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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CROSS

Reconciliation with God
The New Covenant

Introduction

At the beginning of the second message on the Reflections on the Death of Christ, I mentioned that we would be pondering over three key points to help us appreciate the Cross as the supreme manifestation of moral and spiritual strength and quality of life of the Lord Jesus and the nature of the triumph and accomplishments of the Cross. 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 that the Lord Jesus went through at the Cross.
3. The significance of what was accomplished at the Cross and the implications for mankind and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

We have considered the first two points in the second and the third messages (AR174 and AR175). In this message, we will begin our consideration of the third point – *the significance of the Cross*.

As we reflect on the suffering of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, we may wonder: 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 if it was so terrible?

This sentiment is understandable. Yet, the more we understand how terrible the Cross is, the more we can appreciate its accomplishments because the terribleness of what took place on the Cross is more than matched by its accomplishments, which are marvellous and glorious beyond description.

Was it not for this reason that the apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24 that Christ is the "power of God and the wisdom of God," even though the crucified Christ was "to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness"?

The positive meaning and significance of the Cross are so marvellous and far reaching that in spite of the intense suffering and agony it entailed, it is the will of God (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and also an expression of His love and wisdom.

Sadly, though believers generally recognise the Cross as central to the Christian faith, most have only a superficial understanding, insight and appreciation of it. When they contemplate Christ's sufferings on the Cross, they tend to concentrate on the physical sufferings of the Lord. There may be some vague notions that He bore our sins, but there isn't sufficient insight into the intensity, magnitude and the meaning of the suffering involved. Likewise, there is generally a grave lack of true appreciation of what was accomplished at the Cross.

How much we appreciate what the Lord went through at the Cross on our behalf and what the Cross has accomplished and the implications involved can have a significant bearing on our response to Him, our gratitude to Him and on our motivation to live for Him and experience what He intends for us. Let us therefore prayerfully look to the Lord for deeper insight into these issues and follow through with a deep response to the Lord and what He intends for us.

The Cross – God's Strategy for the Fulfilment of His Purposes

In a nutshell, we can say that the Cross is at the heart of God's strategy for the fulfilment of His purposes. It is the basis for the solution to the fundamental problems of man and it also opens the way for man to rise up to the fullest potential of moral and spiritual development. This is God's main concern for man at the personal level. I say "opens the way" because not everyone will benefit from it and if they do, it is not to the same degree.

The way we have developed in moral and spiritual stature would have a direct bearing on our relationship with God and other people and the depth of our fellowship with Him and with the brethren.

Moral and spiritual stature would also enable us to participate meaningfully and effectively in the fulfilment of God's plan and purposes. And God does have a significant role for man in the outworking and fulfilment of His plan and purposes.

All these are major issues:

- the development of each individual to the highest potential
- the depth of quality of fellowship between God and man and between man and man
- our participation in God's plan and purposes

What took place at the Cross opens up the way for positive development in all these directions. Apart from the Cross, none of them would be feasible.

The Cross – Not the End of the Story

Another preliminary aspect to note is that the Cross is not the end of the story. If it were so, as the apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15, "Our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (v. 14). Not only that, Paul also says, "Your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (v. 17), and we will not have a living Saviour.

Beyond Christ's death on the Cross is His resurrection, ascension and exaltation, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at Philippians 2:8-10:

Philippians 2:8-10

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Verse 8 tells us that Christ humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. But it did not end there. Notice the words in verse 9, "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him." Because the Lord Jesus was willing to humble Himself and die on the Cross, God the Father highly exalted Him. The exaltation of Christ is linked to the Cross. And bound up together with His exaltation is His resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We see this in chapter 2 of Acts.

Acts 2:32, 33

32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

The apostle Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, which was the occasion of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He alluded to Christ's death and resurrection when he said, "This Jesus God raised up again" (v. 32). Then in verse 33, he talked about the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God. But before Christ's exaltation would be His ascension. Next comes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit according to the promise of the Father. One event followed the other and all are inextricably linked to His death, that is, Christ's death → His resurrection, ascension, exaltation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We may view the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as part of the significance of the Cross. We may also view them all including Christ's death as one unit, one event.

We will now go on to consider the significance of what was accomplished at the Cross and their implications. In this message, I will concentrate on the significance and implications under two main headings:

- Reconciliation with God
- The New Covenant

It is needful for us to have a good grasp of these basic truths primarily for ourselves first, and where appropriate, also to draw from our storehouse for sharing with others, including new converts, on the fundamentals of the faith. As we examine these truths, let us pay attention to the supporting scriptural texts so that when we share these truths with others, we may be able to do so with scriptural texts in support.

Reconciliation with God

The first aspect I wish to consider with you concerns man's relationship or lack of relationship with God. The basic problem of fallen man is that he is separated from God because of the issue of sin.

The Scriptures makes it plain that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin in man creates a barrier to his relationship with the holy God. Man is also under the wrath of God and the sentence and condemnation of death because, as the apostle Paul declares in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death."

Because of the issue of sin that has to be dealt with, Christ endured the Cross, bearing our sins and the punishment due to us. We saw this in Isaiah 53:5, 6, 8, 12 in the earlier message AR174, how the Lord Jesus was pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities and how by His scourging we are healed (v. 5); how all of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (v. 6) and how He was cut off from the land of the living and bore the sin of many because of our transgressions, to whom the stroke was due (vs. 8, 12).

We may now be reconciled to God through Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:18, 19

18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,
19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

This passage tells us that through Christ's death, we can now be reconciled to God. God took the initiative to bring us back to Himself. Not only that, He has now

committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 15 of the same chapter makes it clear that the context is about the death of the Lord Jesus for it says, "He died for all ... and rose again on their behalf."

We can be reconciled to God because, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:7, we have been forgiven, having been redeemed by the blood of Christ:

Ephesians 1:7

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.

Note the words "in Him we have redemption through His blood." Our redemption is linked directly to the shedding of the blood of Christ on the Cross. This opens the way for us to be forgiven of our trespasses. And this is something we do not deserve; it is according to the grace of God. Those whose sins are forgiven are no longer under the wrath of God and the sentence and condemnation of death.

1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

The above verses tell us that we can obtain salvation in Christ and thus be free from the wrath of God, no longer having to live in fear of the sentence and condemnation of death. The phrase "who died for us" in verse 10 relates this assurance we can have to Christ's death. It went on to say, "whether we are awake or asleep, we live together with Him". It is clear from the context that the terms "awake" or "asleep" do not refer to being physically awake or sleeping. Instead, they refer to the states of being alive or dead physically. Whichever state we are in, whether physically alive or dead, we may continue living with Him.

Yes, in Christ, there is life even when one is physically dead. The apostle Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55 that death has been swallowed up in victory and that death has lost its sting. Those who trust in God therefore need not be fearful of death. Through the Cross, it is now feasible for us to enter fully into life. Though the Cross speaks of death, the death of Christ, at the same time it is the basis of life for all.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us it is now feasible for us to draw near to God's holy presence through the blood of Christ:

Hebrews 10:19-22

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,
21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

In the Old Testament times, people were able to draw near to God through the blood of bulls and goats because of the anticipation of Christ's death. If Christ did not die, then the blood of bulls and goats would not avail, because "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (v. 4). But we now have confidence to draw near to the holy God through the blood of Christ, having our hearts sprinkled clean (v.19, 22).

To summarise, we can say that the way is now open for all mankind to be reconciled to God at the personal level. As John 3:16 puts it, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

But I want to emphasise that though the way is now open for all, there is a need for a personal response. For us to experience forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God and to be redeemed through the blood of the Lord, there is a need for a personal response of repentance and faith. In Mark 1:15, the Lord Jesus proclaims, "Repent and believe in the gospel." We need to repent and believe in the good news that God has sent His only begotten Son to die on the Cross for us and trust in Him for salvation. Otherwise we will perish.

The New Covenant

I will now go on to a major aspect of the significance of the Cross and that is, through the death of Christ on the Cross and through repentance and faith in Him, believers have entered into *the New Covenant* with God through the blood of Christ.

Let's look at Luke 22:20. This was just prior to the Cross, on the occasion the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's supper.

Luke 22:20

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

The Lord Jesus makes it very clear that the basis of the New Covenant is His blood which was shed on the Cross. In other words, the death of Christ enables us to enter into this New Covenant.

What the Cross Means to God

Often, we see the significance of Christ's death only from man's angle and fail to appreciate it from God's angle. In our plight, we long very much to enter into salvation, to be free from the bondage of sin and from a life of hopelessness and meaninglessness. However, we should also appreciate the Cross from God's angle and be deeply impressed with the fact that it also means very much to God.

The death of Christ opens the way for many things that God can now freely make available to us without compromising His character. He can now freely express His love and grace towards us, and transform us, that we may be conformed to the image of His Son. He can now have deep and eternal fellowship with us. It means very much to God that man should be able to rise up to His calling in such a way. It rejoices His heart when we undergo positive development and transformation in our inner being and are able to participate meaningfully in the outworking and fulfilment of His purposes.

We Ought Not Remain in Spiritual Poverty

So the death of Christ (together with His resurrection, ascension and exaltation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit), opens the way such that it is now feasible for frail, finite, sinful man not only to have their sins forgiven, but also to have fellowship at the deepest level with the holy, almighty God. Beyond that, man can also rise up to the highest level of moral and spiritual stature and participate fully in God's plan and purposes. But I want to emphasise that although it is now feasible for all these to take place, it may not be so in reality. In fact, sad to say, generally we have only tasted a little of what God intends for us. How can we fare better?

To what degree we attain to what God intends for our lives is dependent on two key factors:

- Our depth of understanding and insight into the truth, in particular, what God has done and provided for us through and in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The depth and quality of our response to the truth.

This is the life of faith, living in the truth.

We can say that Christ was willing to go down to the lowest depth of humiliation and suffering so that fallen man who is in bondage and sin can rise up to the highest height of moral and spiritual attainments, meaning and quality of life. If Christ were not willing to go down to such depth, it would not be feasible. And it means much to God that we can rise up to that kind of level of meaning and quality of life, which was God's intention when He created man.

As the apostle Paul puts it, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9). Some may think of this verse as a reference to the

future in eternity. However, though in principle it can extend to all that God has prepared for us in eternity, I see that the meaning of the verse is already in operation for all who have entered into the New Covenant. The apostle Paul is communicating to us the fact that there are very deep and wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love Him. But how much do we know of these things? How much have we entered into them? This is what we will go on to consider.

Coming back to our consideration on the New Covenant with God, there are several aspects I wish to cover with you. Some are accomplished facts the moment we enter into the New Covenant. Others involve vast potentials that lie before us, which we may experience in ever-increasing measure. Though these may be familiar concepts, let us not let their familiarity dilute our appreciation of their meaning and significance.

God's Provisions and Intentions for Us Under the New Covenant

a. Children of God

Through Christ's death on the Cross and through repentance and faith in Him, we acquire a new and very important status as God's children. It does not require any accomplishment or any other thing we need to do to enjoy this status. We read this in the Gospel of John.

John 1:12

But as many as received Him (Christ) to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

The apostle John spoke further in his epistle about how wonderful it is that the almighty God is now our heavenly Father.

1 John 3:1

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.

"See how great a love" - it is indeed a very deep and great manifestation of God's love that frail and sinful people can become children of the great, almighty, holy and perfect God. And as if to reassure us that this is true, the apostle John went on to say "and such we are".

Being a child of God is not an empty title. Together with it are many significant privileges and implications. It immediately communicates to us how God regards and treats us. God is now our heavenly Father and He loves us and cares for us as His children. As children of the almighty God, the sovereign ruler of all creation, we can trust Him in all situations because we know that in His sovereignty, He is watching over us, caring for us, providing for us, loving us and undertaking for us.

b. Born of the Spirit

When we repent and believe in God and in Christ's death on the Cross, we are born again, born of the Spirit and regenerated. When Nicodemus came to see the Lord Jesus one night, the Lord spoke of the need to be "born again".

John 3:3, 4

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

The original text translated as "born again" can also be translated "born from above". Both meanings are possible. As I see it, it is a very beautiful thing that this particular word is used. We are both born again and born from above.

"Born from above" has the meaning of being "born of the Spirit" (v. 6), born of God. The apostle John had earlier in the same gospel mentioned this truth in John 1:13 - "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." As we receive Christ into our lives, we have the right to become children of God (John 1:12). This is because we have been born of God, born of the Spirit, born from above.

But the term "born again" also has the meaning of being born a second time. When Nicodemus replied the Lord Jesus, he said, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

Nicodemus knew that the expression "born again" has to do with the issue of being born a second time. But he was puzzled. How can we be born a second time? Surely it is not possible to enter once again into our mother's womb? And indeed that is not what the Lord Jesus is talking about. Yes, He is speaking of a second birth, but He is not referring to a physical birth, but a spiritual one. It is being born of God, born of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who gives us a new life.

c. Temple of the Holy Spirit

Having been born of the Spirit, our body becomes His temple and the Holy Spirit now dwells in us. We read this in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

1 Corinthians 6:19

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

The verse that follows tells us that we "have been bought with a price" (v. 20), the price of the death of Christ on the Cross. So as we respond to God in repentance and faith, we are born of the Spirit, and the Spirit of God dwells in us, and our body

becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. All these can be traced back to the death of Christ at the Cross - the significance of the Cross and its implications.

The almighty God, the Holy Spirit, now dwells in us to teach, guide, empower, transform, renew and work within us. Ultimately this is what God is concerned about. His concern for us is not limited to helping us go through various situations in life. He wants to transform and renew us from within so that we can grow in moral and spiritual stature and enter into deep fellowship with Him, actively participating in His purposes.

d. Partakers of the divine nature

The apostle Peter tells us that the way is now open for us to become partakers of the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:4

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Isn't it marvellous that we finite human beings, with all our frailties and sinfulness, can become partakers of the divine nature? The Son of God took on our human nature in order to identify with us and to die for us so that we may be able to partake of the divine nature.

The divine nature is related to the character and life of God. With the Spirit of God dwelling in us and working in us, we can now experience the reality of God's character being formed within us and thus we are being conformed to the image of the Son of God. This is God's intention for His children – not merely our trying to imitate the conduct and ways of God, but His character being formed in us, and we then manifesting the character of God in the way we live.

What is the evidence that the Spirit of God is working in us and transforming our lives? It is the increasing reality of the fruit of the Spirit becoming a part of our being – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. It is not merely a fleeting experience nor something superficial but has the stamp of the divine nature and divine reality in it. It is only when we experience the reality of the transforming process and God's character being formed within us that we become more able to maintain the love, joy, peace, patience... and meaning within our hearts even as we go through all kinds of trials. And it is this kind of reality formed within us that is really important and critical to the Lord and for the quality of our life in eternity.

e. Eternal life and the life of God

When we, through repentance and faith, enter into this New Covenant, we also experience and enter into eternal life because we now have the life of God within us.

Sometimes, believers think that eternal life pertains to eternity and since eternity is yet to come, so eternal life is in the future. This is not so. The moment we become God's children, we have eternal life. The apostle John highlights this in 1 John 5:11, 12.

1 John 5:11, 12

11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son

12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

If you have the Son of God, you have eternal life. If you do not have the Son of God, you do not have eternal life. Have you received Christ into your life, in repentance and faith? If He has come into your life, you have the Son of God and you also have eternal life. The apostle John goes on to say:

1 John 5:13

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

The apostle John says, "I write these things... so that you may know..." meaning that God does not want us to remain in ignorance. He wants us to realise that we already have eternal life. It is not something that pertains only to the future. Together with the reality that we are citizens of heaven (the next point), we should therefore live on earth with an eternal perspective and not live like those who are earthbound.

f. Citizens of heaven and a place in God's kingdom

Having being born of the Spirit, we become citizens of heaven. We are in God's kingdom now, even though we are still living in this fallen world.

Philippians 3:20

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

So let us realise that as we live in this world, we have dual citizenship. We are citizens of the country we belong to, but we are also citizens of heaven. And although we have earthly responsibilities in this world, even more important are our responsibilities as citizens of God's kingdom. It is in God's kingdom where our priorities lie, that is, in the kingdom that endures, the kingdom that really matters, the kingdom that will not be shaken.

g. Infinite potential for moral and spiritual development

Sometimes we grow a little and we are so elated. We think, "This is it. I have attained." But realise that the Cross has opened up for us infinite potential for moral and spiritual development of which we have only tasted a little. This is at the heart of God's concern for our lives and we should pay careful attention to it during our time on earth, that is, to seek to learn, grow and attain moral and spiritual stature as much as we can. There are various passages in the Scriptures that speak of this. I will refer to two passages, one in Colossians and the other in Ephesians.

Colossians 1:25-29

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out *the preaching of the word of God*,

26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

In the above context, Paul is talking about his ministry, his struggles, his sufferings on behalf of the church (vs. 24, 29). Let's look at some of the areas he brings up here.

Fully Carrying Out the Word of God

Paul said that God called him to be a minister to "fully carry out *the preaching of the word of God*" (v. 25). The phrase "the preaching of" is not in the original text. So we can say that Paul was called "to fully carry out the word of God". And this, the apostle did by various ways and means, including preaching. The fuller meaning of the phrase "word of God" encompasses all that God desires to communicate to us. At the heart of what God desires to communicate to us is "the mystery" (v. 26), and at the heart of the mystery is Christ (Col. 2:2), and an important aspect of the mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). The Lord willing, this will be considered in detail in a new series of messages on the mystery and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

The Mystery: Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

Paul explains in verse 26 that to "fully carry out the word of God" involves the fulfilment of the mystery that was hidden in ages past, but which God has now revealed to His people. God's intention is for us to know this mystery, at the heart of which is Christ. One major aspect of the fulfilment of God's purposes is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). Christ in us gives great assurance to us of the great

potential within us to rise up to what God desires of our lives - the hope of glory. It gives us hope that we can be changed from selfish, ugly, weak, frail and sinful people into men and women of glory.

Goal of Paul's Ministry

It is towards this end that Paul laboured, proclaiming Christ, admonishing and teaching every man with all wisdom so that he might present every man complete in Christ (v. 28). Have we spent time to consider what it means to be complete in Christ? Though we can never attain to its fullness, yet it is the goal that we should move towards - for our own lives as well as the goal of our labour in relation to the lives of others.

Power for Ministry

Furthermore, Paul says, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (v. 29). He knows that in order to achieve the goal, he must labour according to the power and wisdom of God. Likewise, we too should labour according to God's power.

The Context of Church Life

In Ephesians 4, Paul again dwells on this subject of being "complete in Christ". The word translated "complete" in Colossians 1:28 is translated "mature" man in Ephesians 4:13. Here, Paul is talking about personal growth and development in the context of church life or body life. In verse 8, we see that Christ, after He has ascended, gives various gifts to men. These gifts are for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (vs. 11, 12). But what is the ultimate direction of all these? Verse 13 gives us the answer.

Ephesians 4:13

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

These are very deep things that Paul is talking about: unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man. And what is the direction of this "mature man"? "To the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." And we know Christ is the perfect God. Thus it means that God wants us to move towards a life of perfection and the Cross has opened up this possibility. That is why I mentioned earlier of the infinite potential for moral and spiritual development. Christ in us and we in Him opens the way for us to move in that direction. I will elaborate on this significant phrase "in Christ" in the next message.

h. Fullness of life

The Cross opens up for us life in all its fullness. In contrast to the thief who comes only to steal, kill and destroy, the Lord Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). God's intention is that we live life in all its

richness and fullness and not one that is miserable, poor, deprived. Here we are talking about life in all its richness and fullness in reality. From a worldly perspective, we may appear to be wretched, poor and disadvantaged, but from the perspective of God's kingdom, we need never be so.

Our Response to the New Covenant: Repentance and Faith

We have seen in the above eight points that God has opened up for us many things in the New Covenant that are very important. But what is our part in the New Covenant? We may respond to this question in various ways. But at the heart, it is basically that of *repentance* and *faith*. That is how we enter into the New Covenant. And that is also how we ought to continue in it.

In Mark 1:15, the Lord Jesus preached, "Repent and believe in the gospel." To enter God's kingdom and enjoy all that God has for us in Christ, we need to repent and believe. But the principles of repentance and faith are not only for conversion and entry into God's kingdom; they continue to be relevant as we fulfil our part in the New Covenant.

The Principle of Repentance

To repent is to turn away from our old way of life. Before we came to know the Lord, we lived a life of sin, self-righteousness, self-life, self-desires and worldliness. We have now turned away from that kind of life to God, to walk with and submit to Him, and to live a life of true discipleship.

The principle of repentance has another important aspect, and that is having a repentant spirit. Having a repentant spirit would mean whenever there is wrongdoing or failure, we do not seek to justify ourselves; but coming to the Lord with a humble and contrite spirit, we confess our sins, ask for and receive forgiveness, take whatever corrective measures that are appropriate and carry on from there. We are deeply sorry for the wrong done, but we are not discouraged. A repentant, contrite spirit would mean absence of a spirit of rebellion, pride or self-righteousness.

The Principle of Faith

We need to exercise faith as we fulfil our part in the New Covenant - faith in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Faith in what God has done and provided for us through the Cross and in what God intends for our lives in the New Covenant.

True faith is not just the recognition of truth, or merely having concepts in our mind. It includes a positive response that is appropriate to the truth that we have come to understand. It must first involve insight into the truth. We must pray to God for spiritual insight so that the truth becomes alive to us. The spiritual insight must

become convictions within us and form the basis upon which we can properly exercise true faith and live accordingly. This is the life of faith.

Now if we do not understand the truth, then we exercise our faith in vain because our faith has no proper basis to rest on and act upon. Faith in the truth is crucial. Paul tells us that God has chosen us "for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). So we need to seek the Lord and ask Him to help us know the truth, have insight into the truth, and then on the basis of the truth, exercise our faith, according to the guidance and enabling of the Holy Spirit. And that is our part in the New Covenant.

Conclusion

The Cross is the foundational basis of God's plan of salvation. Salvation in the fullest sense goes beyond conversion and embraces all that God desires for our lives. God is full of redeeming grace towards a fallen world. All of us are lost and God wants to redeem us in His grace. And it is the Cross that opens the way for us, it being the foundational basis for us to enter into and live out the New Covenant – the New Covenant in Christ's blood (1 Cor. 11:25).

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