



The Other Side of the CROSS

Suffering and the Glory of God

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A contemporary worship song includes these lines for the believer to voice to Christ: “Like a rose, trampled on the ground, you took the fall and thought of me, above all.”

Excuse me? Did Christ think of me “above all” while he was on the cross? The Scriptures don’t point us in that direction. Did he think of us on the cross? Yes. Above all? No. Let’s get this straight!

Just as there are two sides to a coin, so are there two sides to the cross. For generations, many in the Church have only known one side of the cross. It’s a side that can point to ease, safety and comfort. But it’s now time for the Church to grow up and look at the other side of the cross—the one that points us to suffering.

The first side we are all familiar with: Christ died for us. But there is a second side to the cross: Christ died to magnify and vindicate the glory of his Father. This is the side with which we are unfamiliar. This is the side where we are weak and need to grow deep roots.

Why would Christ’s death be primarily for his Father’s glory? You begin to find the answer by first looking at Hebrews 10:1-4.¹ The author here is simply saying that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament never took away people’s sins. It was a system that was to foreshadow a perfect sacrifice found in the cross centuries later. Hence, the sins of all of those in the Old Testament were never really dealt with; they were just “hanging out there” left unpunished. People were thinking: “What kind of a God are you to allow sin to go unpunished? Are you no longer righteous? Are you no longer just? Do you not care about your glory any more?”

In John 12:27-28, we get a clear picture of how Christ *primarily* viewed his death on the cross. In

this context, he is talking with his disciples about not wanting to go to the cross. After opening his heart to them, he then addresses his heavenly Father directly. Knowing the slow, suffocating death he was about to experience, certainly he would be talking to his Father about *the primary reason* as to why he was going to the cross.

Now note what he does not say: “*Save these kind, wonderful, worthy people from hell, for they don’t deserve it.*” In fact, he doesn’t even mention us. Kind of humbling, isn’t it? And it definitely contradicts “Like a Rose.” So what does he say? “Father, glorify thy name.” Christ’s primary focus was on his Father’s glory.

Why was he concerned about his Father’s glory? Because of all the sin that had not been punished and that had tarnished the reputation of God. Christ was first and foremost concerned for his Father’s glory. “Father, I’m going to the cross to show them how holy, righteous and just you really are.” This was primary. We were secondary.

Two Different Conclusions

This is where the other side of the cross is pointing. Christ’s death was focused on his Father’s glory; he wanted to satisfy his Father’s righteousness and free us so that we could glorify God as well. Now depending upon which side of the cross we focus on, we will have two different conclusions about how the cross should govern how we live our lives.

If we are only focused on the familiar side of the cross, we look at the cross and say, “Christ suffered and died for me.” We then look at Revelation 21:4 and see that in heaven, there will be no death, no more mourning, or crying, or pain. So we conclude, “If that’s what God wants for me

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in heaven, it must be what he wants for me here on earth now! Wow, it makes sense! Since Christ suffered for me, he must not want me to suffer. He did all the suffering for me.”

From this we can conclude that God wants us to have a safe, soft, comfortable, happy life—no pain, no crying, no mourning. Instead of living for God, *we believe God lives for us*. So we think, “If Jesus lives for me, I’m going to be like Jesus. I’ll live for me too. I’ll just do it in a Christian context!” Suffering? Why would God want us to suffer?

How does the other side of the cross view suffering? It’s simple.

Since it is first and foremost about the Father’s glory, we then look at the cross and say, “Christ suffered and died for me *so that* I might gain favor with the Father and therefore be able to glorify him. So since Christ suffered primarily for the Father’s glory, then he has given me an example. I should be willing to suffer for the Father’s glory as well.”

Herein lies the key logic. Christ suffered to reveal the Father’s glory. And if Christ suffered to reveal the Father’s glory, then we should follow his example and be willing to suffer and reveal the Father’s glory, too.

Does the Bible call us to suffer? Unequivocally yes.

Jesus first foretells us that it is going to happen. He spoke of sending us out like sheep in the midst of wolves, about being hated, persecuted, whipped² and even killed.³ He told us that we are not greater than our teacher. Since he was persecuted,⁴ we will be persecuted. (Where did we get such a safe gospel?)

As the disciples saw suffering take place in their own lives, they wrote about it to each other. The Lord made those letters become a part of the Holy Scriptures, which is the training manual for our lives today.

In this manual, Paul says suffering for Christ’s sake is a special privilege given to us.⁵ Paul even wants to suffer⁶ and challenges us to join him in suffering!⁷ Peter clearly tells us that Christ left us an example to suffer; therefore we should follow in his steps.⁸ He then later tells us to expect it in our lives...and even calls us to rejoice in suffering.⁹

Why Aren’t We Suffering?

Yes, the Bible clearly calls us to suffer. So then, why aren’t we suffering?

Answering that question falls into two categories. The first is found in the fact that we—the Body

of Christ—are suffering. Just ask our brothers and sisters in China, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, India, Indonesia and a multitude of other countries. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are being beaten, tortured, raped, persecuted and killed. Just go to The Voice of the Martyrs website and read up on what our brothers and sisters are going through this very day.

Do we Americans get a “pass” on suffering? Don’t jump to that conclusion too quickly. Most Christians are “passing” on suffering, not because it’s not God’s will for their lives, but because they’ve only viewed one side of the cross. They are living a safe, soft, comfortable life because they think Jesus lives primarily for them. If they were to view the other side of the cross, they would find that Jesus lives primarily for the glory of the Father and suffering is to be a part of their lives, but not necessarily the kind of suffering that would make it on The Voice of the Martyrs’ website.

This is the second category that helps answer the question of why we’re not suffering. Paul spoke of different levels of suffering when he spoke about all of the things that were happening in his life. In his list of suffering he spoke of dishonor, bad reports, hunger, sleepless nights, emotional distress, imprisonment, beatings, despairing of life, and even death. I categorize those as “emotional suffering, light physical suffering” and “great physical suffering.” Though few Americans are involved in the great physical suffering, many are experiencing other suffering on a regular basis.

Have you counseled other believers for hours on end, still not seen victory, and are torn up over it? You have experienced emotional suffering. Have people at work lied about you, tearing down your reputation because you are a believer? You have something in common with Jesus and Paul. You have suffered, too.

But God wants suffering as a part of our lives for a multitude of reasons, one of the primary ones being that suffering reduces sin in our lives. Less sin means we reflect the glory of God better—and that is what life is all about.

Discover the other side of the cross. Make the glory of your heavenly Father your highest priority, and live out the reality of Romans 11:36: “For from him, and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” f

¹ For the sake of brevity, look up the texts yourself!

² Matthew 10:16-25

⁶ Philippians 3:10

³ Luke 21:16

⁷ 2 Timothy 1:8

⁴ John 15:20

⁸ 1 Peter 2:18-21

⁵ Philippians 1:29

⁹ 1 Peter 4:1, 12, 13