

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

**12** <sup>9</sup>A large crowd of Jews found out that [Jesus] was there and came, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup>So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus also; <sup>11</sup>because it was on account of him that many of the Jews were leaving and believing in Jesus.

<sup>12</sup>The next day a great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>They cut branches from the palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD—the King of Israel! <sup>14</sup>Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, <sup>15</sup>Fear not, O daughter of Zion. See, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt. <sup>16</sup>At first his disciples did not understand all this. But after Jesus was glorified, they remembered that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. <sup>17</sup>The crowd that had been present when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, gave their testimony. <sup>18</sup>For this reason many people went out to meet him, for they heard that he had performed this sign. <sup>19</sup>Consequently, the Pharisees said among themselves, See how you are achieving nothing at all! The [whole] world has become his disciples!

<sup>20</sup>Now there were certain Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, [with the request,] Sir, we want to see Jesus. <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew. [Then] Andrew and Philip [together] came and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus responded by saying, The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>I tell you the truth, Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. <sup>25</sup>He who loves his life shall lose it; but he who hates his life in this world shall preserve it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>If any man would serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be. If any man serves me, the Father will honor him.

<sup>27</sup>Now my soul is troubled; and what shall I say? [Shall I say,] "Father, save me from this hour"? But it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>"Father, glorify your name." Then there came a voice out of heaven, [saying,] I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. <sup>29</sup>The crowd that was standing there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, An angel has spoken to him. <sup>30</sup>Jesus said, This voice has not come for my sake, but for your sake. <sup>31</sup>Now has come the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world shall be cast out. <sup>32</sup>And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. <sup>33</sup>He said this to show the kind of death he was about to die. <sup>34</sup>Then the crowd responded, We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man? <sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, The light is with you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before the darkness descends upon you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of light. When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. (Jn. 12:9-36)

## Introduction

One of the most spectacular shows of nature is the eruption of a volcano. Huge, fiery plumes arch up into the air. Silver lava oozes down slopes—slow, relentless, consuming everything in its path. When the drama is finished, what is left behind is a landscape devoid of life. Utter, total death for every living thing in the lava's path.

But in bringing death to the surrounding land, the lava also brings new life. The lava forms new land that will eventually become green and productive. Within a year after the eruption, algae, ferns, and moss start to grow in small cracks and crevices. Soon after, seeds start sprouting, broadening the cracks and slowly breaking the lava into soil. The death brought by the fiery lava is turned back into life—life more abundant because there is more land. Without the initial death caused by the lava, there would be no Hawaiian Islands, no Indonesia, and no West Indies. (*POWER*, 2/24/91, pp.4-5)

Here in the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus likewise reminds us of the paradoxical, but normal, course of things in the natural world: *"I tell you the truth, Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit"* (Jn. 12:24.) There is the necessity of death; but by means of death, abundant life is produced.

We must appreciate the fact that God's chosen method of operation is to bring life out of death.

Jesus goes on to inform us that what is paradoxical, but normal, in the realm of nature, is also applicable to His own life: *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. <sup>33</sup>He said this to show the kind of death he was about to die"* (Jn. 12:32-33.) Furthermore, the Lord Jesus indicates that what holds true for His own life must also hold true for your life and mine if we would be identified with Him and have a part in His salvation: *"He who loves his life shall lose it; but he who hates his life in this world shall preserve it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>If any man would serve me, let him follow me"* (Jn. 12:25-26a.)

If we would experience the life of God, we must acknowledge the centrality of the cross and submit ourselves to the cross of Christ.

### I. We Must Submit to the Cross, Because It Is the Pathway to Triumph

John 12:1-8 describes the Lord Jesus attending a great banquet held in His honor in the village of Bethany, located just outside of Jerusalem. The next day word quickly spread that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem; He has left the village of Bethany and is making His way toward the holy city of Jerusalem—it is the first Palm Sunday.

Upon hearing this report of Jesus' approach, a great multitude, filled with excitement and expectation, prepare to greet their long-awaited Messiah: They cut off branches from the palm trees. With palm branches in hand, they run out to meet Jesus—they will form part of His entourage; they will show their support and solidarity; they will unite behind their Messiah.

As the multitude goes out to meet Jesus, and as they make way for His triumphal entry, they are heard crying out, "*Hosanna*," [meaning, "Save now!"] "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*" This was the sung song as the Old Testament throngs accompanied the king as he led the festival procession to the temple of the LORD. The words added by the crowd, "*the King of Israel*," reveal their expectation: they are welcoming a conquering king.

But if the crowd had been careful to observe the manner of Jesus' arrival, they would have observed a significant difference between their view of a triumphal entry (and triumphal king) and Christ's view. Jesus entered Jerusalem riding upon a young donkey; not mounted upon a white charger, commanding a legion of soldiers. The manner in which He entered the city of Jerusalem was in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scripture of Zechariah 9:9,

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and [is bringing] salvation; he is humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey. (Zech. 9:9)*

Jesus is, indeed, the conquering Messiah; but His conquest is not with a sword. On the contrary, it is with the cross.

The testimony was there, but the message was ignored in the frenzy of excitement and misconceived expectations. But when Jesus finally addresses the crowd, He makes clear that the pathway to triumph is the way of the cross:

*Now has come the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world shall be cast out. <sup>32</sup>And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. <sup>33</sup>He said this to show the kind of death he was about to die. (Jn. 12:31-33)*

We must submit to the cross, because it is the pathway to triumph for the Christian as well as it was for Christ our Savior. The appointed course God laid out for His Son went through the cross, it did not take a detour around the cross. Recognizing that the cross of Calvary lay before Him, the Lord Jesus declared, "*Now my soul is troubled; and what shall I say? [Shall I say,] 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>'Father, glorify your name'" (Jn. 12:27-28a.) In the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal the Lord Jesus relinquished His own will and submitted to His Father's will: "*Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'" (Matt. 26:39.)**

Likewise, the appointed course God has laid out for His adopted sons and daughters in Christ goes through trials and tribulation, it does not detour around them—it is the way of the cross. Note 14:21b-22, where we read that Paul and Barnabas *"returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and [teaching them] that it is necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God **through many tribulations.**"*

Although the heavenly Father charts a course that brings His children through trial, He is faithful to stand beside us and supply us with His aid, He extends to us the invitation, indeed, the command, *"Cast your burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be moved"* (Psl. 55:22.) Furthermore, we have the assurance that He will bestow upon us His eternal blessing: *"our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all"* (2 Cor. 4:17.)

## II. We Must Submit to the Cross, Because It Is Mandatory, Not Optional

Jesus makes clear that the course He **must** take leads through the cross to fruitfulness and glory: *"Now my soul is troubled; and what shall I say? [Shall I say,] 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it is for this reason that I have come to this hour"* (Jn. 12:27.) He also makes it clear that this is the same course that each of us must take if we would be identified with Christ and participate in His redemption: *"If any man would serve me, let him follow me"* (Jn. 12:26a.)

The Lord Jesus makes it emphatically clear that the cross is not optional, it is mandatory; note Mark 8:31-37,

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>Now he spoke these things publicly. So Peter took him [aside] and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But [Jesus], turning around and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and said, Get behind me, Satan; for your mind is not focused the things of God, but on the things of men. <sup>34</sup>Then he called to himself the [whole] crowd [along] with his disciples, and said to them, If any man desires to be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>Whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the [sake of] the gospel shall save it. <sup>36</sup>What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world, but to forfeit his life? <sup>37</sup>What can a man give in exchange for his life? (Mk. 8:31-37)*

Jesus makes clear (Mk. 8:34,) that if we would have a part in the life of Christ, then the experience of the cross is a necessity. Jesus is saying, "If anyone would follow Me into the kingdom of God, then let him follow Me to the cross; let him, by means of the cross, become dead to the world and alive unto God." As the Lord Jesus points out (Mk. 8:35,) paradoxically, the course that appears to be safe and sensible—the course that appeals to the self-centered, self-preserving soul—in fact leads to disaster; while the course of surrendering our life to Christ—

submitting ourselves to His crucifixion (as the Apostle Paul testifies concerning the Christian's experience, "*I have been crucified together with Christ,*" Gal. 2:20)—leads to life: participation in Christ's heavenly resurrection life. Jesus declares that our life and soul is of far greater importance than all the world has to offer (Mk. 8:36-37.) Jesus is concerned about the well-being and the eternal welfare of our soul—and the only place of safe-keeping is to place our life and soul into Christ's hands, even though it means joining with Him in His crucifixion, for that also means joining with Him in His resurrection life.

We must submit to the cross, because it is mandatory, not optional. If we would enter into the life of God, (and be spared from the wrath to come,) then, together with Christ, we must pass through the death of the cross; again, as the Apostle Paul expresses it: "*I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ is living in me. That life which I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal. 2:20.) When we put our trust in Christ, handing ourselves over to Him, we might say that, spiritually, He draws us back into His own life, and into His own crucifixion, and into His resurrection life.

As we live the life of God in this present world, we must, by the grace of God, continue to employ and experience the instrument of the cross:

*If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself and **take up his cross daily**, and follow me.* (Lk. 9:23)

***Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:** sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup>But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self.* (Col. 3:5-10a)

### **III. We Must Submit to the Cross, To Receive the Promised Inheritance**

Our Lord Jesus Christ submitted Himself to His Father's will—going to the cross; therefore, God highly exalted Him:

*... he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. <sup>9</sup>**Therefore, God exalted him to the highest position** and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name; <sup>10</sup>so that before the name Jesus now possesses "every knee should bow"—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—<sup>11</sup>"and every tongue confess" that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.* (Phil. 2:8-11)

Jesus assures us that those who serve Him—bearing His cross—shall be honored by His Father: *“If any man would serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be. If any man serves me, the Father will honor him”* (Jn. 12:26.)

Let us consider these sure promises of God:

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if ... we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. <sup>18</sup>I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* (Rom. 8:17-18)

*Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup>if we endure, we will also reign with him.* (2 Tim. 2:11-12a)

### **Conclusion**

We must appreciate that it is God’s chosen method of operation to bring forth life out of death. If we would experience the life of God—both now and in eternity—we must personally submit to the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross.