

# K-495 the Crucifixion of God (2 of 2)

by Art Katz

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*Art Katz emphasizes the centrality of the cross in understanding God's nature and the Christian faith, highlighting its implications for humility and suffering in the believer's life.*

**Duration:** 1:14:27

**Scripture:** Acts 7:51

**Topics:** "Cross"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a conference where he felt out of place among well-dressed and charismatic figures. He contrasts his plain appearance and monotone delivery with their splendor and captivating speeches. Despite feeling rejected and insignificant, the speaker emphasizes the importance of a different kind of teaching that goes beyond principles and becomes a transformative event. He draws inspiration from the suffering and gracious death of Stephen, who reenacted the cross and showed the ability to bear suffering without retaliating. The speaker encourages the audience to embrace opposition and understand the purpose behind it.

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## Transcript

If the enemy can succeed in moving the church away from the cross, and I think he's been largely successful in modern times, or even allow a kind of an acknowledgment of the cross that is not the cross, but some plastic simile of the cross, he will have succeeded. I remember I came to a ministry that celebrates the cross, and in fact the Lord gave me that image in the talk that night about a plastic beam. I said, your cross is not the cross, the splintery blood-splattered one, but a plastic simile.

You can knock it and it's hollow. And I've never been invited back. But it was an illumination for me that this requires the deepest apprehension, and those who have had that kind of insight usually have to express it in the suffering of their own life.

I think of Watchman Nee, whose statement on Romans 6, in the normal Christian life is perhaps one of the most brilliant, setting forth of the place of the cross in the crucified life of a believer, and was later called upon to demonstrate that in almost a quarter of a century of internment in a communist prison camp in China. So this is sacred, holy, needs to be restored, and I think that the book that I have before me is one of the finest statements that has come to my attention. It's also an opportunity for us to hear how theologians think, and to understand what theology is.

Any ology, biology, what are the other ologies? Sociology, the study of society, the study of biology. Theology, the study of God. So, in Germany, because they did not have separate seminaries, and that the subject of theology was included in the universities, it was called the Queen of the Sciences.

It was looked upon as the pinnacle. The ultimate endeavor of intellect and soul and spirit, in inquiry of all the kinds of things that come before men to examine, theology was considered the pinnacle, the queen, and that every other discipline, like philosophy or science, was a contributing factor in order to apprehend and to probe the rich things of God. So let's pray, and without the Spirit of God to illumine the cross of God, we'll have haywood and stubble.

We need a very real cross, and I think it's on this issue that the last great struggle of the church is going to take place, if not already. So we need to understand and identify and firmly have hold on this so central aspect of the faith, because as we were saying last time, this is where God is most acutely revealed. This is where it has pleased him to reveal himself as God, and to miss that revelation is to condemn yourself to a distortion of God, though you may call him Jesus, or whatever label you please to call it.

You can call it Judaism, you can call it Christianity. It is not God, but some facsimile, some approximation that must suffer distortion, and that distortion and warp will be felt in every aspect of the life. That's why if this is not in its proper place, if this has not come into its pivot with a thump into the hole, dug for it and become the center, everything is going to be askew.

And that's usually the condition of most Christian lives, for the want of this centrality. So little wonder that T. Austin Spock's book is called The Centrality and the Universality of the Cross. So let's just join our hearts and ask the Lord for illumination, the privilege, and the consequence of understanding.

So Lord, we bless you. We ask the breath of God to be upon us, Lord. Breathe upon us, my God.

Your spirit, that eternal spirit, my God, that glorifies Christ and makes known the things pertaining to him as he makes known the things pertaining to the Father, and that all three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, reveal God as you deserve and desire to be understood. Lord, I think that we can say in our prayer that every warp in present mankind, every human suffering, every distortion, every violence and mayhem and murder and every ugly and terrible thing that is going on in the earth is in proportion to the ignorance of the knowledge of God. Mankind is paying a price for that ignorance, my God, more than it can ever conceive, and that the knowledge of God is sanity, righteousness, right living.

And Lord, we want to know, we want to understand that we might set you forth and make you known and exhibit and demonstrate the realities, my God, that are in you and that are revealed at the cross. So bless us together, Lord, and open the riches of things by your spirit that men cannot probe and understand unaided. We thank you for this privilege.

We look to you, my God, that you're the only one having suffered this who can make this known. We bless you for our privilege to seek you in this and look to you in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

So if we can get through a central chapter of this book on the crucified God, we will be doing really good and have a little glimpse of how theologians probe, ask questions, and seek to understand. So just consider that of all of the things that God could have done to affect his salvation, why did he choose to do it in this way, the cross of Christ Jesus, because everything about it is abhorrent and calculated to offend human sensibility and particularly religious sensibility. It's as if God went out of his way, knowing man and

his disposition, to set forth something calculated to offend his every category and to say, if you reject this, you reject any knowledge of me.

And as I try to suggest, what the Jewish people have paid for this rejection is beyond any ability to comprehend what the state has left us with such a distortion and such an absence, not only of the knowledge of God, but the presence of God, that we have been an open victim of all of the consequences of this profound thing. If this came at the cost of God himself being crucified, how must he regard that rejection? And if judgment is not just some arbitrary thing that God slaps on man, but is the outworking of man's own sin, that the judgments are proportionate to our own transgressions, what would be the consequence of this rejection, of this sinful rejection? History has demonstrated and will yet demonstrate how great that consequence is. So, Moltmann says that the death of Jesus is a statement about God himself, not only a statement, but the statement and an ultimate statement, I would say.

Who is this God? And that reveals what he is in himself through the cross. He quotes my favorite theologian Karl Barth, who says that to crucify Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and that man's thought about a lofty God and being noble and distant is completely shattered by what is demonstrated in Jesus at the cross. I just need to be reminded myself that Jesus himself is God, and God made flesh, taking upon himself the form of man and revealing in his suffering humanity not only what true man is, but what true God is.

Because this man suffers in his humiliation, his own experience of rejection, the unbelievable, excruciating physical thing, the torment, the bearing of sin, the turning of the father from him, is a totality of things that we have not even a word to sum up. It is the humiliation of Jesus, and that's why it's followed by his exaltation. Because he lay aside his deity, because he did not consider it a robbery to be equal with God.

And allowed himself to take upon himself the form of a man and of a servant, and to suffer in that form the death and the death upon the cross, the most excruciating and dishonoring, therefore God hath highly exalted him and given him a name above every name both in heaven and in earth. So you have both the enormous humiliation and the enormous exaltation, and that's a principle for us. It's God setting forth not in a revelation of himself, but his way.

So the exaltation, honor, anointing, use, service, glory, the things that pertain to God are related to humiliation and going down. The two things are set by God in what was revealed through Jesus at the cross. So he calls this the center of all Christian theology.

Not only its theme, but in effect the entry to problems and answers on earth. I don't know if we can see that, and I don't know that I can find any way to say that. I always often say that if you scratch something deeply enough in the last analysis, the issue is always the issue of the cross.

Whatever it is, whether it's in marriage, whether it's in ministry, in relationship, in community, if you scratch deeply enough, the issue invariably and always is the issue of the cross. It's central to everything. I hope later we'll get to see the issue of the church and unity and being the one new man that God is after is also the issue of the cross.

So what kind of man is this that suffers this humiliation and this death? You know that *ecce homo*, that Latin phrase, behold the man. Man as God would have us to understand what God celebrates as man is not our notion. It's not the macho man.

It's the man in weakness. It's the man who gives himself over to this as true man. It's God's humanity, he says, and the dehumanized Christ.

Remember the pictures that we saw in that classic painting? You wonder whether you're looking at a man or an animal. So gnarled, so grotesque in his suffering that he's marred more than any man. So this is charged with irony and contradiction.

He's so despoiled as man, so dehumanized, but in that suffering he exhibits God's definition of what true man is. True man is not some macho guy who flexes his biceps, but the true man is the one who allows himself to become dehumanized, to suffer humiliation in obedience to the Father at the cross. That's man.

Behold that man. So this utter humiliation to the point of death on the cross is the statement not only about man but about God. Did I ever tell you that you may have heard this when I picked up an article one time, and the title was The Humility of God.

And just the title alone made me freak out. I just collapsed. I sagged and I went down.

The humility of God. I'd never thought in those terms. I thought of God as noble, superior, great, powerful, all of the grand adjectives that are true of God, but I never thought of the humility of God.

And the humility of God is not just an aspect of his being, it is God. This is what God is, and this is why the Jewish community cannot consider that the Jesus on the cross is their God, because it contradicts their every definition and category of what they would suppose God to be. But God is not wanting them to live on what man supposes God to be, but what he in fact is, as he demonstrates what he is.

And that's why the cross is the central demonstration. It is the demonstration of the humility of God. A God who will suffer this for man.

The jeering, the taunts, the becoming sin, the physical excruciation, the nakedly in the dung heap, on the cross. Outside of the city is a statement of what God is in a way that we could never have conceived him if we broke our brains all our life long. We could never have thought that this is what God is.

God, saints, is humble. That's his nature. As powerful and as glorious as he is, when he says that he stands at the door of our heart and knocks, and if any man hears my voice and will open to me, and I will come in and suffer for him with me, is a beautiful picture of that humility.

We need to have that sink into our spirits, because the church that does not reflect God in his humility is not the church. We have to say that there's been a false representation of God, most ironically by that agency intended for his revelation, the church, because it has not acted and lived in the central disposition of God himself, which is his humility. God is humble, and the once and for all demonstration that he gave is his coming down from earth, from heaven.

No man can ascend who has not first descended. I think that there's even a scriptural basis to say not only descended onto the earth, but into the earth and below the earth, and spoke to the prisoners. I don't know all that that means.

In fact, I hardly know anything of what that means, but some go so far as to say he descended even into hell. He descended into the place where men are in captivity. Some say it's that generation that was judged by the flood, and there he presented himself.

I don't know. I don't want to even speculate about that, but only to say that when God goes down, he goes down. It's not some momentary act.

It's not some aberration. It's not the impulse of the moment. It's an act in keeping with what he is in himself.

This is his true self, and it was revealed once and for all in one historic moment in time, in Jerusalem at the cross, and that's why it's so central to any understanding of God. The distortion of that, the failure to comprehend that, or the indifference to that, has got to be charged I've said it so many times now, with remarkable consequence. So it's a revelation of a God who takes upon himself the form of a man and exhibits this humility and that humanity.

This is God, and God is like this. He's not greater than he is in this humiliation. He's not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender.

He's not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. He's not more divine than he is in this humanity. Those are not my words.

This is the statement of Moltmann. This, by the way, is theological thinking and writing, probing. What does it mean? Examining and trying to apprehend the depths of things that men would do well to devote themselves.

Everything that Christian theology says about God is to be found in this Christ event. This Christ event on the cross is a God event, the event I'm saying. Here God has not just acted externally in his unattainable glory and eternity.

Here he has acted in himself and has gone on to suffer in himself. Here he himself is love with all his being. So for all of the talk of what love is, which is subject to sentimentalizing and different renderings, if we see this as the epitome of the act of love, this self-emptying and giving oneself over in behalf of others, in such humiliation unto death, we will have the closest approximation of what love is.

How much have we suffered for the distortion of the meaning of that word? So everything comes back to the cross. Here's the revelation of the God who is love in the supreme act of love. So if you want to know what it is, examine it here.

And wherever that is reenacted or reiterated in the life of the church or an individual saint, that is the love of God going forth. Wherever that kind of self-sacrifice is exhibited, there is God. And that's the exhibition of God that the powers of darkness dread.

They would very much prefer a church that is macho, a church that is doing heroic things and carrying on great events and conferences and things like that. The powers of darkness love that. But to see God's own humiliation, to see reenacted again the very thing that was exhibited at the cross terrifies the powers of darkness.

That is another reenactment of God. That is setting forth God as God. And that is devastating to the powers of darkness.

And that's how the age ends. When the church as the body of Christ suffers in itself, the final convulsions of what Jesus suffered at the inception of the church is again the experience of the church at the end by

the same powers of darkness. When the church so to speak is crucified, when God allows in Revelation 13 the beast to defeat the church and the church bears it with the same humility and uncomplaining self-surrender as being its call and the privilege to reenact the glory of what was first consummated at the cross, the age ends.

The powers that have been defeated or disarmed are brought to their final and utter end by that once and for all final reenactment. That's the whole majesty and the glory of what we are about. And that's why in all that God is dealing with us day after day is to bring us to that place.

Every time we stub our toe or have a difference of opinion or some episode arises in tension, it's all some minuscule issue of the cross and our willingness to bear with Christ's humility that that thing that's put before us, another reenactment. And our failure to do it shows that we've not yet come to that place. And so I need to say also that we must understand that the resurrection is inextricably bound up with the crucifixion.

These are not separate categories. The one is integral to the other. And it's by the power of the life revealed and obtained that raised Jesus from this death of humiliation.

That exaltation is our power to reenact his humility. And taking the cup and the bread, how does it say it? That his death might be remembered. Somebody help me with that.

That we would show forth his death somehow in the drinking of this cup. That somehow in that sacrament of the life that is to be found in the bread and in the cup is a power to show forth that death. Because humility is not something we can put on.

You can't be the first one in your neighborhood to have it. It's a contradiction in terms. Humility is God.

It's not some self-effacing meekness where you're so reticent. Oh, do you mean me? Oh, really, I'm not a public speaker. No, please, no, don't call.

That's not humility. That is vanity and egotism of the most secretive. God calls you to do something and say something for his name.

You can count on the enablement and grace he'll give you to perform it. To defer from that obedience because who am I that is a terrible disrespect to God and an unwillingness to believe for the grace to perform the things for which we're called. So like love is distorted, humility is distorted.

We give human definitions to those things which are okay for salesmen but terribly inappropriate to the people of the kingdom. We need a humility that's humility and a love which is love which is to say what God himself is as it was most acutely revealed in his uttermost suffering unto death. And that willingness to bear that is the reenactment of God.

And God is in that. And the God that is in that terrifies the powers of darkness and that brings as much result in proportion as what was wrought on the cross. And that's why Paul says if the rulers of this darkness knew, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.

As they ventilated their wisdom in destroying, they did not know they were releasing for they would not have done it. So if we want to know what apostolic preaching is, if you want to know what real intercession is of the kind that affects an answer from heaven, that shakes powers of darkness, that brings answer, it's

the reenactment of the cross. It's a prayer or a witness or a sharing or a preaching that is the tasting again of death of humiliation.

It's the feeling of terrible weakness that is not an accident but a necessary condition for the releasing of his life which you don't have to bear as voluntary as it was for Jesus. Now every variation and deviation is a movement away from this cross and the real issue for which the church is called. So for those who have no stomach for this, the experience of this humiliation which is a suffering, they would look for some other forms of Christian expression.

Here he's saying that this was for Luther the issue of the true or the false church and was the principal factor in setting in motion the Reformation because the Catholicism of Luther's day was a works-oriented religious kind of thing that men would perform in order to obtain the favor of God. Really what it was is a distortion or the exclusion of the cross and that Luther's Reformation brought the church back again to the thing that is central and that in fact he says it's the issue of reality itself. Others will come to understand that because there's a form of the knowledge of God that does not require the cross.

I think that that's the form that Judaism has obtained and even that which is called Christian. There's a great emphasis in the 19th century on things that are natural and nature and finding God in nature, natural religion it's called, which is a movement away from the scripture and can bring a knowledge of God by your own deduction from nature. And some of the leaders of the Jewish community like the Mendelssohn family who moved into this exciting enlightenment renaissance view of nature and natural religion and were somewhat embarrassed by the reference to the scriptures and the supernatural God of the scriptures were a great factor in influencing the German theology that finally was established by the 19th and early 20th century.

There was a movement away from biblical faith and that there's a way in which God can to some extent be known in nature because he's revealed in his own handiwork. But that does not reveal God in a way that God would have himself to be known. I want to get at that if I can.

I think that the wrong forms of the knowledge of God will result in a religion of that kind because the power is the resurrection side of the cross. So he writes here, it's not enough for anyone to know God in his glory or in his majesty but at the same time he does not know him in the lowliness and shame of the cross. Thus true theology and true knowledge of God lies in Christ the crucified one.

Natural knowledge of God is potentially open to men but in fact they misuse it in the interest of their self-exaltation and their self-divinization. I understand this so well but I don't know if I can communicate it. There's a way in which you can come to a sense of God from nature that shuns the revelation of the cross, that has some valid things to say about God but the effect of it is to exalt the man who has that knowledge.

Do you understand that? The kind of knowledge that's derived from a study of nature, God in nature, however true it may be, has this effect upon that one. It exalts the man. But the knowledge of God that comes from the revelation given at the cross humbles man and humiliates him and brings him to the place of the truth about himself and about truth itself and about reality itself.

That's why the cross is so central. You can almost say that the real conflict right to the end of the age is between Judaism and Christianity or anything that resembles a faith that purports to be a knowledge of God that does not derive its understanding from Christ crucified and resurrected. This is the real antagonism, whatever names they're called, and when I say Judaism I'm including even Christian

denominations that though they may give some verbal acknowledgment of the cross or of resurrection, their real view is a view of God not taken from that but from a general sense of knowledge that leaves man in an exalted condition.

And in fact there's an antagonism between those who prefer a view of God predicated on that because it's a nice God and it's a loving God in a certain way and an honorable God and a God who would not ask you to do this and to do that and a God who would not call you to shame and that kind of thing. And that, the people who subscribe to that will invariably be opposed to those who insist upon Christ and him crucified and the life that derives from that in resurrection. We need to understand that this basic conflict because we're going to be at the heart of it.

So that's a remarkable statement of the dangers of knowing God from nature and even celebrating the created thing above the creator himself and why God in his mercy and the point of time gave a revelation of himself to save us from that kind of distortion that more acutely reveals himself at the cross. So to quote again, to know God in the cross of Christ is a crucifying form of knowledge because it shatters everything to which a man can hold on and which he can build both his works and his knowledge and precisely in so doing sets him free. This knowledge of God revealed at the cross saves man from the kind of exaltation that Romans 1 describes where he would celebrate nature for its own sake or his works as somehow satisfying God because something is revealed about the suffering of God that reveals God at his heart.

I think something about suffering that reveals and that's why the Roman centurion at the cross was compelled to cry out, this, truly this is the Son of God. Something was revealed in the depth of that suffering and the magnitude or the grace with which the suffering was born. The patience and the acceptance, the surrender to it, not the chomping at the bit or fighting against it or the cursing under one's breath, but the resignation reveals the character of God as God in fact is.

It's not a suffering that's masochistic, it's suffering as God bears it that shows what God's heart is and why necessarily that revelation can only come through the suffering of the church and that that suffering is inevitable in the obedience of the church both in the things of the daily and the things that will conclude the age. I think about what it is that made the hearers of Stephen gnash upon him with their teeth. The one statement that brought them to a boil was, I see the heavens opened and Jesus at the right hand of the power or authority or the throne and when they heard that they put their fingers in their ears and rushed upon him with their teeth because in that one statement was such a calculated attack, a devastating blow at what men celebrated as God, as distant, lofty, removed from the sufferings of man, but that a man crucified with the wounds could be at the eternal presence of God at the very throne was so categorically opposed to everything that they understood to be God that they couldn't bear to hear it.

These were the priests, these were the men whose whole religious system was predicated on their view of God, but when Stephen made that one statement, heaven opened to him that he could see the heart of the mystery. You saw the antagonism that came upon him unto death and that's a capsule thing of why it is that the true church is going to suffer in the last days at the hands of that same kind and class of men and for the same reason. Not that we will say, I see the heaven opened, but something about our deportment, the way we carry and conduct ourselves will exhibit the kind of thing that devastates their view of religion and of God and their place in such a system that they cannot bear to hear or to consider and the only answer is to murder and to remove through violence that one who makes this kind of view of God known.

If you can understand what I'm saying right now, you'll understand every historic persecution of the church by the religious party since time immemorial. It's not the world, it's religion that says that they will kill us and claim they are doing God a service, but what God are they doing a service to? It's the God of their own imagining around whom and through whom a whole system, not only of religion, but of society, of value, of the whole thing that constitutes for men reality. To say it's challenged is not to say it enough.

It's absolutely overturned. It's threatened. Its whole foundation is revealed as false to which men have given themselves when the truth of God is revealed by those who see the heaven open and that the crucified, suffering son of God is at the right hand of power.

Not because the father is condescending to take such a loathsome thing to himself, but because what the son is in his suffering and in his wounds is God as God truly is. Please understand that. This is the truth of God and it is God and men cannot bear to consider that.

And there are things in my spirit that have come from 31 years of walking and to whatever degree my own obediences have brought me into a measure of understanding of the reality of this, now to find expression. Isn't that interesting because that's a suffering form of teaching. There's another form of teaching where it could be lined out in principles that would be interesting and edifying, but this form of teaching has the potential for becoming event.

But that is in the moment that the life of God will take hold of something as it's perhaps doing right now as we gasp and splutter our way through. It's a painful thing. See what I mean? It's a reenactment of the cross and that's what made apostolic preaching so powerful.

And merely to subscribe to the cross as somehow yes being true, but not understanding the principle, the life thing that is in it that God set forth in himself as a model and an example for every successive generation that a church should be predicated on that foundation and have its life out of that power, then we don't understand what it is to which we're called. And when some of us have to taste death or taste humiliation, taste the kinds of things that pertain to us, we think of a strange thing. Going back to what was the cause of Stephen's death, because the first of anything is often the paradigm or the pattern.

The first modedum contains timeless profound elements that will be enacted in every true modedum until the end. And so what is it that we could understand with Stephen's death? First of all, his statement was not something calculated to please men or to pacify them. He was brought to a place where men were already opposed to him and calling him a blasphemer, so he knew he was already in a place of danger.

Instead of speaking soothing things or carefully spoken things that would ease their displeasure, he seems to have rubbed them the wrong way. He goes through a whole history of Israel and shows the characteristic apostasy of the Jewish people, their failure with Moses, right on down, and then he ends with, as your fathers did so do you also, you do always grieve the Holy Spirit of God. He shows an unbroken continuum and they are with their fathers, and in fact they're soon going to prove it by what they do to him.

But when he came to that one statement, when he saw the heavens opened by the Holy Spirit, Jesus at the right hand of the Father, who is the crucified Christ, battered, wounded, carrying those wounds and the statement of his suffering right to the throne of God that men somehow think ought to be sublime and religiously exalted and different and other than, that was the nub of offense that they could not dare to consider and had to extinguish the life of the man who saw that and depicted it in his own suffering. Can

you get that? That's why the church prefers God's man of faith and power. That's why they love personalities that seem to have it all together, who come out from the wings and are resplendent in their authority and of course, and you look at them wide-eyed, you're some suffering saint and you're not from political post and you can't get it together and you're marriage and you're children and you're this and you're that, but there he is, some resplendent thing other than yourself and of course you're not expected to aspire to be that.

Can you understand that there's a way in which the church would like that? Because it does not make a requirement of them. They like to have someone who is exalted and in another place, the mysterious man of faith and power, it absolves them. They're not expected to, that's why their passivity in the pew and just singing the hymns on the dollar collection plate and that's a projection of a view of God who is exalted, noble, holy, different and other than men, but the God who is a sufferer like men and in his humanity shatters that whole phony baloney religious enterprise and not only shows us what God in fact is, but what he's calling us to be by the same grace by which he was it through the eternal spirit.

Can you understand that? The world hates the cross and especially the religious world and where the cross is in any way resonant in a believer, there's something in the religious world that arches its back. I've gone up in elevators, in Hilton hotels, at international and regional full gospel conferences where some of the most celebrated charismatic figures of our generation and I've never met them and not a word was exchanged, but the moment that the elevator door closed and we ascended up, I could just sense the back arching. There's an intuition in a sense that what is represented here is antithetical, is opposite and contrary to everything upon which my religious success has been predicated and indeed as that conference has unfolded, it becomes clear.

God has me wearing a cardigan, black sweater and a white shirt without a tie and grey trousers in contrast to these guys who are splendidly dressed and my word comes out like a monotone. I go, Lord, what is this? By contrast such a bleak nothing that these men even get up and leave the platform with contempt and disgust and when you come the next day to have a cup of coffee, there they are clustered together, they're in, they are the in crowd. These are the guys who are with it and God is with them and you come in and they give you that kind of a look and there's no inviting you to their table, you're just a loathsome thing and you go sit in the corner with your cup totally out of it.

But something happens in the course of those days with your plain and un, what's the word, conspicuous presentation where people come down before God flat in such a transaction, in such a life changing thing. But unfortunately those who derided you were not there to see it, they've already gone on. I'm saying those things just to show you, classic archetypal oppositions but the end will reveal them yet more acutely.

And we are the people called to the end and we need to know why it is that we're going to be opposed and not to blanch or balk at that but to be steadfast in cleaving to the cross of Christ Jesus because only it has the power to set men free. And the Jewish people need to be set free from their delusions. A phony church needs to be set free from its deceptions and the only thing that has the power is the reality of God which corresponds to the truth of God set forth in the suffering of God at the cross of God.

It's a mode of living and being and not just a subscription to the truth of it in your mind. He quotes another writer who says that the natural man is incurably religious and hates the cross and suffering. He seeks works and success and therefore regards the knowledge of an almighty God who is always at work as being glorious and quote, uplifted.

I've had it out with some rabbis. They don't like the idea of a Lord who is in the earth or present let alone a Lord who is in you. That God would be incarnate in man has got to be something such an offense.

They want God distant. They want him noble. They want him away from the fray of the earthly struggles and the realities of the life that men know.

And they think that somehow that's an uplifting view of God that the God who is in the midst of his people and incarnate in flesh, the same thing that God did with his son that he does now with us believe. Christ in us, the hope of glory, is the most calculated offense to everything that is religious. So if God is somehow noble, uplifted, and distant, and superior, what would be the character of men who subscribe to that view of God? Noble, separate, uplifted, and separate.

Superior, contemptuous, and disdainful of the Gentiles. What will be the view and the character of people who subscribe to God as God, who is imminent in the life of man, in the flesh, suffering as a son of man himself? That God is not some high lofty noble. He is that.

How do I say it? But because he's that and came down, the coming down more perfectly reveals what this God is and what he would have us to be. We're called to be witnesses, not as we imagine God to be, but as he in fact is and has revealed himself at the cross. So he talks about a confrontation between the theology of the cross and philosophical theism of indirect knowledge of God from the world or from nature.

You know that Thomas Jefferson was a theist or a deist and would scissor out portions of the scriptures that were in contradiction to his view of God. So he tailored a view compatible with his own sense of the nobility of man and the kind of God that corresponds to that. In a word, it makes God in man's image.

And that's why he could fornicate with his slave women and have children by then because it's consonant with a view of God predicated on man's conveniences and as men would choose to see him that disregards the revelation that God has given at the cross. Death, suffering, and mortality must be excluded from the divine being in the same way that we want to see men of faith and power. We don't want to see a God who tastes death and exhibits suffering.

We think that that's unbecoming to God and really unbecoming to us. I don't want to get too much into this. These concepts of God that men devise, that has no place for God as a sufferer and one who dies at the cross, and that men need a security of a God who is of a higher kind and therefore have to conceive of a God who doesn't come down and comes down to suffer.

A God who by definition cannot suffer and die. And this is why I think that the Jewish community historically has rejected Jesus. How can that be God? It cannot be.

God is too noble to have done that. And how do they know that? Because they project from themselves what they would think appropriate to God seeing what they think appropriate to men. Man needs to be recognized in his nobility and his dignity.

How much more God? So how can this be God who will suffer such abuse, such rejection that that's horrendous and therefore we have the historic rejection of that Christ who is their God. And so we have the enormous task of communicating that error to a people who have paid for it historically so long and will yet pay again unless they can be turned to recognize that what they have rejected is in fact God. And maybe the only way that they'll see it is one more reenactment of a willing suffering for their sake as it is exhibited by the church.

And that's exactly what was the root of Paul's conversion. He saw that in Stephen, a man who was beneath his dignity. He was only a busboy.

He was not the prize student of the Rabbi Gamaliel. But the way in which that man suffered, the way in which he died, the magnanimity of that death, the graciousness, the last words, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge so struck Saul's heart that he could not spit it out. It was a revelation of something beyond the categories of religion.

It was a revelation of very God himself. What Stephen did was reenact the cross and the suffering for another and the ability to bear it without retaliating. Can you imagine when these stones are coming into your flesh? Well, what happens when someone stubs our toe? Gives us a dirty look, or we think it's a dirty look, or is indifferent to us, or we think is indifferent.

My Lord, we go, hey, why not? We can't bear it. How much more when stones actually thud into your flesh and you can hear your nose bone break and the blood runs into your eyes and into your mouth and you're just a battering ram for this process of death and not once react against it except to say, lay not this sin to their charge. No man is capable of that kind of magnanimity except by the life that was released by him who suffered it first, Jesus, and whose life was imparted to him who believed and lived in it, Stephen.

And now what Paul missed by not being there at Calvary, he's seeing reenacted before his own eyes for his sake. And though he may not with his mind as brilliant as he was have understood it, the reality and the power of it is incontrovertible. It has got to be communicated and it is telling.

It becomes event even against the unwilling Pharisee that Saul was in all of his self-righteousness and his zeal, quote, for God. But what God was it? The God of his own Pharisaical imagining and not the God who is God who revealed himself at the cross. Here comes this revelation and finally catches up with him until the resurrected and ascended Christ has got to say, why do you kick against the cross? Well, it may be that in this first martyrdom, four Jews and a supreme Jew, Saul, who are going to see again what it would take to bring the remnant of Israel back to God that concludes the age.

It's not going to be by four spiritual men. It's not going to be by some convenience of spiritual principles and how to get saved. It's going to be by a demonstration that we missed historically 2,000 years ago and evidently need to see reiterated again, not hypothetically, but actually by men who are people of the cross and who will not only suffer it, but counted all privilege and all glory.

Why didn't Stephen feel the thud of the stones? He was so in the heavenly realm already, the heaven was open to him, not just in that final moment of suffering, but characteristically as the man of the spirit. And there was Jesus rising to receive him and which implies reward and the great tribute that one of us prayed for, that the one thing we want to hear when it's time is, well done, good and faithful servant. Imagine to be caught up to the Lord with that great eternal phrase sounding in your spirit and not shame, but honor, glory, distinction because you have obeyed God and have suffered in that obedience and now well done, good and faithful servant.

Whether you're a Stephen, whether you're a preacher, whether you're a public figure, whether you're an unseen intercessor, God will honor your obedience and the suffering of it as much as the most conspicuous and celebrated heroes that are publicly employed. The joy that comes with that eternal acknowledgement and the anticipation of it enables us to bear the suffering that precedes it. We need to study Stephen, so to understand what precipitated that anger unto death and against him and what was

revealed in the bearing of it that released Saul from the imprisonment to a religious unreality that made him a murderer and will make other men murderous and turned him to be the great apostle of the faith is really a picture of how the remnant of Israel will be brought into its own apostolical at the end of the age because it's Christ crucified, the suffering Christ, crucified, risen and ascended that is opposed.

So that antichrist is not just a general rejection of Christ, but the rejection of the crucified Christ and the insistence on a God who may be called Christ, but is not the sufferer. Some celebrated and imagined figure more in keeping with what we think a lofty God to be. So that antichrist spirit abhors the cross and this theologian goes on to talk about this kind of religion is at the heart of society.

This has got to do with the whole status quo, the whole world is calibrated and structured around this, the place of the pope, the papacy, Catholicism, world religions, world faiths that are honored and celebrated and that we can find some basis for ecumenical agreement and share a common moral concern for uplifting mankind. All of that is calculatedly opposed to God and yet it comes in the name of God. It despises the cross.

His baptism was the depiction of the cross. His going down as the son of man to fulfill all righteousness was a statement to the father and to the witnesses on the bank of the Jordan and to the powers of darkness that I'm commencing my ministry as the son of God, but it's not going to be predicated on my ability. Though I am supremely the son of man and could have made an impressive show of it, on that basis I'm going down unto a death to my own humanity.

I will never seek to serve the father on that basis at all. And when he came up from that death, the spirit of God came upon him as the source now of his life and being and service. And that he was driven by that spirit into the wilderness for a suffering of 40 days of self-denial and being tempted to come off from that ground was the very commencement of the life of Jesus and that brought him inevitably and to the end to the cross.

He began with the cross and he ended with the cross. His every act was an act of self-denial. It was a cross enactment.

It was the spirit of crucifixion before the crucifixion in fact came, which is really a statement of how we ought to live and have our being. And in fact, if we're not living that consistently, will we end that? Is the end going to be some kind of magical flourish that we will be able to be Stephens when we have failed all of the previous requirements to give, to deny ourselves, to bear insult, injury, rejection? It's got to be what the theologians call a cruciform end. Lifestyle.

And the name for that, when men do it together, is community. A cruciform lifestyle is community. It's the cross.

It's suffering. It's the flesh catching it. And that's why it is rightly rejected.

Men are only too happy to learn that communities bite the dust and that they have failed. They want that confirmation that it cannot work. So they are absolved from any necessity themselves to walk the cruciform lifestyle.

What is Sunday midweek Bible study normative Christianity? In the deepest sense of what we're speaking, the avoidance of the cross. It is so constituted that there's little possibility for the kinds of conflict and cross situations that come when God's people live consistently and intensively together on the daily

basis. And there's not pattern on the church that was a glory at the first, but a religious mode more in keeping with a world system that likes a religion that is a Sunday phenomenon, that is polite in the foyers of the church, that makes nice and yes, how are you and all that kind of thing, but does not reveal God or the power of God.

So this kind of religion corresponds to the critical disestablishment of Christianity from the bourgeois religions of the particular societies in which that theism has predominated. This is the kind of language that these theologians use. It's perfectly meaningful.

And I could just slowly say that bourgeois religions, middle-class religions, self-serving religions, by whatever name, that have to do with the concepts of men. And when the cross is exhibited, it challenges or destroys the idols of national political religions. And that's why men like Kennedy or, who's the present incumbent, Clinton, always have a show of religion.

Their Sunday churchgoers, Bush was an Episcopalian, Reagan, all of these men have a form of religion on their shoulder. But it's the kind that is so caught up with the bourgeois, worldly life and view of reality and power. And that's why, however despicable our life is becoming, you never hear from the White House, let's seek the Lord.

Let's call a season of fasting and repentance and the seeking of God. We have come to crises of such a kind. Our culture is so degraded.

Our legal system is so emasculated. Our economy is so threatened. We have problems overseas in former Yugoslavia that we are unable to solve.

We've come to an impasse. Our mechanisms cannot any longer work. We need to seek God, but we don't hear that because the God to which they subscribe is not in fact God, but a Sunday sanctifying form of religious confirmation to a world system whose author is from below and not from above.

Now we're not just challenging differing religious systems, we are challenging by such a cross-centered life the system itself. We are challenging and when you touch any aspect of it, the whole anti-Christ thing rises up. That's why in Acts 16, when Paul and Silas only delivered a single woman who brought her masters much gained by soothsaying, she had the spirit of divination, and they used her commercially and made much profit.

Or those who made metal images in Ephesus and their fortunes were predicated on the goddess Diana making all of that. When the truth came and their system was challenged and their source of profit, the foundation of their life economically, socially, politically, culturally, religiously, then these men can strip the clothing off the one who has blown the whistle and bring them before the magistrates, the rulers, who will beat them to within an inch of their life and throw them into dungeons or say that they're not fit to live. You really need to understand the whole system predicated on that which is cross-avoiding, that has its religious forms and is totally integrated into a political, social, and economic form, and is opposed to the truth of God.

If you move in cross-centeredness, invariably you're going to be brought to a place where you challenge that system, and when you do, the foe will fly. And you'll see an indignation and an anger and bitterness that is totally inexplicable, except that you understand it's the anti-Christ spirit that is coming against you because what has been struck is threatened. Maybe that's the reason why Jewish people insist on

monotheism and think that they're doing God's service, as if they're defending the one God and the one Lord.

And I say to them, but the Shema Yisrael is not to reinforce you in your narrow and singular monotheistic view because God is not mono, he's triune, and that what we're told is, Shema Yisrael, the Lord your God is one Lord in his unity, not in his monotheistic singularity that you like and is in keeping with your system. And they're clutching that because to give that up is to give up the whole ground and the foundation of a way of life and a mode of being. And I'm saying again that the only and the most powerful revelation of God in three persons was at the cross.

The father who called for the son's obedience unto death had to avert his face. The son who obeyed and the emptying of himself unto death and the performing of it not by a human heroism but by the eternal spirit. So all three persons of the Godhead remarkably at play in the supreme moment of God's greatest revelation as he devised it out of his own wisdom and choice.

And all that he could have done, in any ways that he could have represented and expressed himself, this is the way that he chose. So anyone who says resurrection of the dead says God. On the other hand, anyone who says God and does not hope for the resurrection of the dead and a new creation from the righteousness of God has not said God.

What other belief in God can be held by those who are dead unless it is resurrection faith? So the cross and the resurrection inextricably joined and we have the one to the proportion that we have the other. To say resurrection without the cross is only to intone an abstract term. It has no power, no cognacy, no penetration.

But to say resurrection because you say cross is to have God and to exhibit God and to have the hope of God and to have the resurrection faith. So can we have such a faith in an abstract way without in some measure experiencing what is represented at the cross? Can we know resurrection power without cross humiliation and emptying? And that's why I just want to end, leave this for most of us. To hold this abstractly is to do a disservice to God.

It would be better if we had never considered it than to make this another religious fad, another employment, another playing with terms, a doctrine. God has called us to an awesome reality and he did not offer it to us in some abstract way by having it in the scripture as a principle. It's in the scripture but it's descriptive of what he himself set forth in his own suffering.

It was God crucified. It was God who became man that he could suffer as a man the humiliation in obedience to the father that makes a man a man, that makes a man true man, not in the distorted visions of men as the world pervades it, but as God makes him know this is man. Behold the man.

When you behold the man you behold the God. Because God could never have revealed himself abstractly but only in a man who is obedient in his humanity unto death. And that's why the end of the age waits on again the same revelation.

Not abstractly, not verbally, but in fact through a man, a corporate man, the body of Christ, willing for the same emptying and the same going down as was exhibited by the first, calling many sons to glory through the same way in which he was exalted and obtained glory through his suffering unto death. And everything now and in these days and all of our days is given of God to that man. The cross, life, waits to be affirmed

and to be embraced.

Not some morbid way here. Lord this is truth, this is reality, this is life. The world is at enmity with you.

There's a tremendous demonstration that yet needs to be made in an unbelieving world that is not impressed with our phony baloney. It needs to see God as you yourself exhibited him once in point of time and need again at the end to do it again. Be assured you're not only going to be tested but you'll be mocked.

And you'll be mocked by those who are quote in the faith and closest to you. So you're in the terrible tension of wanting to throw the whole thing over and not even make the pretense of an attempt at the reality. So much do the powers of darkness despise this centrality and want to bring us to a place where we ourselves would be contentious of it and cast it over and make our surrender to something of a lesser kind, of being good Christians, even charismatic and making no pretense about the cross.

And that would be tragic. So we need to pray for each other that we would be steadfast and recognize this centrality and welcome its restoration and welcome the testings and the humiliating stumblings and failings until this thing is established. We will be able to be the Stephens of our own generation.

So Lord Jesus, precious God, we make that a prayer. This is anything but a definitive or exhaustive statement of the centrality of the cross. It's a first statement.

It's the first examination. It's a first beginning of a probe of something, my God, so central and yet so limited. So cast aside, so turned into something else, so sentimentalized, so made a piece of church decoration or a lame piece of jewelry, Lord.

We're asking your wonderful mercy and grace that you would help us to the appropriation of this cross as lifestyle, as a mode of being, as a willingness, my God, by the power of your life to bear something, to learn to endure, to suffer humiliations and to walk in an obedience, my God, that will bring us invariably to it. Help us, precious God, Jesus. May your life be in the words, my God, that we have shared and considered and discussed.

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