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THE NATURE AND INTENSITY OF CHRIST'S AGONY AND SUFFERING (1)

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

A Review

In the previous message, we noted that though the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was in reality the climax of the fulfilment of His mission on earth and the climax of a fruitful ministry, and that the most important accomplishments in the spiritual realm were taking place, it might not appear that way at all to the onlookers, not even to the disciples.

As the Lord Jesus hung on the cross, He seemed a rather pathetic picture of failure and defeat at the end of His life and ministry. His followers deserted Him, and like a lamb led to the slaughter, He was abused, mocked, spat on, scourged and finally, crucified on the cross, He died the most painful, humiliating and agonising death.

Justice seemed nowhere in sight as the sinless One was sentenced to death by the Jewish supreme court for testifying to the truth. Likewise, the Roman governor Pilate, succumbing to the clamouring of the Jewish multitude, allowed the Lord Jesus to be crucified even though he knew the Lord Jesus had done nothing deserving of death.

It may appear to be the darkest hour in human history when the Son of God who came to save us was crucified. Not only did it appear to be a triumph of evil at a human level, it also appeared to be the greatest triumph of Satan and the powers of darkness, which seemed to be effective in opposing God's plans and desires, frustrating what He desired to do. Even the whole land was covered with darkness, and the life of the Lord Jesus, the true Light of the world, seemed to have been snuffed out.

Not only that, God the Father appeared to have forsaken the Lord Jesus as He cried out in anguish, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It seemed a cry of desperation, despair, helplessness and hopelessness. He who was supposed to be the coming King, the Messiah, the deliverer of Israel, was dying under the authority of the Roman oppressors. The Saviour of mankind did not seem able to save Himself. Death, evil, sin and darkness seemed to prevail. Truth, light, goodness, love, righteousness and justice seemed absent as He, in whom was life, died on the cross.

What took place at the cross may appear to the bystanders as a dismal picture of defeat and failure, weakness and helplessness. The Lord Jesus was like a lamb led to the slaughter, dying a shameful death, being crucified on the cross with the criminals, a vanquished victim.

But in reality, it is the most beautiful picture of glorious triumph and accomplishment, and it is the supreme manifestation of moral and spiritual strength and quality of life, of steadfastness and unwavering perseverance in the path of truth, of obedience to the will of God the Father and of love for fallen mankind. In reality, the Lord Jesus was clearly not a weak, helpless and vanquished victim.

In this message and the messages that follow, we will seek to understand and appreciate more deeply what took place at the Cross, and as we do so, it will help us see more clearly the striking contrast between appearance and reality in the various aspects.

Acknowledging Our Limitation

As we reflect on this subject, we need to acknowledge that there are several aspects of what took place at the Cross that are not only very significant, but very deep and extremely difficult for us to properly grasp, understand, appreciate and identify with.

It is akin to trying to understand the being of God. It is possible only for us to catch a glimpse, that is, some degree of appreciation of the being of God. Because we are finite beings, we can only attain to a limited appreciation of the total reality of the being of God. The reality consists of much more than we can fathom.

However, our attempt to understand and appreciate more deeply the being of God and what took place at the Cross is not an exercise in futility. It is unlike a man who tries to fly like a bird. He tries to flap his arms like the wings of a bird. No matter how hard he flaps, he can never fly like a bird. To attempt to fly like a bird would be an exercise in futility because man has not been created with the ability to fly.

However, because we are created in the image of God, it is possible for us to understand God to some degree and likewise, appreciate and understand what took place at the Cross. It is not so much like a man trying to fly but rather, it is analogous to trying to appreciate the universe through a telescope. As we look through a telescope, there can be some degree of understanding and appreciation of what is in the universe. But it is not possible for us, through the telescope, to fully appreciate the whole universe. Far from it. The bigger and more advanced telescopes may enable us to see more, but the universe is so vast that the more we see, the more we realise how little we have known and how much more there is to be known.

There are some aspects of understanding the being of God and the Cross that are of this nature - the more we are able to catch a glimpse of it, the more we will realise

that it is extremely difficult for us to properly appreciate all that there is to it - and there are some aspects that are just beyond us. Bearing this in mind, we will now try to appreciate what took place at the Cross.

Three Key Points

To 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, we will reflect on the following three points:

1. That the Lord Jesus went to the Cross *voluntarily, in the path of truth and in obedience to God the Father*. This point helps us appreciate that He was not a helpless victim but that He voluntarily chose to lay down His life - with meaning and purpose.

2. *The nature and intensity of the agony and suffering* that the Lord Jesus went through on the Cross. This area of truth, together with the first point that He voluntarily chose to lay down His life, helps us appreciate the manifestation of strength of character, moral and spiritual strength, and quality of life.

3. *The significance of what was accomplished* at the Cross and the implications for mankind and the fulfilment of God's purposes. This point helps us understand the preceding two points - why the Lord Jesus willingly went through the intense agony and suffering of the Cross. And together, the three key points help us to appreciate more deeply the supreme manifestation of moral and spiritual strength and quality of life of the Lord Jesus.

We will consider the first two points in this and the next message, and the third point will be dwelled on at length in the subsequent messages.

1. The Cross, a Voluntary Choice and in Obedience to God the Father

The Lord Jesus voluntarily laid down His life for us in the path of truth and obedience to God the Father. It is clear from the Scriptures that although evil men crucified Him at the cross, it was not carried out against His will. He was not a victim. He went to the Cross freely and voluntarily, with conviction, steadfastness of purpose and love. It was also in accordance with the will of God the Father. Let us look at what the Lord Jesus says in John 10.

John 10:11

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

John 10:17,18

17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

There are two aspects that are very clearly presented here: firstly, as the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus laid down His life for our sake, an act that was done *deliberately, willingly and with a purpose*. We read this in verse 11, "the good shepherd lays down His life," and again in verse 18, "I lay it down on My own initiative." If He were not agreeable to it, no one would have been able to kill Him. He said, "I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again (v.18).

Secondly, what the Lord Jesus has done is *in line with the will of God the Father* (v.18: "This commandment I received from My Father") and something that the Father appreciates very much (v.17: "For this reason the Father loves Me").

We can also reflect on the verse that we are very familiar with:

John 3:16

"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."

This verse helps us to appreciate that behind the death of Christ is the love of God. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." His love for the world is so strong that He was willing to let His only begotten Son die the agonising death of the Cross. Christ died at the Cross so that, "whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life". This is what motivated God the Father and Christ the Son. The death of Christ on the Cross is not in vain. It is something very important and significant in God's kingdom and for eternity.

Just as God the Father was motivated by love for the people of the world, likewise Christ the Son. The Lord Jesus Himself tells us, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). It is the love of the Lord Jesus that motivated Him to lay down His life for us – and we were not even His friends when He did so. The Scriptures teaches us that even while we were sinners, God's enemies and hostile to God, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Another passage that is helpful for us to look at is 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19.

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.

In particular, take note of these words: "God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (v. 18). Because of our sin, we were alienated from God, separated from Him. To be reconciled to Him, then, is a very significant issue; it is basic and fundamental. Christ suffered for this purpose that we may be reconciled to God. But it is not Christ alone who was involved. Verse 19 tells us "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself". In other words, it was in accordance with the will of God the Father, and God the Father was fully involved in it.

We also noted in the previous message that the death of Christ was in accordance with the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), and that the death of Christ is at the heart of God's plan and critical for the fulfilment of God's purposes. Not only was it voluntary, we can say that the primary purpose of the Son of God in coming to this earth is to die on the Cross. We noted in John 12:27, the Lord Jesus says,

John 12:27

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."

We noted that the Lord Jesus is referring to the Cross when He says "For this purpose I came to this hour". Even though it was extremely difficult, the Lord Jesus did not shrink away from the Cross.

2. The Nature and Intensity of Christ's Agony and Suffering

The second point relates to the nature and intensity of Christ's agony and suffering and what He had to endure on the Cross and the circumstances surrounding it. I shall discuss this under four sub-headings.

- a. The physical pain and agony of crucifixion
- b. Humiliation of the sinless Son of God
- c. Bearing our sins and the punishment due to us
- d. The spiritual pressures and afflictions

Apart from the first, the other three aspects of Christ's suffering are very difficult to grasp and understand. We need to prayerfully look to the Lord to grant us increasing spiritual insight – now and in the days to come. Spiritual insight concerning the nature and intensity of Christ's agony and suffering can help us deepen our appreciation of the Lord Jesus and our love for Him. It can also shake us from a life of complacency and motivate us to be more earnest in our walk with God.

Our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the quality of His life, His strength of character, true dignity, meekness, presence of mind, depth of His love and steadfastness of purpose, will come through more forcefully to us if we appreciate in a deeper way the nature and intensity of Christ's suffering and agony.

a. The Physical Pain and Agony of Crucifixion

When we think of the crucifixion, the first thing that often comes to mind is the *physical pain and agony*. This aspect of Christ's suffering is easier to understand and identify with. We tend to recoil when we think of the Lord Jesus, in excruciating pain, dying a slow death on the cross. Such a form of execution would generally be regarded today as very inhumane and cruel, even barbaric. Hardly any government or legal authority would today sanction execution of a man in this way, and rightly so. Mankind would generally not tolerate this kind of execution even for the most terrible and vicious of criminals deemed deserving of the death penalty. And yet the Lord Jesus Christ, the innocent Lord of glory, died the death of the Cross.

However, it is helpful to note that of the four aspects of agony and suffering the Lord Jesus Christ went through at the Cross, the physical aspect of His suffering is likely to be the least difficult and agonising. The other three aspects are likely to be incomparably more difficult for the Son of God to endure.

When believers think of the agony and suffering of Christ, many tend to be primarily conscious of the physical aspect. For a proper appreciation of the nature and intensity of Christ's agony and suffering, it is essential that we seek to understand the other three aspects.

b. Humiliation of The Sinless Son of God

Let us now go on to the second aspect of Christ's suffering on the Cross. This is an aspect that we do not often think about. It may not even come to some of our minds, while in others, there may be but a faint recognition of its significance.

It has to do with the humiliation of the Lord Jesus, the *sinless Son of God*. He who is the creator of all things, the judge of all the earth, the One who was used to the glory of heaven, the One of absolute purity, was made a public spectacle of gross humiliation and abuse.

In the presence of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court, He was spat upon, blindfolded, beaten with fists and slapped in the face and was then asked to prophesy who was the one who hit Him, since He is the Christ (Mark 14:55, 65 and read together with Matt. 26:67, 68). In the presence of Pilate and the multitude, He was scourged (Mark 15:15). Subsequently, He was dressed up in purple and a crown of thorns was put on Him and then they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (vs. 17, 18), and "they kept beating His head with a reed and spitting on Him, and

kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him... they led Him out to crucify Him" (vs. 19, 20).

And to think that all these things were done to the One the thongs of whose sandals John the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb, had testified that he was not even worthy to untie! He who is the One to whom praise, adoration and worship is due!

Picture a great king, a great emperor or the head of state, the president or the prime minister of a country being subjected to such ill-treatment by unworthy people, the outcasts of society, the "scum of society". And yet, if we think about it, the gap between sinful men and the Son of God is infinitely greater than the gap between the outcasts of society and the most illustrious and well-respected president or prime minister of a country. The latter is a case of sinful people abusing other sinful people. In the case of the Lord Jesus, it is the Lord of glory, the Lord of all creation, the perfect, holy and omnipotent God being abused by sinful people.

Uzzah struck down for irreverence

Let us reflect on some passages in the Scriptures to help us appreciate this point a bit more. Let us turn to 2 Samuel 6:6, 7 to see what happened to Uzzah. The context is that of an attempt by David and his men to transport the ark of God from one place to another.

2 Samuel 6:6, 7

6 But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it.

7 And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.

Uzzah was merely reaching out toward the ark of God to take hold of it. There was no hint of negative intention. On the contrary, his intention seemed to be good, as he wanted to steady the ark. And yet, verse 7 tells us, "the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God".

This passage is not easy to understand. The account may cause uneasiness in some people. They may wonder, as they read this passage, "Why is it that God struck Uzzah dead?" Verse 7 gives the reason. While Uzzah's intention seemed to be good, his conduct was inappropriate and irreverent. A few passages in the Bible will throw further light on this.

In Numbers 4:15, 19 and 20, the Israelites were instructed not to touch the holy objects or even try to see them lest they die. This instruction was meant to communicate to the Israelites the vast chasm between God and sinful men – God is a

God of holiness; He is a God of consuming fire. Sinful people cannot come near to the holy God in a casual way.

The writer to the Hebrews paints a clearer picture of the holiness of God as he dwells on the subject of the Holy of Holies.

Hebrews 9:3, 4

3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,

4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold ...

Hebrews 9:7

but into the second (veil), only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

In the Holy of Holies was the ark, separated by a veil. Only the high priest could enter within the veil, and that only once a year and not without shedding blood. Before the high priest could enter, the issue of sin had to be dealt with first. The careful preparation needed before entering the Holy of Holies is intended to communicate to us the unworthiness of sinful men and that the holy God is unapproachable to sinful men. Hebrews 12: 28, 29 warn us that God is a consuming fire. Even when we serve Him, we have to take care that we do so in a manner acceptable to Him – with reverence and awe.

After the coming of the Lord Jesus, His death, resurrection and ascension, the way has been open for us to enter into God's presence, to come before the throne of grace. Given the ease with which we today can come before the presence of the holy God, we may at times take for granted and not be so conscious of this area of truth that we are considering, that is, the meaning of God as the consuming fire, the holiness of God and what it means for us to approach the presence of God.

In the light of what we have read in the Scriptures of Uzzah who was struck down, of the Israelites who could not touch or even see the holy objects lest they die, of the Holy of Holies and the ark that was separated by a veil, of the high priest who could enter only once a year and that not without shedding blood for sins, of God who is a consuming fire, doesn't it seem incredible that sinful men could abuse the Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory, and that those who did were not struck dead? For all the suffering and agony they had inflicted on the Lord Jesus, they seemed to have gotten away scot-free.

How could God the Father have allowed this to happen to the Lord Jesus, the holy One? How could this take place in the light of Scriptural revelation of the nature of God and what happens when sinful men draw near to God? How could it be possible that they did all these things to the Lord Jesus?

I can think of two reasons to explain how all these things could take place the way they did:

- First, the Lord Jesus allowed it; He chose to endure it. If the Lord Jesus did not allow it, nobody would have been able to spit on Him, beat Him, slap Him, scourge Him or crucify Him or do any of those irreverent and outrageous things to Him or get away with it.
- Second, the Lord was clothed in human flesh; He is the God-man. If He were not clothed with human flesh, this would not have been possible. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ..." (John 1:14). Because He limited Himself in this way, sinful men were able to approach Him and even strike Him, and to do all those terrible things to Him.

Otherwise, sinful men would not have been able to come near, not to talk about man-handling and abusing Him.

Can we fully appreciate and understand what it meant for Him, in all His majesty, power and holiness, absolute purity and sinlessness, to endure such degrading and humiliating treatment by sinful men?

c. Bearing Our Sins and the Punishment Due to Us

The most difficult aspect that the Lord Jesus had to go through and endure, however, is likely to be this third aspect. This is a subject that is extremely difficult for us to even begin to try to understand and identify with. This pertains to His *bearing our sins and the punishment due to us*. Let us turn to a few passages as we reflect on this aspect of reality. The first passage is Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53: 5, 6

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
6 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.

The preceding verse (v. 4) mentions Him being stricken, smitten and afflicted. Here in verses 5 and 6 are two aspects that are helpful for us to take note of, namely, that the Lord Jesus *suffered for our transgressions* and that God had *laid on Him our iniquities*.

Christ Suffered for Our Transgressions

Verse 5 emphasises that it was for our transgressions and iniquities that He was pierced and crushed. He did not suffer for His own failures or sins, because He is sinless. Instead, He suffered on our behalf, for our transgressions. He bore upon Himself the punishment that was due to us. He suffered for our sake, for our well-being. "The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him; and by His scourging we are healed".

Isaiah 53:8

By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

Take note of the expression in verse 8 – He was cut off "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due." This again tells us that what He went through was for our transgression. It is something due to us; we deserve it.

Isaiah 53:12

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

In verse 12, we read, "He poured out Himself to death", highlighting the voluntary aspect. And it is linked to the next phrase "Yet He Himself bore the sin of many". It is clear that He voluntarily delivered Himself to death to bear "the sin of many". In Hebrews 9:28, this issue of the Lord Jesus bearing the "sins of many" is also mentioned.

Hebrews 9:28

so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

When Isaiah and the writer to the Hebrews mention Him *bearing the sins of many*, it does not mean that anyone is excluded. The clear Scriptural teaching is that the Lord Jesus bore the sins of *all mankind* and the punishment due to all. This is made clear in various passages e.g. 1 John 2:1, 2.

1 John 2:1, 2

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

In verse 2, the apostle John clearly says that the Lord Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*, not just of some people. It is on the basis of the reality that Christ has died for the sins of the whole world, that "whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" is feasible (John 3:16). He is the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14, John 4:42).

Let us now look at 2 Corinthians 5:21, a verse that is difficult to understand. This is how the apostle Paul puts it:

2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Many of us are familiar with this verse, but I wonder if we have pondered about it? What does it mean, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"? An aspect of the meaning of this verse is Paul putting in a succinct manner the area of truth that we have been considering that is reflected in various passages in the Scriptures.

In the preceding verses of the passage (vs. 18-20), Paul has been talking about our reconciliation to God through Christ. Here, he now tells us the basis, how we who were under the wrath of God can be reconciled to Him. The Lord Jesus was without sin ("who knew no sin"), but He took our place and bore our sins and the punishment due to us (made "sin on our behalf"), so that we can be made right with God in Him ("become the righteousness of God in Him"). There is more to this profound verse which we will be considering shortly.

Bearing the Full Weight of the Punishment Due to All Mankind for Their Sins

As Christians we are familiar with the truth that Christ bore the punishment due to us. But have we paused to consider the meaning and implications of this truth? We've seen that He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), that is, the Lord Jesus not only bore your sins and mine, but the *full weight of the punishment due to all mankind*, and this includes all the sins of mankind, past, present and future. Can we imagine what the full weight of the sins of the entire world is? What did He have to go through? What did He have to endure? Bear in mind that it was not merely the divinity of the God-man who had to suffer, but also His humanity. As the God-man, there is the human part in Him as well. The whole being of the Lord Jesus Christ, both the divine and the human, had to endure it. It is

very difficult for us to even begin to try to understand and identify with what the Lord Jesus had to go through and endure on our behalf.

He Bore Our Sins on the Cross

Beyond bearing the punishment due to us, the Scriptures also seems to indicate another aspect of the agony that the Lord Jesus went through. We read earlier in Isaiah 53:6 that "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him..." This seems to suggest that the Lord Jesus, who is absolutely pure and holy, somehow *came into contact with sin*, not merely at a distance, but *in His person*. Somehow, sin came upon Him.

Isaiah 53:12 describes it as "He *bore the sins* of many". The writer to the Hebrews likewise uses this phrase "*bear the sins* of many" (Heb. 9:28). The words used seem to indicate going beyond just bearing the punishment due to us but that somehow sin came upon Him.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, the apostle Paul tells us "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf..." This is a rather profound verse and difficult to understand fully. To say that Christ bore the punishment due to us does not seem to fully cover and exhaust the meaning and intent of this verse, though it is possible to interpret "made Him ... to be sin" as a figure of speech. But there seems to be the idea of association with sin; that the Lord Jesus became associated with sin, became identified with sin. This interpretation is consistent with the other verses that we have just read.

In addition, the construction of the verse, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin", seems to indicate a contrast between the first and second part of the verse. "Knew no sin" is contrasted with "to be sin". "Knew no sin" clearly means there is no sin in His life. "To be sin", on the other hand, seems to imply that somehow sin had come into His life. But it is quite clear that Christ was sinless and He remained sinless in Himself. The apostle Paul goes on to say that He was made sin "on our behalf". It was not that He had transgressed and thus was bearing His own sins. Rather, it was our sins that He bore. "On our behalf" also communicates the meaning of "for our sake". As the apostle Paul puts it, "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him". This is the purpose for which the Lord Jesus bore our sins; it is so that we can be forgiven, reconciled and become right with God in Him.

There is a verse in the first epistle of Peter that seems to cover similar ground when Peter wrote that "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross..."

1 Peter 2:24

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

If this interpretation is correct, that the Lord Jesus actually bore our sins, how can we even begin to appreciate what it means? He who is absolutely pure, holy and

righteous allowed sin to come upon Him. It is not just that He allowed sinful men to abuse Him; that was bad enough. But this is different. Here it is the Lord Jesus, to whom sin and evil were absolutely abhorrent, actually bearing the sins of mankind. What does it mean for God to cause "the iniquity of us all to fall on Him", for Him who "knew no sin to be made sin", and that He "bore our sins in His body on the cross"? What precisely was involved is very difficult for us to fathom. But the Lord Jesus had to endure it all.

Heart-rending Cry of the Son

There is yet another aspect of the agony that the Lord Jesus experienced that is extremely difficult for us to fathom and identify with. It is associated with the *heart-rending cry* of our Lord Jesus from the cross. Let's look at how Mark presents it.

Mark 15:34

At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

In the previous message, we made the observation that the cry of anguish of the Lord Jesus may appear to be a cry of desperation, despair, helplessness and hopelessness. Even God the Father did not seem to be present and did not seem to care. Was that why He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" We also raised the question, "How could God the Father forsake His only begotten Son with whom He was well pleased?"

What do these words really mean? Why was there the cry of anguish? Did God the Father forsake and desert His only begotten Son at the time when He most needed fellowship and support? Was not the life and conduct of the Son of God fully pleasing to God the Father?

Contrary to outward appearance, it is clear that the Father's heart was fully in it and He was fully involved with the Son in what was taking place. Not only was He concerned; He was actually present. He cared, His heart was fully in it, He was also fully involved. The Cross was according to God's plan and purposes.

This is made clearer when we read what the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:19, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself". It was not as though God was not present on that occasion and the Lord Jesus had to go through it all by Himself. The phrase "God was in Christ" makes it quite clear that God the Father did not forsake nor desert His only begotten Son in the sense that He didn't care or didn't want to be involved or was not involved. This is clearly not true. God did care, and He cared very much about what was going on and what was happening to His Son.

Wrath and Judgement of God

Why then the cry of anguish of the Son of God? The likely explanation is this: God the Father and God the Son enjoy an eternal, continuous, deep, strong, unbroken bond, oneness and fellowship. But because the Lord Jesus was bearing our sins and the punishment due to us, something unthinkable and unimaginable took place. He came under the *wrath and judgement of God*, resulting in a disruption to the otherwise unbroken bond and oneness.

The Lord Jesus has declared in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one". There is that unbroken unity between the Father and Son. But now at the cross, there was a disruption. It is difficult to use words to describe this. It is as if a person is being torn apart. Bear in mind, we believe and worship only one God. Although there are three Persons - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - there is one Being. The kind of oneness that exists amongst them is something difficult for us to properly appreciate. It is a very deep kind of oneness. And yet it was rent asunder, torn apart.

Bear in mind that this was taking place in the context of all the other aspects of the intense agony and suffering of the Lord Jesus at the Cross which we have been considering including bearing our sins and the punishment due to all mankind, the humiliation of the holy Son of God, the physical aspects of the pain as well as the severe spiritual pressures and afflictions that came upon Him from Satan and the powers of darkness, which the Lord willing, we will be considering in the next message.

It must have been indescribable agony and anguish. This helps us to understand the meaning of that loud cry of anguish. Mark 15:34 tells us, "At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice..." It was not an ordinary cry. It was a *loud cry* of very deep agony and anguish.

Rending of the Father's Heart

As we reflect on the heart rending cry of the Lord Jesus, let us not forget the agony and anguish which God the Father would have experienced because the disruption in the hitherto unbroken oneness and fellowship would have affected both. Yes, only the loud cry of the Lord Jesus was heard and recorded, but the Father's heart would have been equally pained. This should help us appreciate better the love of the Father for us expressed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..."

Because of His deep love for us, the Father endured the agony of the Cross together with the Son. One major aspect of this agony is the disruption of the fellowship between the Father and the Son. But that is not all. There is the other aspect that would encompass all the agony and suffering that the Lord Jesus went through on the cross. What do I mean?

We know that when a person is suffering agonising pain, one who is close to him, who loves him deeply, would also suffer greatly. For example, a mother would also suffer and agonise when she sees her child suffering terribly. This is true for parents, it is also true for loved ones. It is true for all those we love and identify deeply with. We cannot be indifferent. We also experience deep pain and agony with the person. The deeper the love and identification, and the more the person means to us, the greater will be the sharing of the pain. It is not uncommon for parents to feel even more pain and agony than what the child experiences. This is something that we can appreciate to some degree as human beings.

The depth of relationship and depth of love of God the Father for Christ the Son would be incomparably deeper than that of any relationship between human beings; likewise, the depth of identification of God the Father with Christ the Son. God the Father would have agonised and suffered as Christ the Son agonised and suffered.

Our Response

We will conclude, for this message, our reflection on the agony and suffering that the Lord Jesus went through on the cross. There is another aspect (2d), which we shall consider in the next message.

Let us ponder on the kind and the depth of love and compassion of God the Father and God the Son toward fallen mankind and their concern for us in our plight. How deep that love and compassion must be that they were prepared to endure the Cross? How can we really fathom its depth?

Let us also ponder on this, that it was for our sins and because of our sins that the Lord Jesus endured the suffering and agony of the Cross. This should help us recognise the seriousness of sin and what it costs Him. Let us therefore not treat sin lightly, but be deeply impressed with the fact that God paid a very high price to make the way of forgiveness freely available to us.

Let us take time, not just for the moment, but in the days and years to come, to continue to ponder over what took place at the cross and ask the Lord to grant us deeper insight into the meaning and significance of this momentous event, that we may be able to appreciate Him in a deeper way, that it may draw forth from us a deeper sense of worship, a deeper love for Him, a deeper commitment to Him, and greater earnestness to serve Him.

Let us remember that our reflections on the sufferings of Christ at the cross are not primarily meant to draw forth an emotional response. Yes, the emotions may be involved; but primarily, we seek to understand the *truth* of what took place so *that the truth may draw forth from our hearts the appropriate response*, resulting in *convictions* that will abide, grow and deepen with passing time.

There are many other aspects about the Cross and what has been accomplished at the cross that will have a bearing on how we should and can live our lives. The Lord willing, we will ponder on them in the subsequent messages.

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