

At the Cross

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 December 2008

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Christian is just ready to leave of Interpreter's House now, and I want to read the concluding word concerning Interpreter's House.

! Interpreter, having taken him through seven rooms in the house and taught him important lessons, now says, Have you considered all these things? Yes, says Christian, and they put me in hope and in fear.

Well, keep all things so in thy mind that they may be as a goad in thy sides to prick thee forward in the way thou must go.

Then Christian began to gird up his loins and to address himself to his journey. Then said the Interpreter, The Comforter be always with thee, good Christian, to guide thee in the way that leads to the city.

So Christian went on his way, saying, Here I have seen things rare and profitable, things pleasant, dreadful, things to make me stable.

[0:59] In what I have begun to take in hand, then let me think on them and understand wherefore they shooed me were, and let me be thankful, O good Interpreter, to thee.

Well, that's old English, but he's saying, Let me think why these things were even showed to me in the first place. And the answer is to goad you on your way, to be goads in your sides.

The spur of the horse rider and the side of the horse. These lessons from the Bible that we learn day by day and Lord's day by Lord's day are to be things that keep us going in our journey and keep us from slowing down, turning back.

I've seen all sorts of things, rare things, profitable things, things to make me happy, and things to make me tremble with fear, but all necessary to help me on my journey.

And so let me be thankful, O good Interpreter, to thee. It would be good for us every time that we walk away from the Word of God to thank the Holy Spirit for another lesson, for the journey.

[2:14] We seek Him as we come. Open my eyes, Holy Spirit. We ought to thank Him as we go. Thank you for what we've seen of Christ today. Thank you for what we've seen of the journey.

Well, then we come to the cross at last. Now I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was faced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called salvation.

Of this way, therefore, did burden Christian run, but not without great difficulty because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below in the bottom a sepulcher.

So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back and began to tumble and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of a sepulcher where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome and said with a merry heart, He hath given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death. Then he stood still a while to look and wonder, for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden.

[3:44] He looked, therefore, and looked again, even until the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three shining ones came to him and saluted him with peace be to thee.

And so the first said to him, Thy sins be forgiven. The second stripped him of his rags and clothed him with change of raiment. The third also set a mark on his forehead and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran and that he should give it in at the celestial gate. So they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on singing. Thus far did I come laden with my sin, nor could ought ease the grief that I was in till I came hither.

What a place is this? Here must be the beginning of my bliss. Must hear the burden fall from off my back. Must hear the strings that bound it to me crack.

Blessed cross, blessed sepulcher, blessed rather be the man that there was put to shame for me. What a wonder that this burden that he has been carrying for so long, that neither he himself or any other mortal along the way was able to unfasten and take off for him, that such a clinging burden should simply fall off at the sight of the cross.

[5:27] It's something mysterious. It's something surprising. And so he stops to look and wonder at that. That so much would be attributed to a mere look.

And isn't that the gospel? That God devises a way of salvation that is a wonder to us.

That simply faith in Christ should have such drastic accomplishments and effects. There's no merit in a look.

There's no room for boasting because I looked. Jesus says, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The imagery is clear. To look is to believe. They're being bitten by snakes that are poisonous.

They're dying in the wilderness because they were complaining.

[6:37] And so the serpent is lifted up on the bronze serpent on the pole and the command is, whoever looks will live. And a mere look to that serpent on the pole does what no doctor could do for them, what they could never do for themselves.

They're healed. And they're no longer dying but now they have life. Just for looking. Amazing look. And that's the picture Jesus uses to describe what's going to happen to him.

The Son of Man must be lifted up. And whoever looks at him, whoever believes on him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. Explain to me how the cross can account for such a radical change. The loss of a burden of sin. The loss of the guilt and the burden of sin. How can simply looking at the cross account for such amazing results?

Lou. It gives us a realization of just how awful sin is. We don't know how terrible sin is when you go to the cross.

[7:51] Amen. Alright. That alone though, Lou, would increase the burden, wouldn't it? Okay. So take me farther. How does it look at that? You're right. We never have seen the ugliness of sin until we've seen the Savior being damned for it.

But where's the comfort in the cross that makes us lose our burden altogether? That's it, isn't it? He's borne that burden.

He's taken the sin upon Himself. He's been damned in my place. And so if He's damned, then I can't be damned. If He's condemned, then I can't be.

Therefore, anyone who is in Christ, there's no condemnation for them. And so, we look at the cross. If we understand what happened there, it takes the burden off of our back.

We no longer carry around the guilt. We no longer have this guilty conscience that feels like, oh, I'm going to be lost because of my sin.

[8:54] No. Jesus is paying the price there at Calvary. And He has paid the price at Calvary. And as we understand that, that my substitute stepped in and paid it for me, then there's nothing left to pay.

Wonderful freedom from guilt, from sin. Martin Luther was shocked as a professor. This is before his conversion, but as he's beginning now to study the Scriptures in order to lecture on them.

And he's studying the book of Psalm and he comes to Psalm 22 and verse 1 and he hears the Son of God crying out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And he's shocked at that. He himself feels that. He says, I feel forsaken by God, but I know why that is because I am a sinner. And I deserve to be forsaken by God.

But why does the Messiah feel forsaken by God? It shocked him into thinking, into digging deeper into the cross. Why should Messiah be abandoned by his Father?

[10:06] And then the light eventually comes. It's because of my sin. And if God has abandoned his Son for my sin, then there's no more abandonment for me.

There's now friendship, forgiveness. And so Christian looks and he looks and he looks until the floods break loose and he's weeping at the cross.

The cross is deep enough to take all of your looks at it. To handle all your looks and to never make you come up empty and say, well, that was a fruitless trip to come to the cross.

There is depth in the cross that will keep the Christian wondering, amazed for all eternity. We'll never get to the end of that. And so come to the cross.

We too often just take a glance at the cross and move on our way. That's not what brought tears to Bunyan's eyes, to Christian's eyes.

[11:08] It was looking and looking and looking again. In other words, meditating on the cross, thinking about what our Savior has accomplished there.

And doing so until our hearts are both broken and warmed with His love. Broken because we see there the ugliness of our sin that crushed our Savior, but also warmed with His love that He would bear God's wrath for us.

So, we ought to stop and meditate long enough to have the joy and peace that comes from believing in Christ and Him crucified. Affect our hearts and affect our lives.

Let me challenge you this week, every day, to think about the cross. to set aside some time to think about the cross and see if that doesn't indeed humble you and thrill you both at the same time.

Spurgeon explains Christian's tears in this way. He is grieving to think that he should ever have offended so kind a God. For nothing makes us so sorry for sin as the sense of being completely forgiven.

[12:29] I'd like to have that phrase blazoned on my heart and mind. Nothing makes us so sorry for sin as the sense of being completely forgiven.

My heart resonates with that. And I say, that's right. I never so hate a sin until I see that it's been absolutely paid for in full by my Savior.

And then I really hate that sin. Then I really feel sorry for sin. So let us pause at the cross. Let us look and look and wonder. It's there we gain a greater hatred of our sin.

It's there that we gain a greater love for our Savior. So he comes to the cross burdened down with sin and guilt. How did he leave the cross? What's his emotional frame upon leaving?

It is finished. How does he feel? Light? Light? Happy? Free? Yes, he has rest.

[13:39] There's wonder. But the predominant attitude that Bunyan states is joy. The joy of God's salvation. Glad, lightsome, merry heart. The beginning of bliss.

Three leaps for joy. Singing. And we would have more of this Calvary joy if we would spend more time looking at Christ and him crucified.

Spurgeon speaks of the joy that was his when his sins were first forgiven. He says, Believer, do you recollect the day when your fetters fell off? Do you remember the place where Jesus met you and said, I have loved thee with an everlasting love?

I have blotted out as a cloud thy transgressions and as a thick cloud thy sins. They shall not be mentioned against thee any more forever.

Oh, what a sweet season is that when Jesus takes away the pain of sin. When the Lord first pardoned my sin, I was so joyous that I could scarce refrain from dancing.

[14:46] I thought on my road home from the house where I had been set at liberty that I must tell the stones in the street the story of my deliverance. So full was my soul of joy that I wanted to tell every snowflake that was falling from the heaven of the wondrous love of Jesus who had blotted out the sins of one of the chief of rebels.

That happy day when I found the Savior and learned to cling to his dear feet was a day never to be forgotten by me. I can testify that the joy of that day was utterly indescribable.

There was no expression however fanatical which would have been out of keeping with the joy of my spirit at that hour. Many days of Christian experience have passed since then but there's never been one which has had the full exhilaration the sparkling delight which that first day had.

I thought I could have sprung from the seat on which I sat and have called out with the wildest of those Methodist brethren who were present. I am forgiven. I am forgiven.

A monument of grace. A sinner saved by blood. My spirit saw its chains broken to pieces. I felt that I was an emancipated soul.

[16:02] An heir of heaven. A forgiven one. Accepted in Jesus. Plucked out of the miry clay and out of the horrible pit. With my feet set upon a rock and my goings established.

I could understand what John Bunyan meant when he declared that he wanted to tell the crows on the plowed land all about his conversion. Remember we saw that when Bunyan was converted.

His joy made him want to tell the crows as he walked home that day. All about his savior. Billy Bray was a converted cornish miner.

And when he was a vile man converted by the savior, he would go skipping down the street and he'd say, I just can't help it. One foot shouts hallelujah and the other shouts praise the Lord. And so there is this I can't help it. There's this sense of joy overflowing that comes upon Christian at the cross. And I say we would know more of that. Perhaps you didn't have that distinct experience of joy because it wasn't so black and white as to when you were converted in your youth perhaps or whenever the Lord saved you.

[17 : 16] But there is much of that joy yet to be tasted as we meditate on the cross. Bunyan not only speaks of the cross here, but he also speaks of the influence of the resurrection.

He speaks of a sepulcher, doesn't he? That the burden falls off at the cross, but it rolls down the hill into the empty tomb and it's seen no more. What's he saying by that?

What role does the resurrection of Christ, the empty tomb, have in contributing to not only to our salvation but to our joy of salvation?

This is a deep theological question. And you guys are digging deep. What's the relationship? How does the resurrection feed the comfort of the Christian?

The resurrection has God's seal of approval on the son's sacrifice. And so when God says, I'm satisfied with that payment and raising the son from the dead, that means there's no more payment to be made.

[18 : 28] And he's completely happy with that payment. And so that payment was made for me and so that joy is completely mine.

All right, good. Jesus goes to the cross as a representative person. He's representing all of his elect, all that the Father has given to him.

He's taken our sins upon himself and he's our representative just as we send a representative to Washington. He's there on our behalf. And so Jesus goes to the cross as our representative and so our eyes are upon him.

What's going to happen to our representative? We see him damned by the Father. We see the wrath of God falling. We see him dying. We see him taken down and put into a grave. And our eyes are fixed upon him.

What does God think of our representative? Has he accepted the sacrifice that he made? Was it enough that he paid? And we wait to see. And when the Father comes and raises him from the dead and raises him all the way up into heaven and seats him at his own right hand, we know.

[19 : 34] We know the Father has accepted our representative. He has accepted us in him. The empty tomb declares that the payment for my sin has been accepted in heaven.

And because Jesus is there, I one day will be there. Because I'm married to him, he's my representative. And because God has taken him to heaven, all who are in Christ will one day be there as well.

He's there as our forerunner. He's just gone on before us. And his presence assures mine. So, the empty tomb feeds the joy as well of the Christian as we meditate upon Christ crucified and risen.

We sing that song, Not What My Hands Have Done, in verse 4, Horatius Bonar says, His cross dispels each doubt. I bury in his tomb each thought of unbelief and fear, each lingering shade of gloom.

Christian, do you ever have gloom and doubts and fears about your salvation? Well, Horatius Bonar says, His cross is the answer, and his tomb is the answer.

[20 : 54] His cross dispels each doubt, I bury in his tomb anything of lingering doubt and fear. God is the So he rose again for our justification.

Well, then the three angels come and they show what it is that we have received from the cross work of Jesus Christ. His work on the cross has won things for us.

And the first angel says, Thy sins be forgiven. If he's paid for them, then the whole debt is forgiven you. In him we have redemption and through his blood the forgiveness of sins.

The second angel strips him of his rags and clothes him with a change of raiment. Not only is something taken away, our old filthy rags, our own sins, but something is given to us, the righteousness of Christ.

I delight greatly in the Lord. My soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.

[22 : 06] And then the third angel sets a mark upon his forehead, gives him a roll with a seal that he should give at the celestial gate. And here Ephesians 1.13 is the footnote if you turn there.

Ephesians 1.13 and 14. And you also, talking about all that's ours in Christ and the blessings of forgiveness, redemption, forgiveness of sins, verse 7 and now verse 13 and 14.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, having looked, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, all to the praise of his glory.

So here is our sealing. We're marked. God puts his mark upon us that says he's mine, she's mine. We're sealed by him for the day of redemption. Marked. And that seal is the promised Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God in us is the mark that we belong to God and it's a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

[23:36] So because we have the Spirit now and we enjoy life in the Spirit now, that is guaranteeing that one day we're going to have the full inheritance. He's just the down payment. What we enjoy now is the down payment.

The first installment of our great salvation. And his presence in work in our hearts now is the guarantee that the full inheritance will be ours. So here is the fruit of the cross.

Forgiveness, righteousness, and the sealing, the guarantee of eternal salvation, all purchased for us by Christ on the cross.

salvation. Now, we've been following the track that Bunyan is saying that a person can be inside the gate of conversion to Christ, can be on the way to heaven, can enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit as our instructor, and still have a deep sense of the guilt and burden of sin that weighs them down, saved but lack the assurance of salvation.

salvation. And that, we noted, was the way that it was for Bunyan for many months. And yet it was clearer views of the cross then that gave him stronger assurance of salvation, that removed the burden from his back, the feelings of guilt.

[25:03] And, again, we're not saying this is a prescriptive for how it has to be in every situation. it's rather maybe you had this experience upon the first day of your conversion, as Spurgeon did, as he just explained, and you realized all that was yours in Christ, at least some of what was yours enough to thrill your heart and to take off any kind of a sense of sin and guilt immediately.

Maybe it came in stages, maybe as you grew in your understanding of the cross, you found your assurance deepened and strengthened. But what Bunyan is wanting to make clear is that a clear sight of Christ crucified is what unhinges the burden.

Whenever and to whatever effect that takes place in your life, it's Christ in him crucified. And so Spurgeon says the shortest way to faith is to consider the object of faith, Christ crucified.

And so he goes from the cross singing, singing a song, and the song is excellent. what a place to be the beginning of my bliss, to be the place where my burden falls.

Bless cross, he says. Bless sepulcher. And then he says, no, blessed rather the man that was there put to shame for me. In other words, the Christian glories in Christ himself.

[26:34] Not just a work done for him. Yes, that. But there is the personal element that Bunyan's not wanting us to miss. And that is the man himself who was put to shame for us.

Dave, you had a question. Just through my own life, I certainly struggle with assurance and understand the burden and emphasis here. but just for my own clarity, if Bunyan in fact used this effusion passage as a footnote here, we are not saying that the white raiment of the cleansing of Christ, whether we feel a burden or not, doesn't happen until our burden drops off.

It happens at salvation. Is that not correct? Correct. Is that a question? Or would you like a follow-up question?

Or would you like Pastor Aaron to explain the whole mess to you? All right, so what Dave's saying, it looks like he's saved here. Because here he's forgiven.

The angel says you're forgiven. Here he gets the righteousness of Christ. And that's what happens immediately upon faith. You look and you live immediately. The righteousness of Jesus is given to you.

[27:49] Sin's taken away forgiven. Righteousness given. Holy Spirit given as the seal, guaranteed. And it happens here at the cross rather than at the gate. What's the deal?

Pastor Aaron, explain it. I'm serious. I think that this is a personal opinion.

I think Bunyan is describing conversion as a process the way many of us experience it. It starts at the gate, it ends at the cross for him. And there are things there that may in reality happen only

moments apart in our experience.

Things that have to logically precede one another. But in time we can't separate them out. When you're in an allegory you've got to describe each one of them. And you have to make there be details.

You've got to go to the house of the interpreter. And that could be just a momentary thing when we receive this spirit, receive this spirit. But anyway, I think he's just describing conversion as we experience it, as a process.

[29:04] I can tell you the day and moment when I was saved. I can tell you that I prayed for a long time that Jesus would save me from my sins. And for me, I experienced conversion over a period of time.

Though there certainly was a moment when God declared me righteous in his sight. I think it's just being described as a process. We enter by the gate, the narrow gate, we're saved by the blood of Christ.

And I think some of the things that happen that are almost inseparable in time when you write an out of the way you have to be described individually. Did you hear that in the back?

Yeah, I think what Pastor Aaron is saying is that because he chose a journey as the way to explain conversion and the whole Christian life, it's linear.

And so, yeah, you've got to deal with one thing at a time and you don't stack them all up on top of each other, but this happens and then this happens and then this happens when in reality many of these things would have happened perhaps simultaneously or right at once.

[30:14] So that's one way to try to put together the gate and the cross. Jason? I guess initially I had some concerns about the whole sense of the cross and the place of assurance, which I think it is.

But I think Bunyan's also describing justification here and he doesn't specifically say that earlier and I think it plays into what Pastor Aaron is saying is that there are multiple things going on when a person is converted and an allegory doesn't give itself to explaining going into the gate and being justified and receiving the Holy Spirit and learning all these things that happen in a moment in time or in ways that we can't describe.

I guess that was my concern with just saying it was assurance there, but there seems to be a lot of details suggesting this justification that he's trying to describe.

Yeah, and my comeback would be that he's either describing justification or else he's showing what took place back at the gate through faith in Christ because you do have mercy looking upon the cross from the gate.

And so, again, I think there is this stacking of realities that happen in the Christian life. Dave? Well, and also I think that it's Christian's experience how he feels about everything.

[31:50] At the gate, he was converted but didn't necessarily realize it or feel it at the time until he came to the cross and that's where he is.

Right. So that's the way that we've been presenting this, that we would say that these three things that happened, he comes to understand happened to him. They actually happened to him at conversion back at the gate.

But, again, he also had his sins removed at the gate. He also had his guilt removed at the gate. But because he's still in his experience feeling these things, like Dave says, he's explaining perhaps, he's explaining how he feels these things, not when they happen.

So that's the other way to view these things. Steve? Perhaps the, I'm not sure, the analyzing the allegory that we're doing on here. Yeah. I don't see, it seems from the gate to the cross is all the same day.

It all happens on the same day in the allegory. Or, I mean, in other places it says it's nighttime, not daytime, not nighttime, but it's all seen through the same day. The gate turned up for his house and all the way to the cross without stopping.

[33:03] Okay. Which would, again, speak of stacking up experience together. All right, Dave? I reflect back on when I came to Christ and I had difficulty with insurance and someone explained to me that it's like a train.

It's one train, but the engine is the facts and the faith and the caboose is the feelings and that they come, not necessarily, they don't be. Okay.

Yes, Raj? I think there's multiple things going on here. I think in some people's experience, I think some of what's funny and times are fake here too, is that you can always, your burden doesn't always live to get the day of salvation.

There is a time that takes place from the time that you are saved until the burden, until you have that assurance of salvation. So in one sense, there isn't this fact where it all happens in one day. Well, the reality of justification though, Raj, is what we're saying. The actual forgiveness of sin and the actual giving of the righteousness of Christ and giving of the Spirit, that that all takes place at conversion.

[34 : 16] I think we're all agreed on that. Right. But that's what I'm saying. It's not necessarily any allegory or a sequence where in some senses, some of the things that happen at the cross, you know, the burden isn't lifted at the gate.

And so you might take the cross and the gate at one day, but yet the burden isn't lifted until after that. So you can't take the allegory and say it's the same way the burdens are going to end.

Yeah, there's two different ways of seeing this. I agree. And as somebody just said, we're just debating the allegory. And I'm glad that that's all we're debating. We're agreed that it is the cross that saves us, that forgives our sins, that gives us righteousness and purges the Holy Spirit as the indwelling guarantee for heaven.

So, yeah, this is where we started, where I said you may not agree with Bunyan's story. You don't need to. We can disagree with what his story, but the biblical truths that he is presenting to us, I think we come away with the same.

Mark? It's been a while since I read the book itself. I'm trying to remember what would you say would describe the content of his faith and faith?

[35 : 44] Well, we said that there has to be some knowledge of the cross at the gate. You can't be saved without some knowledge of the cross. We get the writing of the allegory and does it mention the cross?

It doesn't in pilgrims' experience, it does in mercies, Christiana's experience. So, there again, that's a bit confusing to us from his storyline.

But it could just be saying that Christiana saw more about the cross at the beginning of her Christian life than her husband did. She understood it.

And maybe the reason she understood it is because she's been living with a husband who's glorying in the cross and who's talking to his wife about what the cross means. And so maybe that's why when she comes to faith, she has a fuller understanding of the cross in her life.

Well, our time is gone. And again, let's glory in the cross. Let's think about it every day this week. Let's rejoice in him as we come to worship.

[36 : 48] We're dismissed.