in the Lord Jesus, on the Cross, when the Lord Jesus was bearing the sins of the world and the punishment due to us, Satan had relative freedom to afflict, torment and attack Him, and he actually succeeded in what the Scriptures describes as "bruising Him on the heel."

The spiritual pressures and onslaught by Satan and the powers of darkness would have been very severe. They would have attacked and afflicted the Lord Jesus all they could under the circumstances, and in a highly concentrated form. Satan and the powers of darkness would very much desire to destroy the Lord Jesus. They hated Him. It was an absolute contrast: light and darkness, good and evil. And Satan and the powers of darkness concentrated their attacks on the Lord Jesus when they saw that they had this window of opportunity to do so.

Anguished Cry of the Lord Jesus

The severity of the afflictions and attacks by the forces of darkness could well have a bearing on the loud cry of anguish of the Lord Jesus: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). In His hour of intense suffering, when the Lord Jesus would most appreciate the fellowship and support of God the Father, it was not available because the Lord Jesus was then bearing our sins and the punishment due to us.

Let us take note of the verse preceding the cry of anguish.

Mark 15:33

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.

This was a unique occurrence. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there a record of a similar event taking place. Darkness fell over the whole land, from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. This is likely to be the period of time when Satan and the powers of darkness had much freedom to afflict and attack the Lord Jesus, and they did so with great intensity and severity.

It was an unnatural darkness. In the NASB margin of verse 33, it is mentioned that the sixth hour is noon and the ninth hour is 3 p.m. That is normally the time when it should be the brightest. The three hours of unnatural darkness is likely to have spiritual significance in the spiritual realm – much freedom as well as intensity of

Satanic and demonic activity. It is also likely that such an occurrence in the spiritual realm is unique. As far as I am aware, this is the only occasion in the whole history of mankind when Satan and the powers of darkness attacked with such intensity and concentration on a single person. Generally, the activities of Satan and the powers of darkness are spread out all over rather than concentrated on one person. But, on this occasion, it was a concentrated attack on the Lord Jesus as He bore our sins on the Cross.

Verse 34 also tells us that it was at the ninth hour that the Lord Jesus uttered the loud cry of anguish, which means that it took place after the Lord Jesus had endured and suffered much.

Our Own Experiences Compared

Some of us may have experienced very severe attacks and afflictions by the evil one and the powers of darkness. It can be extremely pressurising, very overwhelming, and almost unbearable. We may also have heard or read about such agonising experiences in the lives of others vividly described to us. Such experiences can help us understand what the powers of darkness can do when they afflict a person. They can, in a limited way, give us a glimpse of how Satan and the powers of darkness attacked and afflicted the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we experience such times, queries, doubts and confusion may assail us. We may wonder why the God of love would allow us to go through such sufferings. During such times, it is helpful to bear in mind that however severe the afflictions and pressures may be, they are relatively mild and insignificant compared with what the Lord Jesus went through. It can also be an encouragement to us to recognise that in such a context, though difficult, it is feasible for us to continue to trust God, go through such situations well, and emerge triumphant, just as the Lord Jesus did - triumphant through it all. The Lord willing, we will be considering how the Cross lays the foundational basis for us to overcome the evil one in subsequent messages (AR202-217).

However, where we are concerned, there could be other factors like sin and failure in our lives, and wrong understanding and misconceptions, for which we need to take steps to resolve. In other words, during such times, it is not just a matter of trusting God and going through it, but we also need to sort out our lives. However, for the Lord Jesus, it is different. He is the sinless One. He had to suffer in that way because He was bearing our sins and the punishment due to us.

"This hour and the power of darkness are yours"

In Luke 22:53, we see indications that prior to those three hours of unusual darkness and intense spiritual attacks on the Lord Jesus, Satan and the powers of darkness

were already more actively at work compared to other times generally. The context of this verse is that of the Lord Jesus being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, after having spent the night agonising in prayer. When He was arrested, He said, "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Luke 22:53).

This phrase "this hour and the power of darkness are yours" suggests that not only were the powers of darkness more active than generally, they also had relatively greater freedom to manifest their evil powers. We see glimpses of this in the disciples of the Lord Jesus failing to keep awake in the garden of Gethsemane. It is very likely that all of them failed to keep watch and pray though the Lord Jesus had instructed them to because they were under significant spiritual pressures from the powers of darkness. This issue has been considered in greater detail in the earlier message AR003.

Seeing the Invisible Realm

While the Lord Jesus hung on the cross, the onlookers were probably only able to understand what they could see with their physical eyes. But unknown to them, very significant events were taking place in the spiritual realm that the physical eyes could not see. The forces of darkness led by Satan were attacking and afflicting the Lord Jesus all they could. They bruised the heel of the Lord Jesus. But there is also another side to it as Genesis 3:15 reveals: Satan himself was being bruised (NASB margin: "crushed") on the head.

The spiritual realm is very real; it has a bearing on our lives all the time. For those who desire to honour and serve the Lord, there is a need to be more conscious of the spiritual realm. Let us not live our lives merely on the basis of what we can see with our physical eyes. We need to bear in mind and learn to discern what is happening in the spiritual realm as part of our total consideration of how to respond to situations.

It is also important to recognise that we can affect what takes place in the spiritual realm, for example, by how we pray and how we take our stand to reject the influences and the works of the evil one.

We should not allow ourselves to be discouraged by the appearance of things that seem so disheartening because we fail to take into account what is taking place in the spiritual realm. Even if the outward circumstances seem discouraging, what is taking place in the spiritual realm will be something positive and encouraging if we are faithful to God.

Understanding the Agony in The Garden of Gethsemane

What we have considered so far about the nature and intensity of Christ's agony and suffering will help us to understand and appreciate two Scripture passages that would otherwise have been difficult to appreciate. These two passages, Matthew 26:36-44 and Luke 22:41-44, record the same incident. We will first examine the passage in Matthew.

Matthew 26:36-44

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

38 Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?"

41 "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

43 Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

44 And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.

Unusual Prayer

The words that the Lord Jesus uttered here are highly unusual. This is very unlike the Lord Jesus. We do not see the Lord Jesus praying to the Father in this way in other contexts. Generally, He would very readily and very gladly move in obedience to the will of the Father, in the direction that He knew would accomplish something positive.

When the Lord said, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death" (v. 38), He reveals to us that what He was about to face at the Cross was something extremely difficult for Him to go through.

In verse 39, the Lord Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." These words do not mean the Lord Jesus did not know or understand what the will of the Father was. He knew that the Cross would accomplish very significant things, and would be crucial and pivotal in the fulfillment of God's purposes. Nor do these words mean that the Lord Jesus was unwilling to go to the Cross. Rather, they communicate the meaning that it was extremely difficult for Him to face the Cross, and that if there were a feasible

alternative to accomplish the intent of the Cross, He would gladly take the alternative path.

The words "if it is possible" also do not mean that the Lord Jesus had no choice but go to the Cross. If the Lord Jesus wanted to avoid the Cross, He could have done so. The Father did not compel Him, but He laid down His life voluntarily. We noted and substantiated this point from the Scriptures in the previous message. The words "if it is possible" have the meaning of "if there is a feasible alternative." But there was no feasible alternative in the mind of God, and so the Lord Jesus submitted Himself to the will of the Father.

Likewise the words "yet not as I will" do not mean that He was unwilling, but that He had no inclination towards it, and that it was not a path that He would have liked to take upon Himself. Although it was not something that the Lord Jesus preferred, yet He was willing to go to the Cross because there was no feasible alternative.

In one sense, we can say that the Cross is so terrible that it is almost as if the Lord Jesus shrank from the very thought of going through it. What is it about the Cross that can affect the Son of God in this way? Difficulties, trials and pains of all kinds that mankind experiences – these things cannot possibly result in the Lord Jesus uttering these words. Those words help us to understand that the Cross must have been an extremely difficult, painful and agonising experience. The intensity of the agony must have been of an indescribable magnitude that the human mind cannot fully comprehend.

And notice further the words in verse 42, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." He was praying the same thing as He had prayed earlier; He agonised over the same issue. If He need not go to the Cross, He would rather not go through it. But if the Cross was necessary and it was, then He was prepared for it even though it was extremely difficult – "Your will be done." Verse 44 tells us He "prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more." All these bring home to us the point that the Lord Jesus knew and anticipated the terrible agony that awaited Him on the Cross.

The Disciples Sleeping

Earlier in the night, the Lord Jesus found His disciples sleeping while He agonised in prayer. He told the disciples, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?" (v. 40). It was a very important time for the Lord Jesus. He wished that the disciples were able to be with Him and support Him during this time, but they were not. Perhaps there is a tone of sadness and disappointment in these words. In one sense, the Lord Jesus knew the disciples were not able to cope with the situation. He had told them in advance that they would desert Him. Yet, there was the longing that they could be with Him because it was a very important and difficult time for Him. When the Lord Jesus returned a second time from His private prayer, He again "found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy" (v. 43). The failure of the disciples

to keep watch with Him is likely a result of the intense spiritual pressure and activity of Satan and the powers of darkness that were already in progress and the disciples were unable to cope with it.

Let us now look at the parallel passage in Luke 22, on the same scene in the garden of Gethsemane.

Luke 22:41-44

41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray,

42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.

44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

Again the description here is unusual. The first part is similar to what we have seen in Matthew 26. The Lord Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (v. 42). But the Gospel of Luke provides other details. In verse 44, it is recorded of the Lord Jesus that, "being in agony He was praying very fervently." What was about to take place at the Cross was something extremely difficult and the Lord Jesus was praying very fervently and agonising very deeply, so much so that "His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." The picture that comes through to us is that He was very much affected by what was about to take place. It was something very significant and He was exercising Himself very intensely in prayer, struggling in His spirit over the matter.

Verse 43 mentions that "an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him." At this point in time, He still received help from angels, but there is no indication of angels strengthening Him when He was on the cross. Why is this so? Isn't it far more difficult on the cross than here in the garden of Gethsemane? The likely explanation is that on the cross, the Lord Jesus was bearing the sins of mankind and the punishment due to us and therefore He had to bear it all by Himself.

What we have considered in Matthew 26 and Luke 22 helps us to appreciate the fact that the Son of God had to endure suffering and agony so intense that words cannot adequately express nor the human mind properly comprehend. From time to time we hear people use these words: "Words cannot adequately express how I feel or mind cannot properly comprehend what I am going through." Often these words are used loosely. But they can be aptly applied to what the Lord Jesus went through at the Cross. It was indeed agony of indescribable magnitude. It was so abhorrent, terrible, difficult and unbearable that even the Lord Jesus wanted to avoid it if there were a better alternative. But since there was none in the mind of God, the Lord Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). He had to go through it in

order to accomplish what God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit intended for the salvation of man.

Further Reflections

Let us pause and reflect on a few significant points relating to what we have considered, in particular the fact that the Lord Jesus did not sin yet He bore our sins and the punishment due to us.

Issue of Justice

One issue that at times disturbs people is the issue of justice. To some, the idea of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins and suffering punishment due to us is something rather incongruous and unacceptable. How can God be a God of justice and yet inflict punishment on someone innocent? How can someone innocent bear the punishment due to others who are guilty? This strikes at the issue of justice. Even professing Christians have made remarks like these.

In the previous message, we looked at some portions of the Scriptures to establish the point that the Lord Jesus went to the Cross voluntarily. It has to be voluntary. If it were imposed upon Him, then it would be unjust. It would be unjust to compel someone to bear the sins and punishment due to others. But this was something the Lord Jesus voluntarily went through on our behalf. He laid down His life for us. Because the Lord Jesus voluntarily bore the punishment due to us, there was no injustice done to Him and the issue of justice being violated does not arise.

The Sinless Son of God – the Only Substitute

The other point is that what the Lord Jesus went through is something truly unique. There is no other person in the whole history of mankind who has undergone experiences such as this or ever will. He alone can be our Saviour. None other is qualified to be the sin-bearer. I can see two reasons for this:

1. Because the Lord Jesus is sinless, He could die for our sins. A sinful man can only die for his own sins, not for the sins of others. But the Lord Jesus Christ, being the sinless God-man, could die for the sins of mankind.
2. Because Christ is divine, He was able to shoulder the whole weight of the sins of mankind, the punishment due to all mankind for all their sins, and all the afflictions and attacks from Satan and the powers of darkness as He bore our sins. A mere human being would not be able to shoulder it all.

We can therefore proclaim and bear witness to the truth of the gospel with full conviction – that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). There is no other way. Like the apostle Peter, we can testify to the fact that

"there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The Participation of the Holy Spirit

We have noted in the previous message that God the Father was fully involved with God the Son in the event of the Cross - "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself"; "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." For a more complete statement on this subject, it is helpful to take note that God the Holy Spirit was also fully involved. This we can infer from our recognition of the unity of the Triune God. Hebrews 9:14 explicitly indicates the involvement of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 9:14

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

This verse is clearly a reference to the Cross. While the Lord Jesus offered Himself without blemish to God on the Cross, this verse tells us that it was "through the eternal Spirit." This is a clear indication that the Holy Spirit was also involved in the death of Christ. God the Father so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son; the Lord Jesus willingly laid down His life for us. But let us not forget that the Holy Spirit was also involved in the fulfilment of God's purposes, including the salvation of man.

We also noted in the previous message that God the Father endured the agony of the Cross together with the Son and would have agonised and suffered as Christ the Son agonised and suffered - and the reasons for coming to this conclusion. For the same reasons, we can conclude that God the Holy Spirit would also have agonised and suffered as Christ the Son agonised and suffered.

In other words, the Triune God was fully involved in the event of the Cross - the plan of salvation, its execution and the agony of the Cross.

However, though the Triune God is fully involved in our salvation, let us bear in mind that it was God the Son, and not God the Father, who died on the Cross on our behalf. So in our prayers, let us not be mixed up. If, while praying to God the Father, we inadvertently thank Him for dying on the cross for us, that would not be correct.

Selfless Concern for Others

Now I want to give further evidence on how the Lord Jesus, although appearing to be a weak and helpless victim, and dying a shameful death, in reality went through the

event of the Cross with true dignity, meekness and presence of mind. These are part of the supreme manifestation of moral and spiritual strength and stature.

I wish to bring out three instances where we see these qualities of the Lord Jesus being manifested. These three instances show how the Lord Jesus, while dying on the cross and enduring the tremendous agony, actively cared for others and attended to their needs. As we reflect on them, our appreciation of the qualities of the Lord Jesus will be enhanced.

This is something important for us to take note of as we seek to follow His example. To be able to do as the Lord Jesus did requires true moral and spiritual strength and stature. It also requires presence of mind and a heart of deep love and concern for others as opposed to self-centredness and preoccupation with our own pains and struggles.

Praying for Those Responsible for His Death

Luke 23:33, 34

33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.

34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

The Lord Jesus, after being abused and scourged, and while hanging on the cross, prayed that the Father would forgive those responsible for His death.

Verse 33 tells us that they crucified Him. Verse 34 follows with a "but" to highlight the striking attitude of the Lord Jesus towards His persecutors. Instead of having a retaliatory spirit or becoming angry and resentful, He prayed with concern for those who had done Him terrible wrong, saying, "Father, forgive them..." These were not empty words; they carried weight and meaning, and they flowed forth from a heart of concern for the welfare of those who were tormenting, humiliating and crucifying Him. Isn't this very unusual? This is not the way people would normally respond.

Making Provision for His Earthly Mother

John 19:26, 27

26 When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

While hanging on the cross, the Lord Jesus not only prayed for His persecutors, He even made provision for His earthly mother. He still had room in His heart and mind to attend to the needs of His earthly mother. He entrusted His earthly mother into the care of "the disciple whom He loved." Although His mother's needs were

important, it could not have been more important than what the Lord Jesus was going through on the cross. In fact, they were relatively insignificant. Yet, in the midst of all His suffering and pain, the Lord Jesus had the presence of mind, the energy and the heart to attend to the needs of His earthly mother.

Assuring the Criminal on the Cross

In our third example, we see the Lord Jesus assuring the dying robber who was being crucified beside Him of a place with Him in paradise. This is recorded in Luke 23. Of the two criminals who were hung one on each side of the Lord Jesus, one hurled abuse at Him while the other rebuked the offensive one, saying, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" (v. 40). The second robber had recognition of his own sins for he said, "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (v. 41). He then expressed words of faith in the Lord Jesus.

Luke 23:42

And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

The picture presented in Luke 23 is indeed very remarkable. In the records of the Scriptures on the death of the Lord Jesus, there is no indication of anyone else who could see beyond the more obvious and visible in the way that this robber was able to see. He was a robber, but he was able to see beyond the seemingly helpless, lonely and defeated figure of the Lord Jesus. Here he was, talking about the Lord Jesus and His kingdom! He said to the Lord Jesus, "Remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" Somehow, this robber had the spiritual insight to recognise that the death of the Lord Jesus was not just an ordinary death. He could see that the Lord Jesus has an abiding kingdom. This robber could not have understood it on his own; it required revelation from God. But the revelation from God would also have been in response to the robber's relatively positive attitude at this point of time.

What this robber had said is all the more remarkable when we consider that many of those at the scene of the cross, the onlookers and even the disciples, saw the Lord Jesus as a disappointment. But here was this dying robber expressing with eyes of faith his trust in the Lord Jesus. This robber could see beyond the death of the Lord Jesus, knowing that His death is not the end, but that He would come again in His kingdom. To that heart of faith, the Lord Jesus responded with warm words of assurance:

Luke 23:43

And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Examining Ourselves

As we reflect on the Lord Jesus praying for the forgiveness of those who had wronged Him and who were responsible for His death, making provision for His mother, and assuring the dying robber, we must keep in mind that all these took place while the Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross, dying an extremely agonising death. It is beyond doubt that to be able to respond in the way the Lord Jesus did would require great moral and spiritual strength as well as compassion and presence of mind. What we see is indeed a manifestation of great moral and spiritual strength and stature of the Lord Jesus. It is very contrary to what the Lord Jesus appeared to be – weak and helpless, like a lamb led to the slaughter.

Let us ponder on this issue in relation to our own lives. In the midst of our relatively mild pains and difficulties, are we able to maintain our composure and presence of mind to attend to important matters and to be considerate toward others and mindful of their needs? Or are we so preoccupied with our own difficulties, struggles and pains that we have no room left in our hearts and in our minds to be concerned about the needs and struggles of others? During times of pain and difficulties, are we oblivious to many things that we ought to pay attention to? This is an important issue for us to take time to reflect over.

An Attainable Life

Let us also take note that it is feasible for us to attend to what the Lord desires of us. It is feasible, whatever our circumstances, if we learn to do so trusting in God and with reliance on His grace. Granted, there may be times when it is not appropriate for us, in our own struggles and difficulties, to attend to certain things; to do so would then not be walking in God's will. However, we need to prayerfully consider what the Lord requires of us and not simply say, "It is too difficult. I have too many things of my own to attend to. I already have struggles and pains of my own." No, in the midst of our struggles and pains, are there still things that we need to pay attention to? If there are, we cannot turn a blind eye to them and excuse ourselves. By the grace of God we can attend to whatever the Lord desires of us and whatever is needful. Failing to do so may, if the issues involved are significant, result in disastrous consequences.

We should fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus, our perfect example, and prayerfully consider His attitude and His conduct. It can be a strong encouragement to us because the Lord Jesus went through far more difficult pains and difficulties. In comparison with His, ours pale in significance. And yet, as we have seen, the Lord Jesus still had space in His heart and mind, to attend to the needs of others with love and compassion.

Why did God the Father send His only begotten Son to die such a death? Why was the Son of God willing to die on the cross? To answer these questions, we have to

consider the third major point, which relates to *the significance of the Cross* and what it accomplishes. The Lord willing, in subsequent messages, we will ponder on this vast subject, which can further help us appreciate the meaning of what took place at the Cross.

Let us ponder over what ought to be our response to the Lord and the way we ought to live our lives. May our consideration of this subject draw forth from us a deeper, more consistent love for the Lord. May it have a sobering effect on our lives because the issues of life are significant and our salvation cost God very dearly.

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