

Knowing Christ – His Death 1

Will you please turn to Philippians 3:10, “To know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

Let’s have a word of prayer: *Dear Lord, our hearts are full of thanks. We thank Thee for gathering us together unto Thyself. We thank Thee for Thy presence with us. Dear Lord, we do sense that we are standing on holy ground. We will remove our shoes. We will prostrate before Thee and say, “Lord, what has Thou to say to us?” We are listening. We do pray that Thou will open the eyes of our heart, that we may see Thee through Thy word, that Thou may truly be all to us. And unto Thee be the glory. In the name of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

We do thank the Lord for gathering us together here this time. Every time we have such a gathering, I feel that it is the mercy of God because we are living in the end times. The Lord is coming soon and He is preparing us for His return. So we do believe that this is a very important time. And we just look to thee, look to Him, that He will bless us with Himself.

Last year when we gathered together, we talk about God as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Our God is a triad God: He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the all-sufficient God. He begins everything, He works everything, and everything returns to Him. As the Bible said, “To know Him, the only true God and the one whom He has sent. This is eternal life.” We thank God.

Now this year, the theme is “Knowing Christ”. This verse in Philippians 3:10, “To know Him and the power of His resurrection, to have fellowship in His sufferings, and to be conformed to His death”—This is the earnest desire of the apostle Paul. There is nothing more important to Him than to know Christ. In order to know Him, Paul is willing to let go everything. He considers all things but dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Thank God he knows Christ. But the more he knows Christ, the more he feels he knows very little of Him. And the longing to know Him more increases in his heart. This is a holy passion that motivates the life and the ministry of the apostle Paul. Our prayer is that the same passion will be upon

every one of us. We do thank the Lord that He has revealed Himself to us and in us, but that should increase our spiritual appetite; that should create within us a longing to know Him more. There is so much in Him that He is ready to reveal in us. And to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled. So may the Lord, during these days, create within us a deep longing to know Christ. Don't be satisfied with the little knowledge you know of Him. There's so much more of Him that we need to know. So we do hope that during these few days, our constant prayer will be, "Lord, create within me a longing to know You, a desire for You like the apostle Paul." And you will not be disappointed because as He has filled the apostle Paul, He too will fill each one of us.

As our brother mentioned last night, we will consider this matter of knowing Christ in three different aspects: knowing Christ in His death, knowing Christ in His resurrection, and knowing Christ in His ascension. My responsibility is to share on knowing Christ in His death. God willing, this morning, we will share together on the death of Christ as a mystery. And tomorrow morning, we will share on knowing the meaning of the death of Christ. And then the morning after next will be on being conformed to His death. So I do pray, and I do hope, that we'll all pray about it.

If you turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, we'll read from verse one. This is what apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. "But I make known to you, brethren, the glad tidings which I announced to you, which also ye received, in which also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, (if ye hold fast the word which I announced to you as the glad tidings,) unless indeed ye have believed in vain. For I delivered to you, in the first place, what also I have received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He was raised the third day, according to the Scripture; and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the most remain until now, but some also have fallen asleep. There He appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to an abortion, He appeared to me also."

Now what is the "glad tidings," the gospel, of Jesus Christ? What is the glad tidings, the gospel, that Paul announced to the church? What is the gospel of Jesus Christ that we have received in which we also stand, by which also we are saved? Now what is the gospel that Paul have

received from above, that He delivered to us? Now what is the gospel of Jesus Christ? What are the principle factors of this gospel? He said, first of all, "In the first place, which also I have received that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." So here you find in the gospel there are several principle points. One is, He died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And of course, in connection with that, He was buried to show that His death is real. And then the second point, you'll find He is raised from the dead. And after He is raised, He appeared to many. His appearing is to prove that He indeed has been resurrected. And if you follow this on, you know that after He appeared to His disciples for 40 days; it is but right for Him to ascend to His Father. So His death, His resurrection, and His ascension tell us of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to know the gospel of Jesus Christ—not just know it mentally, not just to know that these are the facts of the gospel, but to know these inwardly, to know His death in an inward way—conform to His death, know His resurrection in an intimate way, know that we are being raised together with Him and live a resurrection life, and know His ascension in an inward way. Not just knowing He has ascended, but we too have ascended with Him and are seated with Him on the right hand of God. Now THIS IS knowing Christ. So brothers and sisters, this is the burden of this conference. And may the Lord fulfill that burden.

You will remember in John 12, our Lord Jesus, knowing that His days are fulfilled, went to Jerusalem, and while He was in Jerusalem, remember how He entered into Jerusalem triumphantly. Everybody was shouting. Even some Greeks, the Gentiles, wanted to see Jesus. So they came to Phillip and said, "we want to see Jesus." Phillip and Andrew, they went to the Lord. And they told the Lord that some Greeks want to see Him. Now, humanly speaking, this is the most glorious time in the ministry of our Lord Jesus. It is as if the whole world is going after Him. Not only did the Jews welcome Him, even the Gentiles, the Greeks wanted to see Him. But listen to what our Lord Jesus said. He said, "The Son of Man is to be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and die, it abides alone, but it dies, it bares much fruit." This speaks of His death.

When you listen to what He said, it seems like a contradiction because every circumstance seems to show that He is so popular and everybody is going after Him. And naturally speaking, this will be His glorification. But in the heart of our Lord Jesus, His glorification is in His death. He

is that grain of wheat that came down from heaven to earth. Not only that, but He had to die. Otherwise, there will be only one grain of wheat in the universe and we are all tares. Thank God He came to this world and He died. And He bears much fruit. Then He turned to the Father and prayed, "Father, save Me from this hour. But this is the hour that I come for, glorify Thy name." And the heavens spoke, "I have glorified myself, and I will yet be glorified." And people around heard the sound, but they didn't hear the word. All they say, it thundered. But the Lord said, "It is my Father who is speaking and He speaks for your sake." If the Son of Man is being lifted up, He will draw all man unto Him. The judgment of the world has come, the prince of the world is being cast out. And then the Jews said, in John 12:34, we heard in the law, that the Christ abides forever. What do you mean by the Son of Man is to be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? So brothers and sisters, immediately you see, that the death of our Lord Jesus is a mystery.

How can the Christ die? He is God. How can God die? God is life. As our brother mentioned last night, He is eternal life. He lives forever. He can never die. But, this Son of God, this God, He is to die. This is something that we just cannot understand because it is such a contradiction to the very concept of God. We know God is God. God is eternal. He is life itself. Can life die? It's a mystery. But brothers and sisters, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

Man has fallen. Man has sinned, and the wages of sin is death. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. God is just, He is righteous and He has to judge us with death. Eternal death is our portion; there is no escape. Nobody can escape this enter death, but God is love, He is just, and everything He does is right. He cannot compromise, but on the other hand, He is love. He loves the man He created. He wants every one to be saved, none to perish, but how can it be done? You know our sin created for God a dilemma, so what should God do? On the one hand He is just. He had to do what He said, and the soul of sin must die. But on the other hand, He is love, He loves us. What can He do? Thank God, He is God. What is impossible with man is possible with God. You know, brothers and sisters, we give God such trouble. And yet God's love overcomes it. And in order to solve this dilemma, He sent His beloved Son into this world to become a man. Brothers and sisters, incarnation is a mystery.

Again we will say, “How can it be done?” He is so infinite. He is so rich. He is so full. How can He put His fullness, squeezed as it were, into a small form of a man? Philippians 2:6-8. “He being equal with God He was in the form of God.” And the word “form” means that inward character. In other words, what God is, He is. This is what the Son is. Everything that is of God the Father is of God the Son. They are one, equal, with God. And yet, in order to become a man, the Bible said He has to empty Himself. He has to empty His glory, empty His honor, empty His position on the throne, empty all the worship, praise, adoration that is due. He emptied Himself. Of course, He cannot empty Himself of His deity because that’s what He is. He is God forever. Even when He came to be a man, He is still God, but He just emptied everything that surrounds God. He emptied all the rights that belong to God—all the worship, the obedience. He emptied all His honor and glory in order to take upon Himself the fashion of a man. And the bible said, “He who was is in the form of God and now He takes upon Himself the form of a slave.” What a distance. Who can measure this distance in the form of God, having all the characteristics of God? And now you find He took upon Himself the form of a born slave. God has every right over everything. As a born slave has no right at all, our Lord, when He came to be a man, His inner sanctiment is the form of a born slave. And awkwardly, He took the form of the man. He is in every way a man. The only difference is He’s still God, He has no sin. That’s the difference.

Brothers and sisters, what love is behind it. You just cannot imagine. Brothers and sisters, you cannot compare anything with this. What love is greater than this love? For your sake, for my sake, not for the righteous, not for the good, but for the rebellious, the sinners, He’s willing to give up everything to become a man. Brothers and sisters, why must God become man? Because as God, He cannot die. He cannot die for your sins. Only a sinless man can die for the sinful world. So that’s the reason why He was born. Brothers and sisters, He was born to die. Even from the foundation of the world, He is the Lamb that was slain. He came as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed for you and for me. After He was born, He was under the sentence of death. You remember when He was a child? Two years old, He could not be more than two years, and Herod the King wanted to kill Him. He had to flee to Egypt. When He returned, He was hidden in Nazareth. Those hidden years, unknown to man, only known to God, when He was 30 years old, He came to be baptized by John the Baptist. What is the baptism of John? It is the baptism of repentance. “Repent for the kingdom of God has drawn nigh.” Those who have every reason

to repent think they need no repentance. The scribes and the Pharisees, they think they are too good to repent. But here is a man who knows no sin. Not only has He ever committed anything, He doesn't even know what sin is. And yet, He came to the baptism of John. John sensed His Spirit, so John said, "No no no." I need to be baptized by you. How can you come to be baptized of me?" And our Lord said, "Let us fulfill all righteousness." Brothers and sisters, why? He took the place of us, and He was baptized. Baptism means death. When you go into the water, you are dead. When you are under the water, you are buried. When you get up from the water, you are risen into new life. So you find that even in the very beginning of the ministry of our Lord Jesus, He began His ministry with baptism. He took the place of our death. And throughout His three and a half years of ministry, He walked the way of the cross. You'll find how He constantly, continually, forever denies Himself, how He was obedient to the Father. There is a word that He often used, "My time." "My time has not yet come." Now what is His time? And then He said, "My time now has come." It is the time of His death. So when He knows that the days are fulfilled, He turned His face to His Jewish land because no prophet should die outside of Jerusalem. He went to Jerusalem to die. No man could take His life. He laid down His life voluntarily. Even when Judas led the people to arrest Him in the garden of Gethsemane, our Lord came forward and said, "Now, whom are you seeking?" They say, "Jesus of Nazareth." The Lord said, "I am." And they all fell down. Brothers and sisters, He volunteered Himself to be arrested. When He was judged by the high priest, they could not find anything, any faults in Him. All these accusations were false. Our Lord would not say a word. Until finally the high priest said, "I adjure you by God, are you the Son of God?" And He openly confessed, "You shall see the Son of Man coming in glory and in power." In other words, He sealed His death sentence by His own testimony. In Acts 2, Peter said, "By the determinant counsel and full knowledge of God, He was delivered." In other words, His death is the determinant counsel and full knowledge of God. Even though it is the lawless man that crucified Him, from the foundation of the world, He is already the lamb slain. So our Lord Jesus, He came to die. His death was voluntary. He willingly offered Himself, by the eternal Spirit, to God, that He may be the sin offering for the whole world. The scriptures have already foretold, telling us, that one day the seed of the woman will come. And this seed of the woman is the Lamb that has been sacrificed through the centuries. Brothers and sisters, even the way He was to die was already foretold in the scripture.

You remember Psalms 22, a psalm of David? David lived about 1000 years before Christ, and yet He was moved by the spirit of God. And he wrote Psalms 22. Now when you read the whole psalm, it is a description of a death and only the death on the cross can fulfill such a description. With the Jews, they don't have this punishment. You know, for a man to be hang up on a pole, He is considered to be cursed. But they kill the person first before they put him up. The Jews did not have this kind of punishment. It is the Romans. They had this kind of punishment. And they use the cross to kill the vilest sinner—a traitor, a murderer. And even if you are a Roman, you will never be crucified because it is so degrading, so shameful. It is so painful; it is a lingering death. But, according to the scriptures, it is foretold. That is the way that Christ will die. Again you read Isaiah 53 and then you see the whole scene again, that He died for our iniquities. Not only was He cursed by man, He was even crushed by His Father. Brothers and sisters, the death of our Lord Jesus is a mystery.

But now to us, it is a sign of glory. Never has the sinfulness of the world exhibited itself so blatantly as on the cross. The One who loves so much is hated on the cross. Never has the love of God been so richly demonstrated as you see on the cross. Oh brothers and sisters, the love of God, it is for you and it is for me.

On the cross, our Lord Jesus was there for six hours. During the first 3 hours, from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock, it was man who crucified Him. Man surrounded Him and mocked at Him. "You save others, why don't you save yourself? Come down from the cross and we will believe you." Even the two robbers crucified with Him, they mocked Him. All the evil forces in the world attacked Him. And yet, God the Father was still with Him. But at 12 o'clock, the sun hid itself. Darkness filled the earth. During the last three hours, it was not man, not Satan the enemy, the evil forces, it was the Father. The Father crushed Him. The Father's heart was broken. He hid His face. He cannot look at his Son. Brothers and sisters, what for? For you and for me.

The seven words He spoke on the cross reveal to us the meaning of the cross. These are the utterances of the cross. They show us what the gospel really is. The first three words were spoken during the first three hours. It tells us what He has done for us on the cross. The last four words were spoken during the second three hours. It is telling us the story behind the suffering. It tells us the secret of the gospel. When they crucified Him, when He was surrounded by

scolding Him and mocking Him, with all the power of darkness attacking Him, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Brothers and sisters, how can God, he righteous one, forgive such sin? Because He offered himself as a sin offering. On that basis of the shedding of His blood, He asked the Father to justly forgive us because the righteous demand is fulfilled. Brothers and sisters, thank God for this word. We are forgiven by the Father. It is because of the shed blood of our Lord Jesus. He satisfied all the righteous demands of God. God can freely forgive us. Thank God we are forgiven. But we who are being forgiven much, why is it that we do not love much? Why is it we are so ungrateful?

The second word: He looked at His mother. Mary was at the foot of the cross. A sword had pierced her heart. And the Lord looked at His mother. And He looked at His beloved disciple John. He told His mother, "Behold, your Son." I personally believe, He did not ask His mother to behold Him, but to behold John. And then He told John, "Behold, your mother." Humanly speaking, even at His death, in His agony, He still fulfilled His responsibility, responsibility as a son, to provide for His mother. But certainly this is more than that. On the basis of His redemption, He created a family of God. The Lord said, "Who is my mother? Who is my brother, my sister? Those who do the will of God." So brothers and sisters, on the cross, He created a family. We are now brothers and sisters. We love one another, we belong to the family of God. This is what He has done for us.

And then the third word: One of the robbers repented and He turned to the Lord. "Remember me at Your coming." And the Lord said, "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise." Salvation comes even to the worst of sinners. There is no one whose sin is so great that He cannot save. Thank God for that. This is what the gospel has done for us.

It is no longer a matter between man and Christ. God has accepted His Son's offer. So God crushed Him. He is able to bear all the sufferings that come from man and from darkness. But when the Father deserted Him, turned His face away from Him, it was unbearable. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" No longer a relationship between the Son and the Father; it is a relationship of God and sinful man. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God." God is righteous. He even crushed His own Son

because He accepted His Son as a sin offering. Oh brothers and sisters, this is the cross. For three hours, our Lord Jesus, as it were, tasted the very wine of eternal death.

So the next word is "I thirst." And the soldier gave Him vinegar. Brothers and sisters, of course when you lose so much blood, you are very thirsty. But I believe that's not the point. I think what the Lord is saying, "I thirst for God, even though You crush Me, even though You slay Me, I still long for You. I thirst after You because You are everything to Me." Oh brothers and sisters, our Lord was faithful even to the very end. He was not offended by His Father. Under the crushing hand of the Father, He told God "I thirst after you. I love you."

And before He died, He gathered all His strength and He shouted, "It is finished." Oh thank God, it is finished. The work of redemption is finished and because the work is done, so He bowed His head and He committed His spirit to the Father. His relationship with the Father is restored. Oh thank God the work is done. Brothers and sisters, this is His death. His death is so unique. There is no death that can be compared with His death. We glory in His death. Let us pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, we do praise and thank Thee for Thy amazing love. We thank Thee for willing to give us Thy beloved Son. We cannot imagine how it hurt Thee. But God, You are love. Dear Lord Jesus, why, why do You love us so much? We who are so unworthy, undeserved, ungrateful, and yet You love us to such extent. Oh the cross of our Lord Jesus. Lord, we just glory in Thy cross. We glory in Thy death. We worship Thee. We love Thee because You first loved us. Keep us in Thy love. Enable us to be constrained by Thy love, that we may no longer live for ourselves, but for Thee and Thee alone. Accept our offer. In the name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.