

The Cross of Christ - Part 1

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the cross of Christ in understanding God and ourselves, and calls for a revolution of concept and a deeper comprehension of the crucified Christ.

Duration: 55:59

Scripture: Matthew 27:37

Topics: "Cross of Christ", "Suffering and Redemption", "The Cross"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the profound significance of the Cross of Christ, illustrating how it reveals both the nature of God and the reality of human existence. He argues that our failures, divisions, and misunderstandings stem from a distorted perception of God, which can only be rectified by confronting the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Katz highlights that true faith and understanding of God arise from recognizing the depth of suffering and the abandonment experienced by Christ, which challenges our conventional views of success and spirituality. He calls for a return to the Cross as the foundation of Christian faith, urging believers to embrace the reality of suffering as a means to true liberation and understanding. Ultimately, he posits that the Cross is not just a symbol but the very essence of God's revelation to humanity.

Transcript

over his head his accusation written, this is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, saying, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself.

If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him. For he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, that is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there when they heard that said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightaway one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and

gave him to drink.

The rest said, Let me, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had tried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.

And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly saying, Truly, this was the Son of God. My thesis tonight and in these days is that the root of our ills, our divisions and strife ambitions, our fears, our spirit of independency, our jealousies, are the results of the failure to radically apprehend God.

We don't know him as we ought. And because we have failed in that apprehension, we don't know ourselves either. Because the two revelations are always joined.

And it's beautifully set forth in the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah, when the prince of the prophets is given an occasion to glimpse the Lord high and lifted up. And in that he cries, Woe is me, I am undone. If there's going to be a rectification in the way in which we perceive ourselves, we need first to rectify the way in which we perceive God.

And I have a sneaky suspicion that there's a great deal of subjective musing, and viewpoints, and projection of things human unto God. I don't know how kind conscious we are that there's a degree to which we make God in our own image. And to whatever degree that image of God is distorted, so are we also.

Another thing that brings us to the cross, beside the place in which to glimpse God radically and ultimately, is that here too is found the power to liberate us from vanity, from ambition, from power, from fear. Because here's a glimpse of truth, suffering ultimately, and therefore here also is the profoundest capacity to set men free. I don't understand the mystery, but I know this.

There's something about the nature of suffering that has the greatest capacity to reveal truth. I've read recently of an account of a Jewish psychiatrist, a Viennese, who was the victim of years in a concentration camp. And in it he gives the account of how he used to muse.

In days past when he enjoyed the prosperity and the advantage of his culture and position of attending the theater in Vienna, he would then go to a sidewalk cafe with his friends, and over coffee and torta, they would examine the play. They thought that that was ultimate reality. I speak that wistfully because there was a time not so past that that was my own life.

But he said, in the light of my present experience in the concentration camp, in the unspeakable torture and agony of my life, in the continual threat of the question of survival day by day, he said, looking back on that time, I perceived that I was a man utterly deceived. And that what I thought to be reality was utter deception. And now in the fierce conditions of my life, stripped to the utter bone, hanging on to every breath for the question of survival daily, I am beginning to perceive what are the ultimate questions that constitute reality.

There's a reason why an unbenighted Gentile, a Roman soldier, standing at the base of the cross and glimpsing the ultimate suffering of Jesus, cried out, truly this was the Son of God. Something happened.

He saw something.

He glimpsed something that revealed the reality about Jesus, which somehow was lost to his own religious Jewish kinsmen. I think there's a necessity for us to return to that place of the cross and the issue of suffering because it contains also the issue of reality. And as I travel in the small places that God gives us to serve him and see the painful instances of the division and brokenness and fragmentation of the body of Christ in Israel, in Yugoslavia, Germany, and places like that, as well as our own country, I know that if answer comes and reconciliation comes, it must come on the basis of the gospel of Jesus Christ and at the cross of Christ Jesus.

Somewhere in this book, the writer says the church must demonstrate what it really believes and hopes about the man from Nazareth who was crucified and rose again. And I believe myself that now more than any other time in modern history, the issue of the crucified Christ is the issue of God is the issue. That's not a little fanciful play on words, but I don't know of another time in history when God has surfaced in such proportion as now, when God is no longer a Sunday matter, when secular issues have become spiritual issues, when the questions that pertain to Israel for the first time can be resolved if the leaders of nations will turn to what God has written pertaining to it by men professing to be believers, both as heads of the state of Israel and the head of the state of the United States.

We're coming to a conclusion of the age and a God who has hidden himself is somehow insinuating himself now in all of the issues. And I think that if you'll understand this, and I don't have time to speak more about it, you will see why it is that we shall be increasingly despised for his namesake in the earth. Where those who tolerated us in times past as some kind of idol minority that has its clinics and its conferences and in Sunday Christianity will constitute a threat to the status quo, a very dangerous group of irrational human beings who somehow look to the heaven for their salvation in an age of increasing crisis and trial.

And yet most believers have no awareness of this whatsoever. Most Christians are fixed still or fixated at the salvational level and have not progressed beyond first principles. What is needed is a revolution of concept of God and a deep comprehension of the crucified Christ in the light of his resurrection.

And the biggest hindrance to this, in my opinion, is our antipathy, our unwillingness to face the issues that pertain to suffering, even as a subject. I don't think that there's any accident that that's true of God's people at the same time when prosperity has never been more lauded among them. And where they're encouraged and in fact told to look for the signs of affluence as the very evidence of God's blessing for their lives.

So suffering is not a pretty subject and it's not a popular subject. And because we have not a disposition to face it, we have shrunk also from considering the cross. And I think that this is tragic and scandalous because there's a terrible disparity between the things that would profess as believers and what is the actual content of our lives.

I'm stunned and amazed even to learn that in ministerial homes and families that one thing can be proclaimed from the pulpit and yet another kind of logic and another kind of reason prevails in their actual important decision making. Even in this trip where we've been in Israel, Yugoslavia before coming here, I've heard out of the mouths of such ministerial people things that you would expect to hear from bourgeois middle-class folk when it comes to the security or the well-being of their own children and their hopes for their own future and their success. I think this too is a reflection of the fact that we have drifted

away from the cross, that such a terrible disparity should exist.

It's interesting that we can give a certain appearance of spiritual comeliness and well-being in an atmosphere like this, in the beautiful presence of God and the spirit of worship, but how long will it take before the grace feels back into our faces or the true condition of our life surfaces that has to do with such mundane things as the way in which our own children behave. Our professions are one thing, but little children tyrannizing our households are another. And we have not the power or the savvy or the maturity to deal with such things as that, yet find ourselves quite able and even eloquently to speak of things that pertain to the gospel and to the charismatic life.

God is after a consistency in our life, and we shall not attain to it short of a deeper knowledge of the cross of Christ Jesus. Because though I'm a fool and couldn't give you explicit reasons for the things that I'm saying, I know that the issue of disorderly children is the issue of the cross, because the issue is not the children but the parent, who somehow cannot bring themselves to exercises of discipline because of a disposition to self-indulgence in themselves, and are unwilling to face up to something that is difficult and painful. The issue of pain is the issue of suffering, is the issue of the cross, is the issue of the gospel.

And it's all linked together if we are to face it maturely and come to a reality in God in which we can set forth a kingdom by which men can be called unto repentance. If you've understood what I've just said, you can say amen. Oh, hallelujah.

Thank you. It's interesting, though, that we shrink from the issue of suffering, yet the world goes on and suffering increases. Not only the suffering of the saints, which was alluded to tonight and for which I'm grateful, but the suffering of mankind on a massive scale.

And we know that the only answer to such suffering is the gospel of the cross, and yet we who proclaim it shrink even from the consideration of suffering as an issue. This German theologian writes, unless it apprehends the pain of the negative, Christian hope cannot be realistic and liberating. We desperately need the revolution of all religious, cultural, and political values which proceed from the true apprehension of the crucified Christ.

The cross is the test of everything which deserves to be called Christian. There's a word that I love in the Christian lexicon. It's the word apostolic.

I don't know why it is, but every time that I sounded or hear it sounded, I salivate. And our brother Derek spoke about restoration as the theme of this age, and I know that that is true. And the restoration for which my own soul cries is the restoration of apostolic reality, which cannot be found independent of the cross.

And the failure to have that quality of life and reality has already resulted in monstrous casualties among our youth and in broken marriages and families, in fallen ministers and rebellious wives, and in a spreading blight of weary indifference that is to be found today in Christendom. Our Christianity is degenerating into a middle-class culture, a folklore, a comfortable nostalgia, a vacuous praise club in the avoidance of the cross of Christ Jesus. The failure to move into this fullness, this apostolic reality, must eventuate in a stagnant faith with the likelihood of eventual unbelief.

Only God knows the actual number of professing Christians whose lives and families are lived as effectual atheists now. I've already given you an illustration that when it comes to the effectual issues of our life, on what basis are such issues made? That determines whether in actuality we're living as believers or as

atheists. For many of us, our religion is a kind of a cultural preference, but there's no substantive difference in our lives from the lives of those lived in the world about us.

I don't know that I'm exaggerating, but you weigh what I'm saying. I may well be understating the ills of present Christendom, but there's something in my heart that says that when the answer is to be found, it'll be found at the cross and at no other place. In this terrible spiral downwards, where the sacred can no longer be distinguished from the profane, more and more manipulation is required to provide some semblance of life against the gray weight of such numbers as I'm describing in the congregations called Christian churches.

That's one of the reasons why we're seeing increasingly a kind of manipulation in our religious life. Desperate men somehow having to face gray congregations and whip up or produce in such contexts something that will make an hour on Sunday passable. Another symptom, in my opinion, this increasing spirit of religious manipulation that reflects the absence of the knowledge and the life and reality of God's people.

Another phenomenon that we see increasingly is the legalism of God's people. As I said recently, I think to a congregation in Yugoslavia, a Pentecostal congregation, you don't have to be Jewish to be legalistic. In fact, the great irony is that so many of us professing to be new covenant people live under a quality of law and are not even aware of it.

If your religious life has something to do with your own activity before God as a basis for your justification before him, that's legalism. And if you can have an eye to see and a sense to perceive these kinds of realities, you can see them working even in Pentecostal congregations where there's something cathartic in what is called worship, something emotional, people getting a kind of relief, something being obtained on a Sunday night that somehow needs to pacify or to stand in the stead of a weak properly lived in God. It becomes a kind of a labor, a weary sweating and a striving, which is another name for legalism and the very antithesis of what God died to save us from.

All of these things, in my opinion, pointing to a need to restore the knowledge of the cross of Christ Jesus for our generation. In the fundamental churches, therefore, one is likely to find in the phrase of this theologian, biblicism without liberating preaching. In Pentecost, the reiteration of its own distinctives, things that pertain to the Holy Spirit long ago abandoned in their own experience.

I think one of the most melancholy things of the present Pentecostal movement is its nostalgia and its references to the past and its efforts to seek to recapture something of the sense of things that have gone by, but are no longer the realities of their present life. In the charismatic realm, a tendency toward sing-song superficiality and human system making. I don't know how much to say about that, but there is a cry for reality.

And many of us who have not found it in our Pentecostal churches or our fundamental churches have been intoxicated and drawn to what seemed to us the hope of reality under the name of community or relationship or discipleship or submission and authority. True, blessed, holy, sacred principles of God, which in our enthusiasm and in a field to obtain, we have gone about to a great degree in our own effort to perform. And it has not brought the desired reality.

Not that God is against the principles, but I believe that they need to be fulfilled by the operation of its own life organically in that which springs forth by the principle of death working unto life at the cross of Christ

Jesus. I've almost come to a point where I'm suspicious to enter a room now where the banner of the Holy Spirit is its predominant decoration. It's as if we have copped out the banner of Christ and have sought to find in the birds every kind of solace, comfort, and answer which God intends fundamentally first and foremost to be found in the cross.

But for some reason it's easier to come to the dove than it is to the cross. And I don't want to posit the one against the other, but there's a priority and a centrality of the cross, which if we escape and sidestep, we make of the precious dove of God, which is the spirit of truth, a kind of a companion piece to our life, a utensil, a utility, and not the holy thing which it represents. All of these unhappy things are taking place, in my opinion, in the church at a time when the church should be preparing itself for an hour, when it should rise up as the visible place of refuge in a soon coming age of distress.

So these are not light questions, but significant for God's people to consider. Well, if there's some measure of truth to what I'm saying, how is the cross then to be approached that we might have some reasonable knowledge about what's represented there? My God, my God, Jesus cried out, why hast thou forsaken me? I've never understood that cry, and I don't know that I understand it now. But in the mystery of the cross, there's something about the abandonment of God that somehow pertains to us also.

And if we are to come to the cross with knowledge, understanding, and obtain from it reality and change, there's something that needs to be first abandoned in us that has to do with self-justification, self-affirmation, and even the deification of our own lives in some of the hokey and sentimentalized notions that we have about God and about the cross. Sometimes I see the crosses in Europe of Jesus stretched out on them. He almost looks like a ballet dancer.

There's something aesthetic rather than agonizing which is depicted there. And somehow, I don't know why it is, there's a propensity in us which is human, all too human, which tends to blunt or minimize or dull or sentimentalize and somehow invalidate the ugliness and the horror and the pain and the suffering of what God wants to register upon our consciousness that was experienced by him in the cross and to which, in some measure, we ourselves are invited. This writer says, in the cross, God justifies the godless and justifies them alone.

One must become godless oneself and abandon every kind of self-deification in order to recognize the God who reveals himself in the crucified Christ. We've had some remarkable experiences in community, in life together. God has sent us precious saints, many of whom would look to be models of charismatic perfection.

But it's amazing what the stresses and demands of our life together have revealed. One precious young one who is living in my own house now, a Japanese young lady who was an elementary school teacher, was for the first weeks of her time with us just a picture of everything that could be desired in a precious believer. I never saw her out of sorts.

I never saw any kind of distemper. I never saw her ruffled. She always maintained the sweetest appearance, was always the epitome of a saint who was overcoming and dwelling continually in the victory of Christ.

Until the day came that she threw a shoe at my wife and came completely unglued, and that lovely little porcelain face cracked. I wonder how many of us are wearing porcelain faces. I wonder how many of us are living out a Christian life under some self-assumed notion of what we ought to be as saints, of how we

think that we ought to walk, of what we think would be decorous or polite or spiritual.

How many of us are all sweetness and light on the surface of our porcelain lives when beneath is all kinds of tumult and disorder, savage passions, and every other kind of unresolved thing which we don't like ourselves to acknowledge, let alone to confess. I'll tell you why I'm saved today, folks. I wasn't looking for God.

I was the fiercest kind of atheist, but I was seeking for reality and truth. And the God of reality and truth found me. And He's the God of reality and truth still, who has painfully and expensively poured out His life and His blood that we might enter such realms with Him in spirit and in truth.

And I can't think of anything more cruel, more of a trespass on the blood of the Son of God, than we should live some kind of mock pseudo-spiritual life, impressing one another when inside is another kind of reality because we have not come truly to the cross of Christ Jesus. I believe with all my heart that this is an hour of restoration and that this must be raised first for the saints of God. Maybe you've noted the character of our modern evangelism, which has so little to do with the appeal to repentance, but has very much to do with self-gratification and the egocentric interests of those to whom it appeals.

If you accept Jesus, it will go well for you. You need this, you need that. Financial security, husband, wife, bodily health, accept Jesus.

I'm not disparaging the precious blessings and gifts that God gives, but I don't think that ought to be made the appeal and the basis for which one is invited to become a Christian. It's the cross, folks. This precious Japanese saint has been brought to an existential crisis, and a crack has run right through her porcelain exterior.

I'll tell you, for the weeks that followed, she was not easy to live with. It was painful to live with this gray lump who once shone forth a kind of effervescence and light, and now was somehow growing her way through in some kind of desperate valley of decision in coming to a confrontation with the stark cross of Christ. I want to tell you it was worth all of the agonizing and the groaning.

It was worth all of the pain and the discomfort because she's coming now into reality, which is an unspeakable glory and a true showing forth of His light. I can't somehow block this experience out of my consciousness, and I have to wonder to what degree, to what extent, how many among us are there who are living porcelain lives that have not yet cracked, have yet to enter into the realities of God. This writer says, to restore Good Friday in all its horror and godlessness, it is necessary for Christian faith, first of all, to abandon the traditional theories of salvation, which have made the way the cross is spoken of in Christianity a mere habit.

I don't know how it was with you, but in the earliest days of my Christian life, as I learned the curriculum or the theology or the catechism of atonement, somehow it was not quite real for me. I was taught and I was instructed and I saw it in the scriptures, and I know that one had to die and I knew that there was a requirement for the shedding of blood, but somehow the reality touched me not. And I wonder if that's been true for many of us.

We've been inducted into a kind of cerebral understanding of what was worked at the cross, but existentially, actually, deeply, truly, we've not yet come to a true apprehension. And because of that, our entire Christian life has suffered. There's a horror and a godlessness about the cross.

That somehow we have been spared from seeing, which I think that we need to confront. Christianity is eminently the religion of the cross, and yet even among religious Christians, many were astonished that his visage was so marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men. I wonder how many of you have seen the famous painting that the Sisters of Mary so celebrate called the Eisenheim Altar, the Grunwald painting of the crucifixion of Jesus.

It's available at their book display. I saw it first as an atheist 15 years ago, hitchhiking around Europe with a pack on my back, seeking for answers to my desperate life, and went there at the suggestion of a German artist whom I encountered on the way, and stood transfixed before the ugliest painting upon which I had ever set eyes. I have a debt of gratitude to that German man that I'll never be able to pay, because that painting was a distinct contrast from all of the depictions of Jesus, which I had seen as a Jewish young man growing up in New York.

All of the soppy paintings, all of the, I imagine, every hair wishfully set in place, that never conveyed to me any reality that would challenge me as a Jew, was in one stroke dissolved when I stood before this Holy Spirit masterpiece to behold the ugliest thing that I had ever gazed upon, wondering whether I was looking at a man on the cross or some kind of deranged animal so grotesquely broken and distorted. White lips and eyes sunk in their orbits in dark circles, and all of the grimace and paroxysm of pain written in death in that face, pieces of wooden metal stuck in the flesh from the flagellation, encrusted blood and spittle, and it was a horror. But I was transfixed and my consciousness was arrested.

As I think that all of our consciousnesses need to be, or we will somehow fall short both of the meaning and the ministry that God has for us through what he suffered there. The cross has always been an unappetizing subject. It has always been unrespectable and perverse.

The Romans always disdained it and felt that the idea of a crucified God to whom veneration and worship was due was totally inappropriate to God. And I wonder how many of us unconsciously have adopted that Roman mentality, that at one level we give assent to the doctrine, but in the deepest level where our life is really lived, we feel that the horror of what was worked on the cross is somehow inappropriate to God. It's unrespectable, perverse, un-aesthetic.

Judaism found it so. The idea that a condemned blasphemer had risen from the dead was bound to conflict with the righteousness of God that was revealed in the law. How it must boggle every mind.

What a contradiction to our every human view of what God ought to be and what true religion ought to be and what walking circumspectly before God ought to be. I think God in his great genius established something at a point of time outside the camp in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago that was calculated to boggle and to stagger every human mind and to destroy every human concept. That no man could come on the basis of his own reckoning or rationality or understanding.

He had to come devastated and brought only by the revelation of the Holy Spirit to what was worked on that cross because he was one to whom God could show the meaning of that horror, being of a broken and contrite spirit that will not let me go. I have a sneaky suspicion that nothing less than the same kind of revelation of the mystery of suffering is going to reveal the Son of God to my own Jewish people in a dying world in the last generation. Bumper stickers are not going to do it and campaigns and rallies, but there is something about the nature of ultimate suffering that reveals ultimate reality and truth.

Have you made your own peace with the scandal of the cross? I think that it is patently impossible for anyone to do it except they be a sinner. Somehow those who are perverse never had difficulty in comprehending the meaning of the cross. Only those who are Judaistic or whose lives were established in a Roman cultural perspective.

The only way to apprehend the cross is as a sinner. Have you made your peace with the scandal of the cross and would you suffer expulsion and death in your identification with it? Until the cross ceases to be in modern times a harmless symbol and common decoration and returns again to being an offense, we will hardly be more than a Sunday supplement to the world. That's cat speaking, not the author of this book.

I want to repeat that. Until the cross ceases to be in modern times a harmless symbol and common decoration, even the world now dangles it around its neck and returns again to being an offense, we will be hardly more than a Sunday supplement to the world. The cross celebrates weakness, helplessness, pitiful abandonment and contradicts and threatens all conventional values.

That everything that the lords of this earth despise, everything that crosses the grain of their own wisdom and understanding and the values which they uphold, even in Jewish life with which I'm so familiar, talks about the values of this life and preferment and advancement and a life well lived and enjoyed and things that have to do with creature comfort and the advancement and the development of intellect and the attaining of position. All of these things are in direct collision with what is expressed in the mystery of the cross in weakness, helplessness, pitiful abandonment. The question is that we call ourselves Christians.

To what degree is our mindset and our true world view Judaistic, celebrating the values that are humanistic and worldly rather than what the cross itself celebrates and holds for us? Can the cross become the foundation for true faith until it is seen and received in its full meaning? This writer says that the cross is the utterly incommensurable factor in the revelation of God. We have become far too used to it. We have surrounded the scandal of the cross with roses.

We have made a theory of salvation out of it, but that is not the cross. The Christian faith which once conquered the world must also learn to conquer its own forms when they have become worldly. We have sentimentalized and distorted and taken the sting out of death, negated the centrality of suffering, and maybe we need to be exhorted again as Jesus exhorted his own disciples upon his resurrection.

Ought not the Messiah to have suffered before he ascended to his glory? O fools and slow of heart! Somehow there was something in them, I think more as men than as Jews, that staggered at the understanding of a suffering that precedes a glory. I think that we too share something of that mentality. There is a must, there is an ought of a suffering that precedes the ascending up to glory which somehow we are slow of heart to perceive.

We have sentimentalized and distorted and taken the sting out of death and negated the centrality of suffering and need in a revolutionary way to remember the crucified God. We must recall the event and make it for ourselves event and the event by which our faith originates. Somewhere in this book he says that true faith begins in the place where the atheist thinks that it ought to cease.

That's the cross. This pitiful picture of the God of glory hanging in complete helplessness and unspeakable suffering in a sky that has gone dark, surrounded by an audience of mockers and taunters and jeers, crying out the abandonment of my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And yielding up the ghost has got to be a picture that contradicts every possible human view of what a foundation for religion ought

to be. And until we have God's view of what that foundation is, which is given only at the cross, in my opinion, we can never have a correct view of our own selves and our own life.

Reality begins at the cross. Faith begins at the cross, at the place where the atheist suggests that it ought to cease. Is that the place where your faith has begun? Of all the subjects that God has ever given me to proclaim, I know that there's none more difficult than this, that God's people who can be rapturous and moved by other subjects somehow find it difficult to respond to the cross.

There seems to be a haze of unreality that surrounds this subject that is difficult to pierce. And I think for good reason. But I believe there's a God intent upon piercing it.

There's a God intent in this last hour upon having a true people whose exterior is not made of ceramic and who are not leading some delusory Christian life based on their own subjective impression of what they ought to be or how they ought to carry themselves. But they've come to such a breaking, such an utter pouring out of themselves, such an abandonment of every view and every notion which is available only in confrontation with the crucified Christ, that they have a place of beginning which is true and real and can eventuate in apostolic reality. This is the first of three messages, so don't feel that tonight you have to come pouring out of your seat.

But God is sounding a theme and he's going to continue it, I believe, in these next two speakings. Is that the cross where our faith substitutes break down? Our shallow amens and hallelujahs. Wisdom is abandoned to folly and here God is non-God.

Here is the triumph of death, the enemy, the non-church, the lawless, the blasphemer. Here Satan appears to triumph over God. Our faith must be born of nothingness.

All our human categories and projections abandoned, even as he was himself abandoned. All must go dark for us and become a night in the daytime of our comfortable religious understanding. Isn't that a picture of Jesus on the cross? And a darkness covers the earth from the sixth to the ninth hour.

And I would raise a question with you tonight. Word to God that I was speaking to the entire body of Christ. How many of us have a sufficient disposition, a willingness to suffer darkness that we would allow it to come upon our lives in a sense of a radical emptying out of our notions, our understanding, our walk, our categories, what we think discipleship is or submission or commitment.

That when the darkness ceases, it ceases by the light and the glory of God that triumphs out of that death. How many of you would be willing to suffer what this Japanese girl has suffered? How many would prefer to retain the measure of religious reality that they have? How many of you would invite God to apply the deepest application of the cross to your own life, your marriage, your family, your ministry, your walk. And that stark symbol that is at the heart of the reality of God would flush out and destroy because the cross is first, the place of death before it's the place of life.

Every unreality and every faked and posed thing. Maybe it's because I have advantage in my calling, not only to travel in different places in the world, but from church to church, congregation to congregation, denomination to denomination, body to body, that I'm concerned for the degree of imitation that I find in the present church. You hear men that sound so much like a certain model.

There was a season even where it became so sickening that there were so many male imitations of Kathryn Kuhlman, you could gag. And I see in some of these pastors and ministers a certain kind of

seeming humility, a new kind of approach to reality, one of the boys type of thing, lower tone of voice, which I know in my spirit is pure manipulation and put on. Our God is the God of reality and truth.

And there's a world that's dying for the want of it, freaking out because it cannot glimpse anywhere an alternative to its own dying society. And there's a God waiting to hear again that apostolic cry, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Here it is.

See, it's visible, tangible. You can touch it. It palpitates.

Look at the reality of it. Have you ever seen such faces? You can hear it in their voices and the resonance. Look at the way they walk and conduct themselves.

Look at the fearlessness of their lives. There's nothing faint. There's no false humility or timidity.

They're bold in God when God is bold. They're meek like, they're lamb-like, they're true, their love is fervent and not put on. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

I tell you that we shall not attain to that until there shall be many porcelain dolls smashed at the cross of Christ Jesus. Faith in the crucified Christ is a contradiction to all conceptions of everything that men have ever conceived, desired, and sought to be assured by the term God, and therefore also all conceptions of the righteousness, beauty, and morality of men. He saw the Lord high and lifted up, and he cried out, Woe is me, I am undone.

We shall never see ourselves truly until we glimpse him truly, and we shall never glimpse him truly except at the most radical revelation of his truth in that place of ultimate suffering unto death which came at the cross. It is the suffering of God in Christ which qualifies Christian faithless faith. I want to end where I began, with the centurion at the cross.

A Roman hack, a professional lackey, an insensitive lout whose profession was to nail men to wood, who's seen countless victims so killed and was utterly unmoved. A man who was schooled in a Roman mentality that celebrates pomp, grandeur, pageantry, and that divinized men and made of their emperors Caesars and gods. Men who came through triumphal arches in splendor and arrogance, whose lives were lived for sensual gratification, for lust and for power, and they were deified as gods.

Saw a pitiful human wreck a spectacle who yielded up the ghost, who saw the antithesis of everything that was celebrated by Rome in pain, suffering, humiliation, and death, and cried out truly, this was the Son of God. This writer says that the death of Jesus is a statement of God about himself. This death expresses God.

You want to be cured from sentimentalizing God, or having a distorted notion of him? Here, in this moment, in this ultimate moment of suffering, he can be glimpsed most accurately. The death of Jesus is a statement of God about himself, for ultimate suffering reveals ultimate reality, and the substance of a man's entire life can be revealed in his dying moment. Maybe this sounds alien and strange to our ears.

I don't know about our brother with the ministry in Eastern Europe. It would be not so strange to him. But have you ever considered that all of our life, and all of our walk, and all of our preparation in God may be for a moment? That somehow we're being prepared to die, and Jesus, who celebrated the woman who broke the alabaster box upon him, said that this is for my burial, for my body.

Though she poured it on his head, this is for my body being prepared for burial. I wonder if in the ultimate design of God, the final revelation, and chance, and choice to a dying world, to recognize the incarnation of God in flesh, is to have one more peek at the body of Christ in extremity and in suffering, not gnashing its teeth, and twisting, and trying to anguish itself to get off, but in sublime faithfulness to the God that has called them to share in that sufferance, in obedience, revealing the glory of God in humiliation and in suffering. Because that is God's nature, humility.

The crucified Jesus is the ultimate image of the invisible God. This is God, and God is like this. Here he has acted in himself.

Jesus was taunted on the cross. Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and maybe the final irony will be at the end of the age, just the opposite.

If this is the Son of God, if this is the body of Christ, if this is the revelation of the mystery of God incarnated in flesh that shall prove the truth of that one who came two thousand years before, not to invite him to come down from the cross, but to ascend up upon it and to remain, and we will believe on him. I'm waiting to hear a cry, not from a Roman centurion, but from my own Jewish people. Somehow we have failed to demonstrate to them the reality of God in Christ.

We somehow can't seem to touch that Jewish mainstream by biblical demonstration. They have not an ear to hear, nor to see, to consider. But the mystery that is revealed in suffering may be a key.

Those that are suffering redemptively for their sake, who will not come down from the cross, may evoke from them the same words, truly this is the body of Christ, truly this is the Son of God, truly my God lives, for I see the mystery and the meaning of his life revealed in them. Maybe we have subconsciously intuited these things, and that may be a reason why we have shrunk from considering the cross. Because we who are called by his name ought to walk even as he walked.

We have a sneaky suspicion that if there was an ought and a must for him, could it be that there's an ought and a must for us? Children, I just invite you to consider the cross of Christ Jesus in these days. Pray for revelation and be willing for a time of darkness to come over everything that is false, postured, imitative, sane in your own life. Meet him in a place of abandonment, but meet him truly that there might be an authentic apostolic reality in the earth again, to which men might be called to repentance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Will you pray with me to the measure that you sympathize with this, see the need for it or agree? Pray for what shall follow, the two speakings that I have left. Hallelujah, Lord, gracious God. You know, precious God, what has been invested in the speaking.

With greater pain and carefulness, Lord, than I've approached any other thing that's pleased you to speak through my mouth, and the prayer and the travail and the self-denial and the things that have been invested in the bringing forth of this word. If there has been some human admixture and some exaggeration and distortion, which has somehow been the projection of myself beyond your own intention, I ask you utterly to dissipate it, wipe it out, but to leave in the heart and mind and spirit and consciousness of every believer in this room, in the place of hearing, who has heard your divine deposit. Establish a resonance, Lord.

Sound the theme. Start something rumbling in the depths of the inner man that will not let us go. Something that will search us out through the night hours, that will bring back phrases to our consideration.

Mighty God, give us such a divine appetite for the reality of God in heaven. Give us courage also to approach near to the thing to which you are beckoning us. Bless what you've been pleased to express in this first speaking, Lord.

Fit us for the continuation of the conclusion. We just thank you and praise you with words that are so pitiful and inadequate, that you've given us something more than a subject matter for messages, a catechism or a theology. You've given us something so unspeakable, so expensive, something so difficult to apprehend and lay hold, that it would take your spirit, Lord, to impart to us its meaning.

Give us the heart and the courage to suffer the pain of understanding, and the changes, the radical changes that it must bring in our lives, in our bodies, in our fellowships, in our congregations. We thank you and praise you for a God of love who will not let us go. In Jesus' holy name.

Amen.

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