

The Divide of the Cross

by Watchman Nee

The sermon explores the transformative power of the Cross and resurrection, emphasizing the necessity of becoming new creations in Christ.

Scripture: Colossians 1:12

Topics: "New Creation", "The Cross and Resurrection"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the stark contrast between the kingdom of this world, dominated by Satan, and the new creation established through Christ's death and resurrection. He explains that the old creation, characterized by flesh and sin, cannot inherit the new kingdom, which requires believers to be transformed into new creatures. The Cross signifies the end of the old creation, while the resurrection introduces the new life in Christ, allowing believers to escape the dominion of the old world. Baptism serves as a powerful symbol of this transition, representing a conscious break from the old life and an entrance into the new life in Christ. Ultimately, Nee calls for a recognition of our identity in Christ and the necessity of living in the new creation.

Transcript

The kingdom of this world is not the kingdom of God. God had in His heart a world-system- a universe of His creating which should be headed up in Christ His Son (Col. 1. 16, 17). But Satan, working through man's flesh, has set up instead a rival system known in Scripture as "this world "-a system in which we are involved and which he himself dominates. He has in fact become " the prince of this world " (John 12. 3 1).

TWO CREATIONS

Thus, in Satan's hands, the first creation has become the old creation, and God's primary concern is now no longer with that but with a second and new creation. He is bringing in a new creation, a new kingdom and a new world, and nothing of the old creation, the old kingdom or the old world can be transferred to the new. It is a question now of these two rival realms, and of which realm we belong to.

The apostle Paul, of course, leaves us in no doubt as to which of these two realms is now in fact ours. He tells us that God, in redemption, "delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love " (Col. 1. 12, 13). But in order to bring us into His new kingdom, God must do something new in us. He must make of us new creatures. Unless we are created anew we can never fit into the new realm. " That which is born of the flesh is flesh "; and, " flesh and blood cannot inherit the

kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption " (John 3. 6 ; I Cor. 15. 5 0). However educated, however cultured, however improved it be, flesh is still flesh. Our fitness for the new kingdom is determined by the creation to which we belong. Do we belong to the old creation or the new? Are we born of the flesh or of the Spirit? Our ultimate suitability for the new realm hinges on the question of origin. The question is not 'good or bad?' but 'flesh or Spirit? ' " That which is born of the flesh is flesh ", and it will never be anything else. That which is of the old creation can never pass over into the new.

Once we really understand what God is seeking, namely, something altogether new for Himself, then we shall see clearly that we can never bring any contribution from the old realm into that new thing. God wanted to have us for Himself, but He could not bring us as we were into that which He had purposed; so He first did away with us by the Cross of Christ, and then by resurrection provided a new life for us. " If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature (mg. ' there is a new creation'): the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new " (2 Cor. 5.17). Being now new creatures with a new nature and a new set of faculties, we can enter the new kingdom and the new world.

The Cross was the means God used to bring to an end the old things' by setting aside altogether our 'old man', and the resurrection was the means He employed to impart to us all that was necessary for our life in that new world. " We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life " (Rom. 6.4).

The greatest negative in the universe is the Cross, for with it God wiped out everything that was not of Himself : the greatest positive in the universe is the resurrection, for through it God brought into being all He will have in the new sphere. So the resurrection stands at the threshold of the new creation. It is a blessed thing to see that the Cross ends all that belongs to the first regime, and that the resurrection introduces all that pertains to the second. Everything that had its beginning before resurrection must be wiped out. Resurrection is God's new starting-point.

We have now two worlds before us, the old and the new. In the old, Satan has absolute dominion. You may be a good man in the old creation, but as long as you belong to the old you are under sentence of death, because nothing of the old can go over to the new. The Cross is God's declaration that all that is of the old creation must die. Nothing of the first Adam can pass beyond the Cross ; it all ends there. The sooner we see that, the better, for it is by the Cross that God has made a way of escape for us from that old creation. God gathered up in the Person of His Son all that was of Adam and crucified Him; so in Him all that was of Adam was done away. Then God made, as it were, a proclamation throughout the universe saying: 'Through the Cross I have set aside all that is not of Me; you who belong to the old creation are all included in that; you too have been crucified with Christ!' None of us can escape that verdict.

This brings us to the subject of baptism. "Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death" (Rom. 6. 3, 4). What is the significance of these words? Baptism in Scripture is associated with salvation. " He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved " (Mark 16. 16). We cannot speak scripturally of 'baptismal regeneration ' but we may speak of ' baptismal salvation '. What is salvation? It relates not to our sins nor to the power of sin, but to the cosmos or world-system. We are involved in Satan's world-system. To be saved is to make our exit from his world-system into God's.

In the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, says Paul, " the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6.14). This is the figure developed by Peter when he writes of the eight souls who were "

saved through water " (1 Peter 3. 20). Entering into the ark, Noah and those with him stepped by faith out of that old corrupt world into a new one. It was not so much that they were personally not drowned, but that they were out of that corrupt system. That is salvation.

Then Peter goes on: " Which also after a true likeness (mg. 'in the antitype') doth now save you, even baptism" (verse 2 1). In other words, by that aspect of the Cross which is figured in baptism you are delivered from this present evil world, and, by your baptism in water, you confirm this. It is baptism " into his death ", ending one creation ; but it is also baptism " into Christ Jesus ", having in view a new one (Rom. 6. 3). You go down into the water and your world, in figure, goes down with you. You come up in Christ, but your world is drowned.

" Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved said Paul at Philippi, and " spake the word of the Lord to the jailer and his household. And he " was baptized, he and all his, immediately" (Acts 16. 31 - 34). In doing so, he and those with him testified before God, His people and the spiritual powers that they were indeed saved from a world under judgment. As a result, we read, they rejoiced greatly, " having believed in God ".

Thus it is clear that baptism is no mere question of a cup of water, not even of a baptistry of water. It is a tremendous thing, relating as it does both to the death and to the resurrection of our Lord; and having in view two worlds. Anyone who has worked in a pagan country knows what tremendous issues are raised by baptism.

BURIAL MEANS AN END

Peter goes on now to describe baptism in the passage just quoted as " the answer of a good conscience toward God " (1 Peter 3. 21 A.V.), Now we cannot answer without being spoken to. If God had said nothing we should have no need to answer. But He has spoken ; He has spoken to us by the Cross. By it He has told of His judgment of us, of the world, of the old creation and of the old kingdom. The Cross is not only Christ's personally Cross of His Son. It affirms that I am cut off from the old world and belong now to the new. So baptism is no small thing. It means for me a definite conscious break with the old way of life. This is the meaning of Romans 6. 2: "We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" Paul says, in effect, ' If you would continue in the old world, why be baptized? You should never have been baptized if you meant to live on in the old realm'. When once we see this, we clear the ground for the new creation by our assent to the burial of the old.

In Romans 6. 5, still writing to those who "were baptized " (verse 3), Paul speaks of our being " united with him by the likeness of his death ". For by baptism we acknowledge in a figure that God has wrought an intimate union between ourselves and Christ in this matter of death and resurrection. One day I was seeking to emphasize this truth to a Christian brother. We happened to be drinking tea together, so I took a lump of sugar and stirred it into my tea. A couple of minutes later I asked, 'Can you tell me where the sugar is now, and where the tea?' ' No', he said, 'you have put them together and the one has become lost in the other; they cannot now be separated.' It was a simple illustration, but it helped him to see the intimacy and the finality of our union with Christ in death. It is God that has put us there, and God's acts cannot be reversed.

What, in fact does this union imply? The real meaning behind baptism is that in the Cross we were 'baptized ' into the historic death of Christ, so that His death became ours. Our death and His became then so closely identified that it is impossible to divide between them. It is to this historic 'baptism'-this

God-wrought union with Him-that we assent when we go down into the water. Our public testimony in baptism to-day is our admission that the death of Christ two thousand years ago was a mighty allinclusive death, mighty enough and all-inclusive enough to carry away in it and bring to an end everything in us that is not of God.

RESURRECTION UNTO NEWNESS OF LIFE

If we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also by the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6. 5).

Now with resurrection the figure is different because something new is introduced. I am " baptized into his death ", but I do not enter in quite the same way into His resurrection, for, Praise the Lord! His resurrection enters into me, imparting to me a new life. In the death of the Lord the emphasis is solely upon 'I in Christ'. With the resurrection, while the same thing is true, there is now a new emphasis upon 'Christ in me'. How is it possible for Christ to communicate His resurrection life to me? How do I receive this new life? Paul suggests, I think, a very good illustration with these very same words: " united with him ". For the word 'united' (A.V. 'planted together') may carry in the Greek the sense of 'grafted' * and it gives us a very beautiful picture of the life of Christ which is imparted to us through resurrection.

*Note. Greek *sumphutos* 'planted or grown along with', 'united with'. The word is used in the sense of 'grafted' in Classical Greek. In the delightful illustration which follows, the analogy of grafting should Perhaps not be pressed too closely, for it is not quite safe to imply, without some qualification, that Christ is grafted into the old stock. But what parable can adequately describe the miracle of the new creation? ED.

In Fukien I once visited a man who owned an orchard of long-Zen trees. ** He had three or four acres of land and about three hundred fruit trees. I inquired if his trees had been grafted or if they were of the original native stock. 'Do you think', he replied, 'that I would waste my land growing ungrafted trees? What value could I ever expect from the old stock?'

**Note. long-ien (*Euphoria longana*) is a tree native to China. Its fruit resembles an apricot in size and has a round central stone, a dry, light brown, papery skin and a delicious white, grape-like pulp. It is eaten either fresh or dried, and is prized by the Chinese both for its flavour and for its food value.-ED.

So I asked him to explain the process of grafting, which he gladly did. 'When a tree has grown to a certain height', he said, 'I lop off the top and graft on to it.' Pointing to a special tree he asked, 'Do you see that tree? I call it the father tree, because all the grafts for the other trees are taken from that one. If the other trees were just left to follow the course of nature, their fruit would be only about the size of a raspberry, and would consist mainly of thick skin and seeds. This tree, from which the grafts for all the others are taken, bears a luscious fruit the size of a plum, with very thin skin and a tiny seed; and of course all the grafted trees bear fruit like it.' 'How does it happen?' I asked. 'I simply take a little of the nature of the one tree and transfer it to the other', he explained. 'I make a cleavage in the poor tree and insert a slip from the good one. Then I bind it up and leave it to grow.' 'But how can it grow?' I asked. 'I don't know', he said, 'but it does grow.'

Then he showed me a tree bearing miserably poor fruit from the old stock below the graft, and rich juicy fruit from the new stock above the graft. 'I have left the old shoots with their useless fruit on them to show the difference', he said. 'From it you can understand the value of grafting. You can appreciate, can you

not, why I grow only grafted trees?'

How can one tree bear the fruit of another? How can a poor tree bear good fruit? Only by grafting. Only by our implanting into it the life of a good tree. But if a man can graft a branch of one tree into another, cannot God take of the -life of His Son and, so to speak, graft it into us?

A Chinese woman burned her arm badly and was taken to hospital. In order to prevent serious contracture due to scarring it was found necessary to graft some new skin over the injured area, but the doctor attempted in vain to graft a piece of the woman's own skin onto the arm. Owing to her age and ill-nourishment the skin graft was too poor and would not 'take'. Then a foreign nurse offered a piece of skin and the operation was carried out successfully. The new skin knit with the old, and the woman left the hospital with her arm perfectly healed; but there remained a patch of white foreign skin on her yellow arm to tell the tale of the past. You ask how the skin of another grew on that woman's arm? I do not know how it grew, but I know that it did grow.

If an earthly surgeon can take a piece of skin from one human body and graft it on another,*** cannot the Divine Surgeon implant the life of His Son into me? I do not know how it is done. " The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit " (John 3. 8). We cannot tell how God has done His work in us, but it is done. We can do nothing and need do nothing to bring it about, for by the resurrection God has already done it.

God has done everything. There is only one fruitful life in the world and that has been grafted into millions of other lives. We call this the 'new birth'. New birth is the reception of a life which I did not possess before. It is not that my natural life has been changed at all ; it is that another life, a life altogether new, altogether Divine, has become my life.

God has cut off the old creation by the Cross of His Son in order to bring in a new creation in Christ by resurrection. He has shut the door to that old kingdom of darkness and translated me into the kingdom of His dear Son. My glorying is in the fact that it has been done-that, through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, that old world has " been crucified unto me, and I unto the world " (Galatians 6.14). My baptism is my public testimony to that fact. By it, as by my oral witness, my confession is made unto salvation " (Romans 10. 10).

***Note. Whatever question medical men may raise as to the account of this unusual incident, the statement which follows is not open to challenge. ED.

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