

At The Cross

The road to the cross was purposed, long before Jesus started up the hill to Jerusalem.

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem is 14 miles uphill. It is a climb of almost 4000 ft. Desert. Windy and windy. Jesus is heading for a destiny that has been on an eternal calendar long before the world began.

God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake. (1 Peter 1:20-NLT)

Days later, destiny is fulfilled at a passion and Passover meal, Jesus has moved deliberately into a garden. In a grove of olive trees, some of which today are almost 2,000 years old, Jesus prays.

Fast forward to the most horrifying moment, Jesus is horrified. Here we see an agonizing, straining and struggling Jesus. Jesus is facing fear. Jesus is wrestling with purpose. And Jesus is hoping for relief. **When you face fear, remember Jesus faced it too.**

He took Peter, James, and John with him, and He began to be deeply distressed and horrified. (Mark 14:33-34-HCSB)

Some, who call Jesus Savior, don't know that Jesus was more than anxious, he was afraid. When you sweat drops of blood, something is going on more than normal fear.

In Luke 22, we learn that the agony and angst was so intense, that pain and perspiration produced **his sweat was like the drops of blood falling to the ground.**

Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. The first one to hear Jesus' fear, was the Father. He could have convened a prayer meeting. He could have confided in his mom. He could have called the disciples.

How did Jesus handle the terror of crucifixion? Jesus went to his Father. As Jesus surrenders to Calvary's call, Jesus went to his Father with tears and terror.

David who faced difficulty had done that years before, “When I was afraid, I put my trust in you,,” (Psalm 56:3-NLT 1996)

The night that Jesus was arrested Satan had sealed off every exit.

Digging into the meaning of the text, we discover shockingly that Jesus was arrested by hundreds of soldiers. A minimum of a couple hundred of Rome’s best were dispatched to deal with a single preacher and his 11 associate preachers.

So Judas obtained a squad of soldiers and some officers of the chief priests and Pharisees. They came to the orchard with lanterns and torches and weapons. (John 18:3-NET)

The temple police were called to aid in making a proper arrest by identification. When they asked for Jesus ID, from those who came to arrest him, Jesus states, “I am He.”

The sound of eternity summons, and releases heaven’s power and his voice sends soldiers tumbling like dominos. This is Satan’s finest plan; this is Rome’s best soldiers; yet one word from Jesus and 200 fighting men fall. Collapse. Suddenly there is nothing but a noisy pile of shields, lamps, and swords hitting the ground.

Then surprise. Awe. Never forget, when Jesus speaks. Satan falls. Rome falls. Pharisees fall. And finally, one final question before 3 death benefits.

Why would heaven’s first and finest Son endure earth’s greatest suffering?

¹⁸ Because He Himself [in His humanity] has suffered in being tempted, He is able to help *and* provide immediate assistance to those who are being tempted *and* exposed to suffering. (Heb 2:18-Amp)

God wants you to know personally, Jesus has been there and done that, so he can offer immediate aid to anyone, anywhere, anytime, in any situation. Call on Jesus, he is ready to do the send Satan tumbling act again.

Jesus' death benefit offers each of us a message of hope to proclaim to others.
(Col 4:3-4-NIV)

Paul, who is in prison, writes these words. Pray for us. ³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message,

He is not saying, "open the door so I can get on with my life, my comfortable life." I think Paul is saying, "God will open the doors in the appropriate time." Can you live like that? How is that fruit in your life work? Patience?

Pray. Please pray. That God would open the door for the message. The message that burns inside that needs to be shared. The message?

Jesus' atoning death on a cross is the bridge.

Jesus became your substitutionary atoner.

Death benefits await the believer that trusts Christ.

Everyone's life would be better, if Christ were at the center.

Pray for an open door for the message of Christ.

And then he says, I am asking for this open-door prayer so we can...so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Paul is not complaining about his chains. Let's take an eternal truth and put it on the real: Sometimes it costs to be a follower of Jesus. Sometimes it costs something to be Christ's servant.

How about you? Are you a complainer as a Christian? God is either Sovereign and running the show, or you are a complainer about how God is doing. Some of you need to quit calling fouls on God. You need stop letting others know, you are just plain unhappy with the show that God is running.

That is so unlike Jesus. That is so unattractive. Are you wondering if you are a complainer? Ask your spouse. Ask your spouse. Ask God.

Make no mistake, your complaining is being noticed by others. Christians and non-Christians, and you are leaving an influence one way or another. Positive or negative? **Do all things without grumbling or disputing (Phil 2:14)**. Paul is asking for some prayers of clarity. **⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. (Col 4:3-4-NIV)**

This is the guy who wrote the book of Romans. Do you think he is struggling with knowing the essentials on what it means to be a Christian? Paul is saying, “that even I can get a little fuzzy on the message.”

So, if the door opens and I have this tremendous opportunity to proclaim the message, I want to do it clearly. Would you pray that I can proclaim it clearly.

Then he gives a challenge, you at Colossae, be wise as to how you act toward outsiders. People far from God watch the words, watch the lives, watch the spirit, of Christ followers.

And your behavior, demeanor, your spirit, it either draws people closer to Christ or pushes them a little further away. Paul knows this.

Ok, gang. Be careful about how you act toward outsiders. **⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.**

Outsiders are always watching, those far from God, are interested if you are keeping step with Jesus. For them, sometimes it’s a game. “Hey hon, you are not going to believe what I saw or heard today from our neighbor who goes to that church.” Then he goes on.

⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace,

Paul reminds us that instead of complaining, let your conversations be full of grace. What is our lead card? What is the first thing out of our mouth? What is our lead card, as we are having conversations with family and friends about Christ? Paul says, “it is grace, kindness, understanding.”

Genuine love. Life giving interest in others. **...seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Col 4-NIV)**

Every once and while you will have to take a stand. Sometimes the truth must be given. Sometimes, the risk of upsetting the relationship will be the by-product of proclaiming Christ clearly.

You may have to tell outsiders, those far from God, this is what God's word says. But it is different, if you have been leading with a full plate of grace. The first death benefit. We get the privilege of presenting the message of Christ to those far from God.

Jesus' death benefit removes the sting of death. (1 Cor 15:55-57)

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"^[b]

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15-NIV)

Destroyed. Gone. Nothing left. Obliterated. Demolished. Swallowed up. Isn't that an interesting synonym for destroyed? **Swallowed up**. Paul uses the word swallowed to describe what Jesus has done to death. Death has been swallowed up! **Death is swallowed up in victory.**

God uses this word destroyed when he talks about the bomb blast, he levied against **death** on the day of Jesus resurrection. And the consequences of the bomb blast are spelled out years later by the apostle Paul as he tells a group of Christians in Turkey, you have a fantastic future after your death.

Listen to the specifics of that fantastic future, as declared by Paul, "**Death is swallowed up in victory.**" ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Death is a real part of life. And I, like you have a lot of questions about death and the afterlife. The Corinthian church had buried their share of church members.

Friends and loved ones had died all around them. And the apostle Paul wants those who remained behind to be at peace about their future death. About their afterlife experience.

And just as God spoke to the Corinthians about their future death and resurrection, **God will speak to you today.**

If your child made it to heaven, before making it to kindergarten, God will speak to you.

If your parents are long gone to heaven and you miss them, God will speak to you.

If you wandered into church today, and have made no plans for life after death, God will speak to you.

If you are wondering why you are still here in your old age, God will speak to you.

All of us are going to die. **I don't know how you feel about that.** More importantly I want you to be ready for that day. Paul wanted his friends in Corinth, Turkey ready for that day. And he wants you to be ready too.

Paul tells each of us that our best days are ahead of us after death because Jesus Christ broke us free from the hold sin had at one time over your life. So, the **penalty of sin** has no hold on me because **in past tense, Christ won the victory through Jesus Christ atoning death 2,000 years ago.**

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15)

Paul also tells us that since the Holy Spirit lives in each of us, we have victory over the **power of sin**. It is a **present tense victory!**

Jesus 'death benefit bridges the gap. (Eph 2:13)

¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 1-NIV)

What does bridge building have to do with Jesus' death benefits? More than you realize. Probably more than you would think.

Since the beginning of time mankind has been separated by a chasm (because of Adam's sin) from a loving God. This truth is told in the opening chapter of the Bible.

Most human beings know that sin, that **southbound gravitational** pull, has caused rebellion/chasm between us and this great God who loves us. Now, look at what OUR amazing God has done to bridge the chasm. It is unimaginable. It is unfathomable. It is beyond Reason.

So the question throughout history has been, how can that chasm be bridged? Entire faith systems have been built to answer that question.

All of these man-made religions have one thing in common, **they started from the man's side of the bridge.**

Question: What can fallen human beings do from their side of the chasm to bridge this gap?

Question: Human beings caused the chasm, so human beings have to fix the chasm. Right?

So out comes the bridge building plans, one religion right after the next, all throughout history. Religions that tell their followers, say these **words**, do these **deeds**, light these **candles**, practice these **rituals**, and abstain from these **behaviors**.

Religions that say these words: Islam Shahada- testimony of faith
I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except the One God, and I bear witness that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Servant and final Messenger of God.

Do these deeds: Mormons- Humans who fall short of exaltation still receive an immortal physical body. Most will be awarded one of three kingdoms of glory, whether it be the celestial, terrestrial, or telestial kingdoms.

Light these candles-Christianity- Christmas time is a setting for lighting advent candles.

Practices these rituals-Buddhism -The Truth of the Path Of Liberation from *Dukkha* is that by following the Noble Eightfold Path, behaving decently, cultivating discipline, and practicing mindfulness and meditation, an end can be put to craving, to clinging, to becoming, to dissatisfaction, and to the cycle of death and rebirth.

Abstain from these behaviors: Socialize after work, salute the flag, give blood and many other practices.

If you spend your whole life working these bridge building plans, you make your way across the bridge, you only get part way across the bridge before you die, there are no guarantees, and if you should have a week moment a serious set-back of some sort, tough luck, it's all for not, game over and you lose.

Man has a tendency to **flatter himself** when it comes to searching and finding God. He makes himself out to be the one on the quest: (Mormonism -puts head in a hat-and Islam-retreats to a cave)

Mankind's efforts tell everyone that he is the one that understood why there is evil in the world and how we can solve it. (Buddhism)

But Christianity turns mankind's braggadocios attitude on its head and says that man did not search for God, man ran from God, man did not figure out why the world was filled with evil, mankind just filled the world with more evil.

Man has been running and hiding and then when he does come out of his cave he sins and murders.

¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Paul was on the bridge building plans-to DO. All the religions of the world and Paul's efforts are spelled-DO:

It's what people DO to earn favor with a God they know they have disappointed. And they never know if they have done enough, and if they have kept enough rules and if they keep doing this it leads to insanity or cynicism.

But biblical Christianity is spelled, DONE. It is the work that Christ has done where he takes all of our sins on his shoulders so that we can be made right with God.

²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24-NIV)

It’s about what he has done. And for Paul God has been at work since the beginning of time to convince him of this plan. And that plan involves a journey.

Biblical Christianity starts its bridge building plans from God’s side of the chasm. And the bridge is none other than Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ has become the ultimate bridge for all mankind to cross in order to be reconciled to God. If you had to go on record today and you had to state your current bridge plan for spanning the chasm between you and God ...

How would you spell your bridge plan: DO or DONE

I rest solely in the DONE plan. If you have shifted from the DO plan to the DONE plan you would know it. Something intensely personal happens inside of you. It is a radical shift. It is like the **geological plates** inside your heart shift, and never shift back.

You would remember it. That shift from the bridge plan of DO to the bridge plan spelled DONE.

Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, Jesus is our bridge from this life into the next reality. God is our bridge from here to heaven. Jesus is the only one who gave his bridge building message and then authenticated it by returning from the dead.

Today you can shift your bridge plans from DO to DONE and allow communion to be your act of faith to make that real.