

TIME SERIES NO.4



AN ABC MONOGRAPH

THE CROSS

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph is No.4 in the present series. It sets out the once-for-all and radicle significance of the cross whilst taking a serious look at historical theories of the cross which are of significance for theological debate but not of the substance of salvation.

Vital prophetic Old Testament and familiar New Testament passages are dealt with and the treatment holds firm to covenant mercy and love in the heart of God(John3.16) as the source of our salvation. Divine justice and mercy meet typically at the brazen altar and the mercy seat under the old order and at the cross in the New Testament.

Paul said ‘For my part I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ. Because of that Cross, I have been crucified in relation to the world, set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate.’(The Message)

**A debtor to mercy alone
Of covenant mercy I sing
Nor fear with His righteousness on
My person and offering to bring.**

**Bob Coffey
Westgate
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1. MERCY

See from His head, His hands. His feet,
 Mercy and love flow mingled down
 Did ere such love and sorrow meet
 Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

A fine old Christian gentleman of yesteryear once put the elementary matters of the gospel to me like this. He first said “Mercy is for the sinner, grace is for the believer”. Then he hurried on to illustrate mercy. He spoke of a convicted man in the days of capital punishment. The verdict would be read out as follows: “A-B, you are found guilty. You will be taken from this place and hanged by the neck until you are dead”. But in the instance of a pardon a further statement would be read by the attorney. Its wording was “It has pleased his majesty the king to grant you His royal pardon – you are free to go”. My revered friend who always dressed immaculately in his black jacket and pinstripe trousers with a silk handkerchief in his pocket would take out that handkerchief with his last sentence as he explained that through the atoning blood of Christ that pardon was offered to the repentant. It was no mere legal fiat- it tore the heart of Christ apart and it

brought tears to the eyes of my friend who is now in the nearer presence of Christ. At the source of our salvation and the provision of God in Christ is divine covenant love.

BLESSED ASSURANCE

The long dalliance of the reformed faith with “assurance” of salvation since the days of the Synod of Dordt has led to an acute emphasis on divine justice as “the” basis of assured salvation to the exclusion of covenant mercy. I believe the living basis of covenant mercy parallels the legal basis of assurance in theology and can stand alone working by faith inspired of the Holy Spirit. Knowing God has to be fundamental and God declares Himself in His love and through the cross speaking to our hearts by His Holy Spirit. *The O.T. saints speak and sing of covenant mercy 190 times and of divine justice only on a handful of occasions* which demonstrates that they rejoiced for their assurance in the covenant mercy (HESED) of God. That is to say that they with equal confidence knew that God was not vacillating or variable but straight and righteous. The guarantee of that righteousness is God’s nature which is holy and just and good – all of which can be summed up in HESED or the purity and non-deviant faithfulness of God in His covenant love.

Blessed assurance Jesus is mine
O what transport of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of His Spirit washed in His blood

At the heart of that love is God’s willingness to suffer for man the sinner- to endure grief for us and to share His righteous loving nature by making us *sons of God*. In the

N.T. The fountain head of Pauline assurance springs from the mercy of God in Christ's death for sinners sealed to his heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 5.5-8 & Galatians 5.6 & 22) which results in faith working by love willing in the first instance to declare us just for Christ's sake (Romans 5) and in the second (Romans 8) imparting power to live and maturing the evidence of His indwelling by the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

2. SERPENT ON A POLE **SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT**

The reference by our Christ our Master to the uplifted brazen serpent(Numbers 21.9 with John3.14) when explaining New Life and Salvation to Nicodemus is of cardinal importance. It is the time-honoured eternal covenant love in action to atone for sin and establish fellowship of God and man and can be seen in

- (i) The provision of animal skin coats for Adam & Eve
- (ii) The lamb caught in a thicket slain for Isaac
- (iii) The promise "Our life for yours" to Rahab
- (iv) The fiery serpent - suffering & death substituted
- (v) Isaiah 53- the prophesied suffering servant
- (vi) John 3.14- Jesus reflecting on His substitution.
- (vii) Luke 23.34 & 43 Forgiven for His sake
- (viii) God's Son gave Himself for me (Gal.2.21).

A SIN OFFERING

A series of texts help us to understand what happened at the cross in a fuller way. First take **2 Corinthians 5.21** "He became a sin-offering for us who knew no sin". On this Luther committed a ghastly howler saying "*He became the greatest robber murderer adulterer blasphemer; he who is a sacrifice for the sins of the whole*

*world is not an innocent person not the Son of God born of the Virgin". Was he concerned to give our Lord the fullest sinner's C.V or was he as sometimes was the case inebriated? Jesus to the contrary must remain the pure Lamb of God effectively to save. **The word "became" is not used in the original.** The word EPOIESEN speaks of making an offering and that is exactly what Jesus did. **All offerings among the Jews had to be perfect.** Jesus was crucified under the charge of "blasphemy" but as Peter testified He never spoke a reviling word. He died *in loco* of sinners. Paul knew Aristotle's Ethics within which there are three definitions of wrong. There is "misfortune, there is "blame acceptance"(like sin-bearing) and there is "miscarriage of justice". Paul in using the terms "to take the blame" made it clear to Corinth who were familiar with the philosopher Aristotle that Jesus' death was neither a misfortune nor simply a case of miscarriage of justice. Christ was taking our blame.*

JESUS BORE THE CURSE

Galatians 3.13 reads "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us for it is written 'Cursed is he who hangs on a tree'".

NO ECONOMY OF SCALE IN LOVE

1 Timothy 2.4-7 tells us God was willing that all men would have been saved and come to know the truth as there is one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom in the place of all individuals. With our Lord and Paul we must recognize that there is room at the cross for all. We need not wrangle about the limits of God's love or salvation but, conversely,

we need to realize that not all have faith or desire to repent.

SUFFERING AND UNIVERSAL EMPATHY

Paul speaks of “How Jesus tasted death for every man (**Hebrews 2.9,10,18 with 9.28**). The means was the Herculean suffering of the cross that would make Him an intimate helper of all who suffer.

THE LAMB FOREVERMORE

Jesus did not become anything else than He ever was on the cross – *the peerless Son of God*- but He allowed that sin be imputed to Him and as man He fully represented us bearing up (ANAPHERO pictures the “carrying away by scapegoat” and the “bearing upward in vicarious intercession”) the sin and the curse which in the determinate will of God He bore whilst in weakness and the gross pain of the cross He remained impeccable as the only acceptable sacrifice for sin.

Peter writes “He did no sin nor was threat or deceitful cunning found in His mouth; who being reviled did not reproach, suffering He did not threaten but committed Him to the one who judges justly-Himself bare our sins up in His body upon the cross that departing from our sins(as spirit from body) we might live for righteousness. By His grievous bloody wound of His you were healed.” 1Peter 2.23

PROPITIATION BY BLOODSHED & DEATH

John writes “He is the propitiation (HILASMOS) for our sins and not ours only but also concerning the sins of the whole world.” (1John2.2 & 3.11 the “sacrifice” which sets aside wrath by bearing the judgment of death

3. THE ACCURSED TREE

The cross is worn with pride by famous sports personalities filmstars and by thousands of Christians worldwide. Nicky Gumbel begins his world renowned Alpha Course series “Explore Life” showing that to hang a crude gallows around one’s neck would be insane. How come the cross has become so precious to so many? The answer must be that Jesus Christ by His death and glorious resurrection has become infinitely dear to us.

O the old rugged cross so despised by the world
Has a wondrous attraction for me
For the dear lamb of God left His glory above
To bear it to dark calvary

We read in Deuteronomy 21.23 “Cursed is the one that hangs on a tree” and Paul tells us in Galatians 3.10-13 that everyone who fails to keep the commandments is cursed and that Christ redeemed us from that curse by enduring the death He as Lord designed to be a curse breaker. The result of our Lord’s death for us is that we are redeemed to God. This is affirmed in the Lord’s cry “It is finished” (TETELESTAI). With that great salvation come more blessings than our father Adam lost. Paul tells us further that the blessing of being just with God which was imputed to Abraham can reach us by means of Jesus death on the cross. Thus we become “children of God” joining the natural Jewish heirs of the covenant with Abraham as by faith we receive the promise of the Spirit under the New Covenant.

Let’s then continue to revel in our holy intercessor who breathed all our needs to God upon the tree and made it a veritable “mercy seat”(HILASTERION) thereby.

(i) FATHER FORGIVE THEM

What a prayer to breath heavenward in those first minutes upon the cross. “God alone can forgive sin” said Jesus. Yet as God in flesh He said to the paralytic “Your sins be forgiven you!” However on the cross He is acting as intercessor for a death squad of Roman soldiers and pleading for them in their ignorance. As the atoning and mediating God-man this big ask is firmly within His prerogative.

(ii) WOMAN BEHOLD YOUR SON: SON BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER This is addressed to Mary and John but it is expressed within a greater breathing and intercession on behalf His own that “They all may be one; as You Father are in me and I in You, that they also may be one in us!” John 17.21

(iii) TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE

The thief on the cross was a huge joy to our Lord. This word is encompassed in our Saviour’s upward breathing because the cross and this vow of Christ opens heaven and full assurance to the believer. The Father had drawn a soul to Christ from the depths of despair.

(iv) I THIRST

This is not to be taken simply as a call for the vinegar wine which was afforded to our Lord. In Psalm 69.21 we read “They gave me vinegar to drink in my thirst”. If we take it as one medieval monk concluded was right our Lord was meditating and conversing with the Father through the word on the cross. In this instance the prayer is ready made. “Act to save me O God for the waters are reaching [*Hebrew n̄ab ‘have come to’ (threaten)*] my soul. There is

no standing or firm ground. I am come into unsearchable waters. [Hebrew *qm*] of waters that "extend before the beholder"] The rising stream [Hebrew *t/bv* of *shibboleths*] overwhelms me. I am fatigued [Hebrew *gy* wearied by exertion] through calling. My throat is burning or parched; my eyes fail from waiting on and on [Hebrew *ljym* for my God]. The thirst for glory and for the Father's heavenly presence is plainly implied and beyond that lies the thirst for that joy of the redeemer with the redeemed.

(v) ELOI ELOI LAMA SABACHTHANI

The Aramaic makes this mysterious and heart rending cry no less amenable to the reader and interpreter but John gives us the Greek equivalent "My God my God why have You forsaken me". The cry arises in darkness which almost immediately lifts whilst rocks break and the temple curtain is rent. The word has two prefixes in Greek. One (EN) indicates that God the Father remains "in" the circle of the reconciling work. The other (KATA) strengthens the idea of being left alone. The imminent or incipient or even immediate breaking of the bowl of the heart in the last throes of suffering confirms that God spared not His own Son. The "Why?" is not a rebuke nor is it uttered through misunderstanding. It reflects the human reality of Christ's bitter suffering whilst He is wounded for our transgressions and cries our cry. "Eloi" is a statement that recognizes the Father's might amid His the Son's utter weakness. The notion of "forsakenness" is suited by several writers to the battlefield where one contingent proceeds to pursuit and victory whilst another languishes. Our Lord might be cast in the latter role but within minutes one must understand the glory of a victorious new

day dawns and two mighty assured cries are breathed heavenward.

(vi) IT IS FINISHED

The meaning of TETELESTAI most widely used by the ancients is “debt resolution”. Christ had fully paid in death the debt we owe. Redemption was complete. This is our discharge from the thrall and penalty of sin. Resurrection is assured, victory over sin is achievable. The new creation is in train. Final victory over Satan and death itself is just a matter of time.

(vii) FATHER INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT

Our Saviour lowers that thorn crowned head but not before breathing another word for the Father’s ears - “Father into your hands I yield my spirit.” Within three days the human spirit of the Son of God would return to that body which was not procreated by man. Many a saint has uttered these words in death. Our spirits shall enter that building of God - that body from heaven - not that which was sown by man with its faults but that awakened by God in its perfection the members of which is in His book in every finest detail. Fully human with such body as He provides and our souls that He saved and our spirits to boot. We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

4. MAN OF SORROWS

Man of sorrows what a name
for the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim

The humanity of Christ is best explained through our Lord's own words in Gethsemane. He bade His disciples amid their sorrow and potential trial "Pray" and Peter records very precisely that Christ said "Watch and pray, lest you enter trial. The spirit truly is ready but the flesh is weak". The final trial of Christ right up against the cross came as He prayed "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me - nevertheless not my will but thine be done". The grief of the human heart and the weakness of our common humanity was well known to Christ. This was reflected again on the cross when Jesus said "My God my God why have you being so close by forsaken me"(EN-KATA-LEIPO). "None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed or how steep the road that the Lord passed through ere He found the sheep that was lost".

JEREMIAH'S GROTTO

Should you visit the Holy Land you must include the Garden Tomb in your visit. Many years ago with a party of ministers going through an induction course for tour guiding I revisited the lovely oasis where as we proceeded south east in the garden the guide covertly indicated *the myrrh tree* –symbol of our Lord's freely shed blood - grows amid a profusion of plant life. Then on a small platform we got our first glance at the place of the skull. The cavernous eyes and mouth gouged in the limestone quarried rock make Golgotha as impressive today as ever. Long ago and from the distant days of Jeremiah's prophecy comes a reference to sorrow and grief which the ancient visionary retailed as he surveyed Jerusalem locked in its worst ever famine till the days of Roman siege. Mothers were reduced to eating the children they bore and

bodies of the dying lay gasping in the streets. The prophet burst out in a paeon of lament “See if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow” (Lamentations 1.12). Guides will tell you that the HAR SELIKA- “the place of spitting” beneath the fond “Green hill far away” – until recently an Arab fruit seller’s stand-was once the cavern where Jeremiah lived. It gets its name from being the place where criminals and blasphemers were stoned. It is preferably there beneath the hill and not on its brow that Jesus was crucified.

ISAIAH SPELLS OUT THE GRIEF HE BORE

Isaiah 53.10-11. And the Lord is willing or inclines to continually smite Him with stripes crushing His spirit He makes Himself sick (cf. Micah 6.13 where God makes Himself sick [compassionate empathy] even when striking another - clearly He turned to making Himself sick for them! Hebrew *yjh* Hiphil with the reflexive meaning) because You will place His soul or physical life as an offering - that by which one contracts guilt [by imputation] (Numbers 5.7-8) (Hebrew *mva*)

*The placing of the life of Messiah is described by the Hebrew verb **מִכְתַּבֵּח** which means "to constitute" "lay as a foundation" and "name Him" - also "to pledge" "to treasure for the future" and "to prepare" This is the counsel of the divine will in eternity past.*

He will see seed, lengthen His days and the "pleasure" of the Lord will finish well or be successful in His hand. In this we see the desire of the Lord is for "seed"(a posterity) - those who receive the divine nature. Like "birth" this of necessity involves pain. As husbands and wives take "pleasure" in a new-born so the Father and the Son and the Spirit take pleasure in souls redeemed through the cross.

11. He shall see prophetically ahead beyond the travail vexation and exhaustion of His soul and rest. By His personal acquaintance my righteous servant will perfectly accomplish (*Hiphil of qydxy*) the justification belonging to great numbers of people and He will carry the "heavy burden" of their depraved defrauding sins (*Hebrew lbs* "to bear penalties others deserve – cf. *Lamentations 5.7*"*Our fathers sinned and we bear their punishment*")

5. ENOUGH FOR ME

I quote W.Y. Fullerton's beautiful hymn in this short section and highlight simply the heart-felt consentience I share with the author's words. I ask nothing else than that you ponder as I often do what He, the Master, has done for my soul in its guilt and need. **Hallelujah for Jesus!**
Amen to all He has done through His glorious death and resurrection!

I cannot tell how He whom angels worship
Should set His love upon the sons of men
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when. But
this I know, that He was born of Mary,
When Bethlehem's manger was His only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so **the Saviour, Saviour of the world IS COME.**

I cannot tell how silently He suffered,
As with His peace He graced this place of tears,
Or how His heart upon the Cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three and thirty years,
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted
And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,

**And lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world IS HERE.**

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship
When, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth will answer,
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world IS KING.
Maranatha - even so come **Lord Jesus!**

GORDON'S CALVARY

The episode I want to relate is the sequel to the frustration of the failure of the Free Church Party of 1839 to find Calvary. Jerusalem at the time apart from the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre which they discounted as the place where our dear Lord died and rose again is described by Bonar their scribe as “a ploughed field”. Housing to the north from the Damascus gate was squalid and tightly built. It obscured what is now the Garden tomb. It was not until General Gordon during a recess from duty stayed at a villa overlooking the Damascus Road that the Golgotha Scarp and the setting to the rear of the houses which were by then somewhat delapidated set his imagination alight. The rest is history. A fund was established, land acquired and a lady curator employed. She had the soil in the tomb sent to Britain for testing for any trace of human bones and none was found. Evidence mounted and the proximity of this tomb to Golgotha, the hollowed race for a tombstone, the detailed rock chiseling characteristic of tombs of the rich supplied data to go with the garden reservoir and the

carved leading Gordon to conclude that he had come upon the locus of our Lord's burial.

THE LINEN CLOTHES

Today pilgrims read the awesome words on the little entrance door “HE IS NOT HERE HE IS RISEN”. On our first visit there my wife Mina and I were deeply moved as so many Christians have been. Just to think that on the 25th anniversary of our marriage we were privileged to stand united to Christ through His death and resurrection on holy ground where our risen Lord had stood with maudlin Mary on that first resurrection morning. In my study ever since I have two framed photographs - one of Golgotha and the other of the Garden Tomb inset with Hebrew rendering of John 19.40-42 and John19.16-18

6.DEBT AND THE DEBTOR

When this passing world is done
When has sunk yon radiant sun,
When I stand with Christ alone
Dressed in beauty not my own,
Then Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

Some years ago I led my first party to the Holy Land and prepared assiduously by reading the account by Andrew Bonar of the 1839 trip of McCheyne, Bonar, Black and other leaders of the Free Church of Scotland to Israel and Hungary. Their purpose was not mere pilgrimage but aimed rather at establishing the extent of the Jewish

diaspora in Hungary and how to begin the work of evangelism amongst them.

The cross is not just a sympathetic act of Jesus. It executed a real and eternal office in divine justice. It paid the sinner's debt. That is what the final word TETELESTI signifies.

Isaiah puts it thus in Isaiah 53.5ff. "**He was pierced through (Hebrew *llj*) for our falling away or breaking the covenant**(Hebrew [vp]; **He was broken in spirit** (Hebrew *akd*) **for our iniquity**(Hebrew *m[*) suffering for us as in Ezekiel 21.29-30 "The crime of the end" due final judgement). *The Lord as servant interposed His precious blood in our utter extremity. The chastening or discipline of our peace was on Him and by His striped blows* (Hebrew *rbj*)**we find healing for ourselves.** *The uncanny precision of the Hebrew prophecy details the Roman flogging before its very invention. Rome was founded 752 BC* Isaiah wrote 790-740. *His WOUNDS were ghastly rivers of blood but they built or joined the first fearful disciples and us in the body of Christians - a mighty movement of the Spirit. This is eternal health.*

7. WEAR IT - CARRY IT

John Bingham's article in the "Telegraph" (15.1.2013) tells the story of the legal outcome of cases in which two British women who were victimised for wearing a cross in testimony to their faith. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the UK had failed to protect **Nadia Eweida's** freedom to manifest her faith in the workplace.

But it rejected a similar legal challenge from **Shirley Chaplin**, a nurse, ruling that the hospital where she worked should be able to refuse permission to wear a cross on "health and safety" grounds.

Both women lost employment tribunal cases in Britain after being refused the right to wear a cross as a symbol of their faith under their employers' uniform policy.

And in a hearing in Strasbourg last year the UK Government argued that this was not a breach of their human rights and wearing a cross is not an essential tenet of Christianity.

But in its judgment the court said that manifesting religion is a "fundamental right".

Owen Bowcott writing in the "Guardian" (January 15, 2013) said "After seven years of legal appeals and accusations that Christians are being persecuted for their beliefs, the European court of human rights has ruled that a British Airways check-in operator should not have been prevented from wearing a cross at work.

Nadia Eweida, 60, was jubilant over her landmark victory, declaring it a "vindication" for Christians, after the court awarded her €2,000 (£1,600) in compensation for the "anxiety, frustration and distress" she endured. While the finely tuned judicial compromise does not establish an absolute right for every employee to wear a crucifix, or religious symbol, visibly at work, it will help define the limits of religious freedom. The decision on Eweida, a Coptic Christian working at Heathrow, was welcomed by David Cameron and others across the political spectrum.

Freedom of religion, the court stated, is "one of the foundations of pluralistic, democratic societies" but "where an individual's religious observance impinges on the rights of others, some restrictions can be made".

In Eweida's case, the Strasbourg court did not criticise UK law but said **British courts failed to balance competing**

interests in the case adequately. On one hand was Eweida's desire to display her religious belief; on the other was the employer's wish to project a certain corporate image.

"While this aim was undoubtedly legitimate," the judgment said, "the domestic courts accorded it too much weight ... the fact that [BA] was able to amend the uniform code to allow for the visible wearing of religious symbolic jewellery demonstrates that the earlier prohibition was not of crucial importance." The then prime minister intervening in the debate to say he might change the law, was among those who welcomed the ruling. Mr.Cameron wrote on Twitter:

"Delighted that principle of wearing religious symbols at work has been upheld – people shouldn't suffer discrimination due to religious beliefs." In Chaplin's case, superficially almost identical to Eweida's, the judges unanimously decided the UK courts had resolved competing rights equitably. Chaplin stressed the importance for her to be allowed to bear witness to her Christian faith by wearing a crucifix visibly around her neck at work. But the Strasbourg judges said the fact that hospital authorities had asked her to remove it for the protection of health and safety and to prevent infections spreading on a ward "was inherently more important". Hospital managers, the judges agreed, "were well placed to make decisions about clinical safety". After the ruling, Eweida, who lives in Twickenham, said: "I'm very pleased that after all this time the European court has specifically recognised ... that I have suffered anxiety, frustration and distress. It's a vindication that Christians have a right to express their faith on par with other colleagues at work visibly and not be ashamed of their faith."

"I'm disappointed on behalf of the other three applicants but I fully support them in their asking for a referral for their

[appeals] to be heard in the [European court's] grand chamber, and I wish them every success in the future to win."

Andrea Williams, director of the Christian Legal Centre, which supported the cases, said: "We are delighted that the cross has been recognised and indeed that Nadia has won her case."

A BA spokesman said Eweida had worked continuously for the company for 13 years. "Our own uniform policy was changed in 2007 to allow Miss Eweida and others to wear symbols of faith and she and other employees have been working under these arrangements." But the

UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission said it believed "the government should now look at the need to change the law to take the European court judgment into account". In the meantime, it added, it would publish guidance for employers and employees," to help them avoid further confusion and potentially costly litigation". The archbishop of York, the **Most Revd Dr John Sentamu**, struck a more cautionary note, insisting that courts should not have any power to prevent individuals wearing religious symbols. "**Christians and those of other faiths should be free to wear the symbols of their own religion without discrimination,**" he said. "The Equality Act 2010 encourages employers to embrace diversity – including people of faith. Whether people can wear a cross or pray with someone should not be something about which courts and tribunals have to rule."

CARRYING THE CROSS

The foregoing covers the fall-out from simply wearing the cross because one loves Jesus and honours what He has done for one's eternal salvation. There is, of course, the spiritual

issue that lies back of this outward and symbolic cultural issue – the matter of heart obedience to Christ’s word “Whoever will follow me, let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me” Mark 8.34.

Samuel Rutherford speaking in relation to the difficulty of the cross for Christ and the believer said “Welcome Christ and His light cross”. Comparitively speaking the commitment of the disciple in general is not in the same league of difficulty and yet Christ warned us against complacency saying “The servant is not greater than His Lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

The case of Simon of Cyrene comes to mind. He was a man born in North Africa who had been working in a field to the north of Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion. He clearly seemed the sort of man of brawn that the Roman soldiers could commandeer to hurry the weakening Saviour who had fallen beneath the cross off the streets and so he was put to carrying the cross after Jesus. The African gentleman never lived the incident down. His whole family became disciples. We read of Alexander and Rufus his sons and Simon’s wife in Mark 15.21 and in Romans 16.13. His wife had been kind to the apostle Paul and Rufus had become notable in the church at Rome by the middle of the first century. Peter was also familiar with both sons of this disciple. What a change that experience of seeing Jesus as Peter says “bearing our sins to the tree. Doubtless Simon stood by and heard the ineffable words form the cross and doubtless he made common purpose with the other disciples and what impact this made on his family. Africa made its way to the cross in the person of this wonderful Christian who bore the cross.

At the cross at the cross where I first saw the light
And the burden of my heart rolled away

It was there by faith I received my sight
And now I am happy all the day.

Discipleship is about experiencing Christ, about confessing and learning more about Jesus and about telling others about Jesus. The gospel of Matthew supplies a good biblical basis for exploring the Christian faith. From my discipleship series I have extracted a selection of 5 lessons - one from each of the five books of Matthew to whet the appetite for this aspect of “following after Jesus!”

MATTHEW BOOK 1 DISCIPLESHIP(1) 5.1ff

His disciples came to Him and **opened** his mouth *ἀνοίγνυμι* - a word used for opening “a chest of jewels”. He **showed** *διδασκω* them the “how” or “way” of His kingdom and after His resurrection He brought them back and met 500 there where He had first set them in array. Jesus uses the word **“blessed”** *Μακαριος*. *Herodotus* owned the word to mean “heroes who live again” or are reborn and also “an island of peace in sea of trouble” - how beautifully apt for disciples.

THE OCTAVE (8 radical factors) **OF HAPPINESS** (*John Moxen* - *an Irish youth evangelist compared the beatitudes to an octave of Swiss bells*). **Blessed are the abysmally poor who crouch and fear.** *Soren Kierkegaard* the Dutch preacher and philosopher wrote a book entitled *“Fear & Trembling”* in which he speaks of people as “like frightened birds flying away to Jesus” for safety in their brokenness. **Blessed are they that mourn** *πενθεω* not the 1/3 of the world’s people who cry themselves to sleep - but those who lament or sorrow over the death of Christ in true sorrow over sin brings the Paraclete in. **Blessed are the meek** - the mild who like unbroken beasts were once turbulent but are now disciplined and mastered by Christ. Their heritage is as that of Israel in

His kingdom. There is the lovely story of the godly *Quaker William Penn* who was given as much land by the native American Indians as he could walk around in a day. **Blessed are those that hunger and thirst.** It is said that the gazelle smells water 50 miles away. We are “Only as holy as we want to be” and there is need for craving for fullness *χορτος* and for each daily draught at the pulsating life spring *αλλομενος* (John 4.14). **Blessed are the merciful ελεος.** The capacity to share grief and feel pity for the hurting is proportioned to the resources we derive from the Lord in our need. **Blessed are the pure in heart.** These keep the Lord in their sight and are purified looking in the mirror of the word and then in Glory they shall see the King in His beauty - **be aware of him οπαω.** **Blessed are the peacemakers.** Such surrender to His terms and evangelise or “act between two” in the interests of the reconciliation of sinners to God. These are the natural heirs of Christ’s work and Sons.

MATTHEW BOOK 2 DISCIPLESHP (4) [9.8-9]

In 96 words Matthew (“*Gift of God*”) – a Roman tax agent banned from synagogue, from prayer and from bringing offerings tells his glorious story of hosting Jesus and lights it up with Jesus’ words “They that are whole need no physician but they that are ill”. The Roman equestrian upkeep was bleeding the empire. Even lower classes paid 1% tax – and artisans 12%. Widows often approached artisans for help. At Tabgha, Matthew taxed merchandise at the higher rate. Jesus said, “Follow me” Matthew instantly responded. In Luke 5.27 account the detractors ask “Why does your master eat with publicans and sinners?” was the question. Jesus great quote from Hosea 6.6 “I will have mercy and not sacrifice” teaches

the lesson that all the correct sacrifices without repentance and faith are of no use.” Jesus was a soul physician.

MATTHEW BOOK 3 DISCIPLESCHIP (26)[15.37] GIVING WITHOUT LOSING

The **disciples** gave but did not lose—the crowd were filled and 7 round plaited fish baskets were taken up as opposed to 12 corn baskets (*such held each 3 days rations*). Four thousand were fed—not counting women and children. This feeding miracle demonstrates Jesus capacity to satisfy Gentiles as the former shows He could that of the 12 tribes.

MATTHEW BOOK 4 DISCIPLESHIP (38)[19. 13-15] TO NURTURE OR NOT TO NURTURE

Mothers brought children not babies but “young servants” whom the **disciples** that Jesus might “make a vow of commitment to them”—to disciples they were of little value. Jesus said “Of such is the Kingdom” He used the word τοιούτος which means “of such quality though so little” (*i.e. both meanings*). The Kingdom proceeds on the basis of taking the “lowly things the despised, the things that are not” 1Cor1.28 to nullify the strong. *Jim Elliot* (An Auca Martyr) was converted at 6 yrs; *Amy Carmichael* at 9 - she rescued 900 girls at Dohnavur; *Mary Slessor* fought against human sacrifice in India and was converted at 7.

MATTHEW BOOK 5 DISCIPLESHIP (50)[27.55-65]

The final discipleship lesson recognises the genuine if secret disciple Joseph of Arimathea, a man who cannot possibly have been unaware of the teaching of Christ retailed by Nicodemus, his friend.

Faithful but secret Joseph of Arimathea – wealthy but also a secret disciple – now “comes out” and requests the body of Jesus. Pilate commands that “the body be given” for honourable burial. Joseph swathed it in a clean Sindian shroud which many not without reason believe is preserved in Milan.

John Bunyan writes of the fear and trembling of Pilgrim in Interpreter’s house before he reaches the cross. “I dreamed heavens grew black with roaring and flashing. Then there was a trumpet voice “Arise for judgment you dead!”. The rocks rent. Some cried for the rocks to hide them. I saw a man in a cloud read names-I was left behind. I thought judgment day had come!” Interpreter advised “Let these things warn you!” Next, Bunyan portrays him go forward to a little hill where stood a cross and a little below a hole like a grave. He stood an looked. Immediatley his burden loosed and tumbled into a sepulcher. He kneeled and tears ran down his cheeks. Three shining ones spoke “Your sins are forgiven”; “Take off those rags – put this robe on”; “take this book”. He gave three leaps for joy. *One for the promise he had; one for the robe and one for the book in his hand that made him sure.*

Through the cross Christ is victor, love has won, we shall awake in glory and everything will be made new!

I do believe, I will believe that Jesus died for me
That on the cross He shed His blood from sin to set me free
William Cowper

FINIS

*Scribbler's jottings.
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