

A Crucified Life pt. 3  
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We're going to continue this morning with part three of the series I'm calling "A Crucified Life". This goal of this series has been for us to come to a better understanding of the death of the cross, what it is, and how it works in us. So far, we've been dealing with what I've called two foundational realities of the cross. The first reality is that the cross is both a finished work and a progressive realization. We've talked about that for two weeks. It is something that God accomplished in an instant, and it is something that you and I spend a lifetime discovering...and that is only IF we will let him show us. Nothing of God is progressively being done. But everything God has done is progressively being revealed according to our willingness to part with ourselves. We will know what God has ended only when we allow Him to show that end, and therefore work that end, in ourselves.

The second reality, if you'll recall, was that the death that must work in us is specifically the death of Christ. It is not our death, our sufferings, our hardships, or our life lessons. It is the end that Christ established, now being established in our soul. The end of what? We saw that the cross brought a decisive end to God's relationship with the natural man, in the natural creation, by way of the old covenant. And it established forever God's relationship with a new man, as a new creation, in a new covenant. And so, what the cross of Christ removed from God's sight, the death of Christ working in you will remove from your heart. This death that we must die is very specifically the death of Jesus working in us.

That is a short summary of what we've been talking about the past two weeks. And I won't spend more time than that reviewing those two foundational realities, but they are essential. If those two things aren't settled in your heart, there really isn't any moving on. We can move on in these messages, but there will be no moving on in our hearts.

I guess you could say that today we're going to look at two other foundational realities. They're related to the first two, but they take it a bit further. They build on the two we have already looked at. And I believe that these two are every bit as misunderstood and wrongly taught as the two that we have already looked at.

Here are all four of them.

1. The cross is both a finished reality and a progressive experience
2. The death of the cross that works in you is specifically the death of Jesus Christ, and not any other death.
3. You experience this death, not as God actively crucifies your flesh, but as He is allowed to show you that you are already dead.
4. Knowing the truth is precisely how Christ's death works in you. And knowing the truth will always cost you what you call your life. If you are unwilling to

lose your life, then whether you realize it or not, you are unwilling to know the truth. That is a fact. And we'll get to that later.

Lets start with number three. Something that I encounter very often is the idea that, through the cross of Jesus Christ, God is trying to crucify my flesh. God is trying to kill me. There are some little jokes and sayings in the body of Christ that demonstrate this mentality. I've heard at least two preachers say "do you realize that the two most powerful beings in the world are both trying to kill you?" – meaning that Satan is trying to kill you in one way, and God is trying to kill you in another way. God is trying to kill the flesh.

Well, while there is a sense in which you could say that and it would not be wrong, I think the general idea that is behind such statements *is* wrong. God is not trying to kill you. If you are a Christian, God is always trying to show you that you are dead. And you see...immediately there are going to be people among those listening to this who are already confused. We resist that kind of statement. And the reason that we are confused and resist is because, of all the things that we feel as a Christian, the word "dead" does not describe any of them. Most of the time, Christians would say, I feel anything but dead. I don't FEEL dead to sin, dead to Adam, dead to the world. No, God must therefore MAKE me dead to these things.

So when we hear that God is trying to show us that we *are* dead, it sounds like a head trip. It sounds like mind over matter. It sounds like we're trying to make something real by believing it. But that is very much NOT the case. If you are born again, you're not trying to make ANYTHING real. You're in need of realizing what God has made real. And to whatever extent we do not, we are more than ignorant, we are utterly deceived.

If you saw a human acting like a dog – I mean one that actually thought it WAS a dog, and begged for food with its tongue hanging out, and barked at cats and turned around three times before laying down....if you saw a human acting like that you would not tell them that, if they believed hard enough, they could be a human. It wouldn't seem like a head trip to try to convince them that they were a man. It would simply be trying to help them realize the reality of the situation, trying to help them realize what was already true despite their ignorance and deception.

Christians would believe almost anything BUT the fact that they are crucified with Christ, buried with Him, dead to sin and free from Adam...even though the Bible declares those things to be the reality of our salvation. And we create a thousand and one theologies to somehow explain away, and put off into the future, what the Bible clearly describes because it does not line up with our current experience and perspective. But, you see, buried in that mentality is the underlying presupposition that our awareness is the definition of what is real. The presupposition here is that our recognition and experience tell the truth and define reality. But, that is an extremely dangerous presupposition. It's dangerous because our false assumptions and lack of awareness and recognition are precisely the problem that God is trying to deal with. Far from being an accurate measure of reality, our minds, by nature, are "enmity with God". The natural mind, and its natural faculties, wouldn't know spiritual reality if it jumped out and bit them on the nose. All spiritual reality becomes real to and in the soul ONLY as it is revealed by the Spirit of God.

So, we have to realize that **all spiritual growth is, put rather simply, the Spirit-given discovery of God's finished work**. The Spirit is working in you to show you

the truth of what already is. As 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2 says, the Spirit of God was given so that you might know the things that have been given by God. And one of the things that has been given by God, in fact, the beginning of all things that have been given by God, is death. The Spirit works in you to show you the death that you were baptized into.

You're never going to discover by the Spirit of God what God is about to do. All things of God's eternal purpose "have been accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). **Spiritual growth is the soul's encounter with and experience of and conformity to what God has already done in His Son.** Only when we encounter the truth in this way can we abide in it.

And I'm not talking about doctrines. Do you know what? I'm a bit tired of doctrines. I'm tired of us acting like the big deal in the church is whether you and I believe in this or that doctrine or idea or concept. You know what I think? I think that much of the time doctrines are things we create in order to hide from the truth. What do I mean by that? I mean we create a doctrine of the cross, and fight for its orthodoxy, but really have no intention of dying that death. We refuse the reality and hide behind the doctrine. We believe in and proclaim an end of the world message, but we will not face the end of the world in our own soul. And frankly, that's the only place where the end of the world is ever going to matter. We insist that Christ is our life, and we battle the contrary heresies, but never begin to learn what it means to live by that life. We hide from the truth behind the fig leaves of doctrines. They make us feel better about ourselves...they make us feel like we're covered with something.

Do we really think that God cares whether we believe the right things? I mean really? I believe in cheeseburgers but that doesn't take away my hunger. I believe in exercise but that doesn't make me fit. I would guess that Satan has pretty good theology. I mean, he knows what's real...and he opposes it every day. Look, it might start with believing the right things. But ultimately, God's interest does not lie in whether you and I consent to accurate teaching. God's interest lies entirely in whether you and I bear in our soul the Truth of His finished work.

That was a bit of a rabbit trail. I was trying to make the point that God is not ever trying to show you something that He is yet to accomplish. He is NEVER trying to get you to wait for something yet undone. He is always and forever seeking to cause you to bear in yourself the reality of what He HAS done, that He might be glorified in your soul.

And I'm saying this because it is necessary for us to understand our problem. Our problem is not that God needs to kill us. Our problem is not that we need to be crucified to this or that. **Our problem is that we generally don't really want to know the truth of what being in Christ means. We don't want to face what God has done.** Because if and when we do decide to let Him show us, He is going to show us that we have been baptized into the death of Christ. He's going to show us that we have been crucified with Christ, and that means infinitely more than we thought. That means something that we literally could not have imagined. If you really want to know what the cross of Christ accomplished, you're going to see that most of what we call our life, what we call our purpose, what we even call our ministry, has been established in and from and by and for things that God has already separated from Himself. Apart from the reality of the cross showing us what

remains, we live in and for the imaginations and unbelief that reign in the darkness of the adamic mind.

You can hate what I just said, but that won't change it. You can fight against it, but only in your mind. God's work is finished, and knowing the truth will make us face it. Knowing the truth will be the end of everything in us that didn't come out from the truth. Knowing the truth will be the end of ourselves.

This is the fourth thing in our list (the second for today). Knowing the truth costs us what we call our life. And more often than not, we're not really willing to pay that price. It doesn't matter what we say. We can cry out to God for years and years begging with tears for God to teach us the truth. **But more often than not, the truth that we are crying out to know will mean the end of things that we're not ready to lose.** And so, despite our words, our hearts will not allow the truth any room.

We're asking God to show us something, but we're completely unaware that what He desires to show us will destroy what we like most about life, or relationships, or church, or purpose. We're desperate to understand the Scripture, but if we really saw them through the eyes of God, it would vanquish our neatly packaged theologies and unsettle our comfortable Christian worldview. We call out for God to answer our questions, but more often than not, a true answer would destroy our question and show it to be a creation of self and unbelief. I hope you can hear what I'm trying to explain.

I talk to people all the time. And if there is one thing I've learned, its that asking questions is not the same thing as wanting to know the truth. People ask questions for a lot of reasons. A lot of people asked Jesus a lot of different kinds of questions. But only a few of those people were willing to hear an answer. **A true answer will always cost you something of yourself, because you are the lie.**

You see, our problem is not really ignorance. Our problem is really deception. I mean by that that our problem is not really that we are just blank slates that need instruction. We're not empty vessels that just need to be filled up with truth. No. We're completely filled already and overflowing with ideas and thoughts and darkness. And, for the most part, we very much like it that way. And so, for truth to have any room to work in us at all, it must replace something that is already there. We're not just uninformed. We're filled with a lie that contradicts the truth in every way.

I lived in Kansas City for six years. During that time, I devoted myself to prayer, fasting, reading Scripture, and ministry to the poor. As far as I know, every day of my life I spent time crying out to God to show me the truth. I fasted for days and weeks on end for that very purpose. I fasted food, I fasted sleep, I fasted relationships. I gave natural things up so that God would teach me spiritual reality. I wanted it, so I thought, more than anything. I prayed, often for hours on end, for the truth to be made real in my heart. I prayed for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. I prayed for the knowledge of God. And, I can tell you without doubt and without hesitation, that throughout that entire six years, God would have gladly shown me the truth. He was not waiting on the right time. He was not waiting on the right amount of tears, or prayers, or fasting. He was waiting on even the slightest bit of true inward willingness to part with the ideas that I loved more than the truth. He was waiting for a willingness to lose the lies that **contradicted** what

He desired to reveal. He was waiting for something deeper than my words and more real than my emotions. He knew that I didn't know what I was asking. He saw that the truth would eliminate all of my presuppositions along with everything that was motivating me to pray. He knew that, despite my zeal and discipline and prayers, there was no room in my heart to show me anything except more of what I already thought I knew. **Truth would not mix with my thoughts. It would not mix with me.**

I saw virtually nothing of the truth in those six years. I'm not ashamed to admit it. Its just a fact. And God was totally right and blameless and good and justified in showing me nothing because I was a fool. I was asking for something that is impossible. **I was asking to know the truth and keep my life as well. I was asking to know the truth and maintain my ideas and purpose and motivation.** I was asking for a room to be filled with both darkness and light simultaneously. You cannot know the truth and keep your life. **To know the truth is to face God's finished work...to face the fact of what God has cut away.**

I told a story once of a battle in World War II. There were probably many occurrences like this. But the story goes that there was a battle raging in a forest where American troops were outnumbered and outgunned. The senior officer called for the American troops to pull out and retreat to a nearby place that would be safely out of range. As the men jumped out of their foxholes and began to run through the forest, there was artillery fire just raining down in every direction. Trees were being blown to bits, craters suddenly appearing as shells hit the earth, screams of people being wounded and killed.

One particular man was running as fast as he could. In the midst of the chaos his mind was sort of on auto-pilot. He blocked everything out and just ran as fast as humanly possible to get to safety. Somewhere along the run he felt a strong stinging feeling in his left upper arm, but ignored it, didn't even look down, and just kept running. His life was in danger and he had only one thing on his mind. Finally, in complete exhaustion, he arrived at the meeting point where he was at last out of range. He was joined by several other men who had also survived the retreat...all of whom were walking towards him and yelling something about his arm. He suddenly remembered that, quite a ways back, he had felt a sting in his left arm. And, for the first time since he felt that pain, he looked down to his side only to discover that from his mid-bicep down there was no arm at all. It had been completely severed by flying shrapnel.

I realize that story is a bit graphic, but it helps illustrate a point. It is very possible to be so consumed in **what we call life**, and our quest to protect it, that we fail to see what has already been cut from us. We are often so occupied with maintaining and enlarging upon what is ours in the earth, that we don't even want to look and see what was cut off before we ever got going.

**In many ways, what we call life is a contradiction to what God has done in the cross of Jesus Christ. That is a hard thing to hear, but it is true. Very much contrary to the popular message in the body of Christ that God wants to protect and bless everything that you call life, God actually wants to show you that most of it is not even related to Him at all. And therefore, knowing the truth will involve the loss of it. I don't mean that God is ever going to take things from you. I mean that knowing God is going to take your heart from many things.**

What is life as we know it? If you were to stop the average person on the street and ask them to describe their life, what would they say? I believe that most people's answer would involve primarily three things. In defining what life is all about, most people would immediately call to mind the people that they know, the places and things in the earth that they love, and the ideas that they have about God or purpose or objective reality – some sort of spiritual or religious notion that makes sense out of their life. That's really it. Life, to the average human, really amounts to relationships, natural things, and religious ideas.

You can get into all sorts of specifics with all three of those, but I'm not sure there is another large category. Somebody says, "well, what's wrong with that?". There is nothing wrong with that if you are an unbeliever...because that's really all that there is. The man or woman who is not born of Spirit has nothing more to work with than people and things and ideas. But, if you have died with Christ and your life is hidden with Him in God...then this definition of life amounts to a contradiction to what God has accomplished on your behalf. For you and I, relationship is no longer sharing the flesh. Relationship is sharing the life of Christ as members of one body. In Christ, the world is no longer our home...and the things of the world should offer no satisfaction, purpose, or joy. And religion has nothing to do with what God has done in Christ. In fact, religion is what man creates when he does not know God.

So all of what the natural man calls life – natural relationships, things, and lofty ideas, are all part of what the cross has done away. And I'm not going to try to qualify that this morning. You've all heard my qualifiers before. I'm simply trying to make the point that to die the death of the cross, we are going to face and experience what God has already done. He's not trying to make something dead, he's trying to show us what he has already made dead...so that it becomes dead to us, as it is already dead to him.

The death of the cross is where your heart dies to all that God has made dead. And the only way for that to happen is if God's perspective, God's light, God's truth brings you to the truth of the matter. I'm talking about the revealing of Christ as your life. And again, this is progressive. This is progressive in us because we only gradually allow ourselves to face what He accomplished in an instant.

But it is a death that operates in your soul as you are willing to see the truth of what the cross accomplished, and bear in yourself the decrease that this demands. Every thing that you are willing to see and accept of the cross of Christ is going to cost you. Knowing the truth costs you the lie. And that sounds really good and exciting until we realize that we are head-over-heels in love with the lie in enumerable different ways. So maybe its more clear to state it the way the Bible does: knowing the truth is going to mean death. You cannot be His disciple unless you hate your father and mother and son and daughter, even your own life. **You cannot both keep your life and know the truth. The two are from completely opposite universes and are utterly contrary to one another.**