

THE LEVER

THE BI-ANNUAL JOURNAL OF BAPTIST EVANGELICALS TODAY



CROSS PURPOSES

THE LEVER

lever (lee-ver) n. 1. a bar or other device pivoted on a fixed point (the fulcrum) in order to lift something or force something open. 2. a flat projecting handle used in the same way to operate or control machinery etc. – v. to use a lever, to lift or move by this. leverage. n. the action or power of a lever. (Oxford Paperback Dictionary)

The Lever aims to open up healthy and respectful reflection in our denomination on the Bible's role in our identity and decision making. We want us all to be moved by the fulcrum of the Biblical Gospel – the unmoving centre of the Apostolic witness to Jesus – and to revolve around that centre, and derive our power from that centre. The journal aims to be a biblical, loving, robust lever for such aims.

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I

I know, I know, we really should rename this 'the occasional journal' of Baptist Evangelicals Today, or better yet, the 'whenever we get around to it' journal; bi-annual just doesn't seem to capture the... *spaciousness* between issues. But we do what we can, and we've made it to the eighth issue of the Lever. The death of the Lord Jesus is our theme and I trust you'll find much food for thought in the articles. With his usual erudition David Starling develops the outline of a balanced and full-orbed view of the cross via his interactions with C J Mahaney and Michael Gorman. Anthony Petterson delivers exegetical virtuosity on Zechariah, proving once again how powerful it is to see the New concealed in the Old and the Old revealed in the New. Hefin Jones's cheekily titled op-ed style piece asks a poignant question of a major new document being used by our Baptist churches here in NSW. Rodney Bayley's appreciative review of Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson's latest book on the Resurrection provides that bit of balance lest we be accused of too much crucicentrism. I also include a Good Friday sermon of mine.

II

It's probably apocryphal, but I remember hearing a story about Martyn-Lloyd Jones. It was said that Wednesday mornings were set aside so people could make appointments with the doctor if they needed pastoral counselling. Apparently it was not uncommon for a person to sit down in his office and be told, before anything was said, 'Well, we know what the problem is here: sin. We just need to figure out what to do about it.' It would be an understatement to say that contemporary counselling would consider this a harsh beginning; a terrible reductionism. But there's a profound truth in it. Most problems are about sin – others against us, us against others, or plenty of give and take, not to mention our 'private' sins against God. Surely the cross speaks powerfully into all such situations. The cross says that the sin committed by you

or against you matters greatly. It will allow no evasion or euphemism with the counselee's wrongdoing. It will bring divine empathy to those wounds inflicted by others. Of course it likewise opens up a path of hope because it is repentance and forgiveness that are so desperately needed in conflicted situations. Whether we are the sinning one or the sinned against, the cross speaks to the person in need of counsel. So, could we add another reductionism to our pastoral counsel and say, 'We also know the solution here: the cross. You just need to ask what it says to your situation.'? Developing a more thoughtful and explicit use of the cross in our pastoral counselling is a theme I may take up in a future article.

III

Evangelicals are often criticised for their cross-centredness and said to be weaker in other vital areas of theology – the Trinity, the incarnation, and so on. Without conceding the point, I do have a theory as to why the atonement features so prominently in evangelical life. I think it is, historically, where most attacks on the gospel have landed. And if a provocateur chooses the field of battle then that's where you're obliged to turn up. Medieval Catholicism cast no aspersions on the incarnation or the resurrection, but the how of justification was another matter entirely. Hence, Luther. Fast forward a few centuries and the likes of Brian McLaren, Steve Chalke, or our own Tim Costello, are full steam ahead on the Trinity and incarnation, but spit venom when it comes to propitiation. In order to promote the gospel in every age, evangelicals have simply had to restate the truth of Christ's comprehensive atonement. I think examples of this could be multiplied. So, are we too crucicentric? My answer: don't blame us!

Matthew Arkapaw



TWO KINDS OF 'CROSS-CENTRED'

'CROSS-CENTRED'?

Evangelicals have long understood themselves as belonging to a cross-centred movement with a cross-centred message. David Bebbington's frequently-cited quadrilateral of evangelical emphases places 'crucicentrism' alongside 'conversionism', 'activism' and 'biblicism' among the defining characteristics of evangelicalism, and a truckload of examples and anecdotes bear out the accuracy of this description.

Whether this ought to be the case is another question, of course. To begin with, it must be emphasised that a message with the cross as its *centre* must not be allowed to turn into a message about the cross in *isolation* – as if a 'centre' could mean something without a circumference. The event of the crucifixion only means what it means because of the larger story of which it is a part – the story of the sending and incarnation of the Son, his human life, his public ministry and proclamation of the kingdom, his confrontation with the authorities, his arrest and trial, and (after his death) his burial, resurrection, ascension and heavenly session, and the prospect of his return. Wrapped around that story, in turn, are the big, concentric stories of God and Israel, God and humanity, and God and the world.

And even when that point is granted and duly emphasised, there remains the question of whether the centre of those big circles should best be identified as the cross, the resurrection, or the cross-and-resurrection. In their recent book *The Cross is not Enough* (reviewed elsewhere in this edition of *The Lever*)

Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson have rightly challenged the adequacy of any account of Christian faith and life that treats the resurrection as a sub-theme or an after-thought. If we are to summarise the whole story we tell, to draw the whole picture of our theology on a single page, then the most helpful approach is almost certainly to place the cross and resurrection alongside one another at the centre of the picture and the climax of the story (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-11).

But whilst the gospel tells a single story, it is a story with many themes, and one that performs many functions. At the risk of over-simplification, it is possible to tease out some of those strands and identify them as, respectively, cross-centred or resurrection-centred in the way that they evoke and apply the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. As a proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and Lord (e.g. Rom 1:1-4; Acts 2:22-36), and as a summons to repentance and warning of judgement (e.g. Acts 17:18, 31), for example, the gospel can be preached with the accent on the resurrection. As a revelation of God's righteousness (e.g. Rom 3:21-26), his wisdom (e.g. 1 Cor 1:21-2:5) and his love (e.g. 1 John 4:9-10), the gospel can be preached with the accent on the cross. Cross and resurrection belong together and are mutually interpreting, but there are particular aspects and dimensions of the gospel in which the emphasis falls on one and particular aspects and dimensions in which the emphasis falls on the other.

The same can be said for the shape of the Christian life, as a life determined by the gospel. Christian faith and hope rest on

cross-centred convictions about God's love (e.g. Rom 5:1-11; 8:32; 1 John 4:9-17) and resurrection-centred convictions about God's power (e.g. 1 Pet 1:3; Heb 11:17-20; Rom 4:16-25; Eph 1:15-23). Christian love is patterned on the self-giving love demonstrated in Jesus' death (e.g. John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-21; Eph 5:1-2), but it is the resurrection that empowers Christ's people to persevere in pouring out their lives for others, assuring them that love's labours are not in vain (e.g. 1 Cor 15:58).

There are contexts, then, in which it is legitimate to speak about the Christian faith and the Christian life as 'cross-centred', just as there are contexts in which it is legitimate to speak about Christian faith and life as 'resurrection-centred'. Nor should the two emphases be seen as 'balancing' one another out, in some sort of zero-sum equation. A person who is captivated by the resurrection of the crucified Jesus will be empowered by the resurrection to 'die every day' in the service of Christ (1 Cor 15:31); those who are 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus' do so 'so that the life of Jesus may be visible in our mortal flesh' (2 Cor 4:10-11; cf. Phil 3:10-11). For us as evangelicals, there are huge tracts of thought and life that we rightly describe as 'cross-centred', and we must never turn down the volume of the message about how Jesus loved us and gave himself for us: 'May [we] never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to [us] and [us] to the world' (Gal 6:14).

TWO KINDS OF 'CROSS-CENTRED'

But there is more than one kind of 'cross-centred' that people can have in mind when they use that adjective to describe the content of Christian faith and the shape of the Christian life. This was brought home to me again this week as I pondered the complementary strengths and weaknesses of two books I have read recently.

MAHANAY ON THE CROSS CENTRED LIFE

The first is a book by C. J. Mahaney called, *Living the Cross Centred Life*, that I was given by a couple of generous-hearted students several years ago. I was already familiar with the title of the book, having sung a few of the songs from the accompanying CD in church, and having appreciated the songs I was interested to read the book that had inspired them.

There is much in the book that had me cheering, and much that did me good. It sets the tone at the start with a sharp challenge to the distractability that we so easily fall prey to in a world full of noble causes and bright shiny objects:

"If there's anything in life that we should be passionate about, it's the gospel. And I don't mean passionate only about sharing it with others; I mean passionate in thinking about the gospel, reflecting on it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to color the way we look at the world and all of life" (15).

The remainder of the book offers a warm and accessible account of the doctrine of atonement by penal substitution, drawing out a number of implications for how we think and feel as Christians ('His Presence in our Suffering'; 'Assurance and Joy'; 'How the Cross Rescues you from

the Performance Trap'; 'How the Cross Removes Guilt and Shame'), before closing with a few suggestions for how to keep the message of Christ dying for our sins in the front of our minds day by day.

Taken as a whole, the book is a valuable reminder of the wonderful gospel-grounded theme of 'redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace' (Eph 1:8). A cross-centred life, according to the vision sketched out in this book, is a life that is undergirded by daily remembrance of God's great kindness, expressed in the forgiveness of our sins, and of the costly death of Jesus that paid for those sins to be forgiven.

What surprised me was not so much what the book included as what it omitted – the fact that a book called *Living the Cross Centred Life* could include so little of the gospels and nothing at all of Jesus' call to take up the cross and follow him. With the solitary exception of Isaiah 53, the suggested verses to focus on in order to 'memorize the gospel' (133-37) are all from Paul's letters, and the first tip on how to 'study the gospel' was 'camp out in the books of Romans and Galatians' (142). In the closing chapters of the book there was some mention of themes like 'our ongoing pursuit of sanctification' (154), but the main connection drawn between the cross and the life of holiness was not the way the cross *informs* the shape of what a life of holiness might look like, but the way the cross *empowers our perseverance* in pursuing it. The idea that Jesus suffered 'leaving [us] an example, so that [we] should follow in his steps' (1 Pet 2:21), was hardly to be found anywhere in the book, from the first page to the last. As omissions go, that is a pretty big one!

GORMAN ON CRUCIFORMITY

The second book I have been pondering recently is one by Michael Gorman called *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Theology of the Cross*. Between the two books there are some obvious similarities (both focus on the cross; both are based mainly – or in Gorman's case exclusively – on the writings of Paul; both are interested not only in questions of doctrine but also in questions of 'life' and 'spirituality') and some obvious differences (for starters, there are the differences in size and weightiness between Mahaney's slim devotional volume and Gorman's 400-page academic monograph).

But there are other differences between the two books that have been occupying my thoughts as I have compared them. It is precisely in the places where Mahaney's book is at its strongest that Gorman's is most disappointing. Whilst Gorman can go as far as affirming that Paul's understanding of the cross includes elements of 'sacrifice', 'interchange' and 'substitution' (82-88, 376), he doesn't think that Paul places his emphasis there (376), and he does not find a motif of penal substitution anywhere in Paul. Nor is he happy with the language of 'propitiation' for explaining the relationship between Christ's death and the wrath and judgement of God that is implied in passages like Rom 3:21-26.

Curiously, Gal 3:13-14 is omitted altogether from his summary of 'narrative patterns' that articulate the various meanings of the cross for Paul (82-88). When he does refer to those verses, he ventures only as far as to say that '*although* the Law pronounced the crucified Christ a curse... God pronounced him the source of blessing' (221; my italics). What he omits to

mention is the logic of the relationship Paul asserts between curse and blessing – that ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law *by* becoming a curse *for* us ... *in order that* in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.’

When he turns to the topic of the ‘faith’ that receives the blessings that are won for us in Christ’s death, he is so eager (and rightly eager, in my opinion) to emphasize the inseparability of faith, love and obedience that he ends up proposing a definition of faith that implies that faith is love (97-99) and arguing that, for Paul, ‘obedience and faith are essentially synonymous’ (133). A similar thing happens to justification: in order to stress the inseparability of forensic justification and ethical transformation, he offers a definition of justification in which the two are simply stirred into the same pot (135-136). In both cases, pairs of concepts (faith and obedience; justification and transformation) that are distinguishable but inseparably connected in Paul’s thinking become fused together in Gorman’s account, to the point that there is no distinguishing between them.

If the themes Mahaney emphasises are the ones that Gorman omits or marginalises, the themes that Mahaney omits are (conversely) the ones that Gorman emphasises. Throughout the book there is a strong and well-argued emphasis on the multi-dimensionality of the meaning of the cross in Paul’s letters, and on the way that the story of the cross

functions, for Paul, not only as the source of our forgiveness but also as the shape of our life:

Paul wanted his life and ministry to tell a story, a story that corresponded to the master story of Christ’s self-emptying, self-giving faith, faith, love, power and hope. That master story provided patterns for life that created constant occasions for a wide variety of analogous acts of faith, love, power and hope. The apostle’s mission was to approximate a faithful retelling, in his life, of that story, and to create a series of communities that, together and individually, would be a living exegesis of the same story (400).

Along the way, Gorman offers a string of worked examples from within Paul’s letters of ways in which that pattern works its way out, informing everything from Paul’s determination to work with his hands as a tent-maker (189-191) to his emphatic advocacy of non-retaliation and love of enemies in the way that the Christians in Rome are to relate to their pagan neighbours (248). In an age of self-promotion and celebrity ministries, I found his description of Paul’s cruciform ministry patterns particularly pertinent:

Paul can alter his behaviours because he does not believe that any or them – keeping Jewish dietary laws or not, for example – are essential to covenant life with God in Christ... Yet the apostle makes it clear that although the nature of the specific behaviors makes it possible for him to adapt or reject them depending on the audience, he must in some way follow the pattern of status renunciation if he wants to share in the blessings of the gospel (1 Cor 9:23). That is, the specifics of cruciform adaptability are flexible

(and, one might say, negotiable), but the general, cruciform pattern itself is consistent and required... Thus Paul’s adaptability is not merely part of an ‘evangelistic strategy,’ for the gospel has an ‘inner dynamic’ that requires Paul to ‘take the same self-lowering path taken by the Christ who was crucified.’

BOTH/AND CRUCICENTRISM

In the case of these two books, then, ‘crucicentrism’ can stand for two quite different sets of emphases. What is stressed in one is neglected or denied in the other, and vice versa. But it doesn’t have to be that way. There is nothing in the Bible’s presentation of the message of the cross that compels us to make an either/or choice between a crucicentrism that emphasises the grace of God in the sin-bearing death of Jesus and a crucicentrism that points to the pattern of Jesus’ obedience and love as an example for us to follow in life and ministry. In the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, the two emphases are placed side by side, over and over again, and brought into the closest relationship with each other:

Whoever wishes to be first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mk 10:44-45)

And he died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them. (2 Cor 5:15)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you should follow in his steps... He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness. (1 Pet 2:21)

If (as I continue to believe) there is a proper place for 'crucicentrism' deep within the evangelical identity, we must be careful to ensure that the kind of crucicentrism we represent in our teaching and our behaviour is not an either/or crucicentrism but a both/and crucicentrism. An evangelicalism that is in faithful continuity with the teaching of Scripture will have a cross-centred understanding of the way Christ's work satisfies the justice of God and propitiates his wrath, reconciling us and all things to God. And, equally, an evangelicalism that is in faithful continuity with the teaching of Scripture will have a cross-centred understanding of how Christ's model of humble service and self-giving love ought to shape Christian life and Christian ministry.

David Starling

END NOTES

1 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989): 2.

2 E.g. John Stott's account of the origins of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship in John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986): 7-9.

3 C. J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross Centered Life* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2006).

4 Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

5 There is no space in this article to lay out the reasons for why the distinctions between these concepts ought to be maintained, even when the connections and overlaps between them in Paul's letters are (correctly) emphasised.

6 Gorman, *Cruciformity*: 191, quoting Graham Tomlin, *The Power of the Cross: Theology and the Death of Christ in Paul, Luther and Pascal* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999): 95.



JOHN CALVIN, *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION*
(BK 2/CH 16/6), 1559/1989, EERDMANS, 438-439

“...AS TREMBLING CONSCIENCES FIND NO REST WITHOUT SACRIFICE AND ABLUTION BY WHICH OUR SINS ARE EXPIATED, WE ARE PROPERLY DIRECTED THITHER, THE SOURCE OF OUR LIFE BEING PLACED IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST. MOREOVER, AS THE CURSE CONSEQUENT UPON GUILT REMAINED FOR THE FINAL JUDGEMENT OF GOD, ONE PRINCIPAL POINT IN THE NARRATIVE IS HIS CONDEMNATION BEFORE PONTIUS PILATE, THE GOVERNOR OF JUDEA, TO TEACH US, THAT THE PUNISHMENT TO WHICH WE WERE LIABLE WAS INFLICTED ON THAT JUST ONE. WE COULD NOT ESCAPE THE FEARFUL JUDGMENT OF GOD; AND CHRIST, THAT HE MIGHT RESCUE US FROM IT, SUBMITTED TO BE CONDEMNED BY A MORTAL, NAY, BY A WICKED AND PROFANE MAN. FOR THE NAME OF GOVERNOR IS MENTIONED NOT ONLY TO SUPPORT THE CREDIBILITY OF THE NARRATIVE, BUT TO REMIND US OF WHAT ISAIAH SAYS, THAT “THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM;” AND THAT “WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED” (IS 53:5). FOR, IN ORDER TO REMOVE OUR CONDEMNATION, IT WAS NOT SUFFICIENT TO ENDURE ANY KIND OF DEATH. TO SATISFY OUR RANSOM, IT WAS NECESSARY TO SELECT A MODE OF DEATH IN WHICH HE MIGHT DELIVER US, BOTH BY GIVING HIMSELF UP TO CONDEMNATION, AND UNDERTAKING OUR EXPIATION. HAD HE BEEN CUT OFF BY ASSASSINS, OR SLAIN IN A SEDITIOUS TUMULT, THERE COULD HAVE BEEN NO KIND OF SATISFACTION IN SUCH A DEATH. BUT WHEN HE IS PLACED AS A CRIMINAL AT THE BAR, WHERE WITNESSES ARE BROUGHT TO GIVE EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM, AND THE MOUTH OF THE JUDGE CONDEMNS HIM TO DIE, WE SEE HIM SUSTAINING THE CHARACTER OF AN OFFENDER AND EVIL-DOER. HERE WE MUST ATTEND TO TWO POINTS WHICH HAD BOTH BEEN FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS, AND TEND ADMIRABLY TO COMFORT AND CONFIRM OUR FAITH. WHEN WE READ THAT CHRIST WAS LED AWAY FROM THE JUDGEMENT-SEAT TO EXECUTION, AND WAS CRUCIFIED BETWEEN THIEVES, WE HAVE A FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY WHICH IS QUOTED BY THE EVANGELIST, “HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS (IS 53: 12; MARK 15: 28).” WHY WAS IT SO? THAT HE MIGHT BEAR THE CHARACTER OF A SINNER, NOT OF A JUST OR INNOCENT PERSON, INASMUCH AS HE MET DEATH ON ACCOUNT NOT OF INNOCENCE, BUT OF SIN. ON THE OTHER HAND, WHEN WE READ THAT HE WAS ACQUITTED BY THE SAME LIPS THAT CONDEMNED HIM (FOR PILATE WAS FORCED ONCE AND AGAIN TO BEAR PUBLIC TESTIMONY TO HIS INNOCENCE), LET US CALL TO MIND WHAT IS SAID BY ANOTHER PROPHET, “I RESTORED THAT WHICH I TOOK NOT AWAY” (PS 69: 4).

THUS WE PERCEIVE CHRIST REPRESENTING THE CHARACTER OF A SINNER AND A CRIMINAL, WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME, HIS INNOCENCE SHINES FORTH, AND IT BECOMES MANIFEST THAT HE SUFFERS FOR ANOTHER’S AND NOT HIS OWN CRIMES. OUR ACQUITTAL IS IN THIS – THAT THE GUILT WHICH MADE US LIABLE TO PUNISHMENT WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE HEAD OF THE SON OF GOD (IS 53: 12). WE MUST SPECIALLY REMEMBER THIS SUBSTITUTION IN ORDER THAT WE MAY NOT BE ALL OUR LIVES IN TREPIDATION AND ANXIETY, AS IF THE JUST VENGEANCE, WHICH THE SON OF GOD TRANSFERRED TO HIMSELF, WERE STILL IMPENDING OVER US. ”

“IT IS WRITTEN THAT THE MESSIAH IS TO SUFFER”: TRANSLATING ZECHARIAH 9:9 AND THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

In the first century world, the idea of a suffering Messiah denied reason. Like a square circle or frozen steam, it was a logical contradiction. The Messiah would be victorious and conquering. The Messiah would triumph over all God’s enemies. The Messiah would rule forever over an eternal kingdom...not suffer and be killed. In order to reconcile this, some Jews in later times who read their Bibles proposed the coming of two Messiahs, a victorious Messiah ben David, and a second Messiah ben Joseph or ben Ephraim who would die in a battle against Gog and Magog. How else could texts about a suffering Messiah be understood?

Not only did it baffle, the idea of a crucified Messiah was scandalous to the Jewish mind (1 Cor. 1:23). Death was the penalty for sin. How could the Messiah die? You may as well be calling the Messiah a criminal.

Of course, the Damascus road experience was one where Paul came to see that the Messiah had to die. The Messiah suffered the curse of God to deal with sin, and God vindicated the Messiah by raising him from the dead. Paul’s eyes were opened to God’s plan – the death of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant is God’s wisdom. It is a beautiful and wonderful truth.

The suffering of the Messiah is a central aspect of Zechariah’s prophecy, particularly chapters 9–14, but even still, some modern Bible translations struggle with the idea of a suffering Messiah. For instance, in Zechariah 9:9 there are four descriptions of the coming king. Compare some of the English translations:

Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey... (NRSV)

Lo, your king is coming to you. He is victorious, triumphant, Yet humble, riding on an ass... (JPS TNK1985)

Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey... (ESV)

See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey... (NIV1984)

See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey... (NIV2011)

Each of these translations, to varying extents, seems still to resist the idea of a suffering Messiah. Before having a close look at this, let me briefly set the context. Zechariah 9 begins the first of two oracles that portray the return of God to overthrow his enemies and save and establish his people ‘on that day’ (Zech. 9–11; 12–14). Zechariah 9:1-8 announces that the word of God is ‘against’ various lands and cities that marked the boundaries of the old Davidic Empire (in Syria, Phoenicia, and Philistia). In other words, in Zechariah’s day the words of judgment of the earlier prophets (e.g., Jeremiah) against these places still awaited fulfillment before God’s kingdom would be established. Zechariah therefore reaffirms the earlier prophetic oracles of judgment. At the same time, God will return to his temple to protect and bless his people. At the center of Zechariah 9 and the center of this future hope is the king coming to Jerusalem (9:9). It is a restatement of the

earlier prophetic hope for an ideal Davidic king, or ‘Messiah’ who is central to God’s salvation purposes (e.g., Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 16:5; Jer. 23:3-6; 33:14-22; Ezek. 37:21-25; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:8-5:5; Amos 9:11-15).

The king is described as ‘your king’, that is Jerusalem’s king, perhaps in contrast to Gaza’s king who perished (v. 5), but certainly bringing to mind the ideal king of earlier prophetic expectation (including the Shoot of Zech. 3:8; 6:12). The call for ‘daughter Zion’ to ‘rejoice greatly’ and ‘shout’ recalls Zech. 2:10 (cf. Zeph. 3:14), where daughter Zion is exhorted to sing and rejoice because Yahweh is coming to dwell in her midst in the context of both judging the nations (2:9) and incorporating them into his people (2:11).

Four further descriptions are given of Jerusalem’s coming king in v. 9. First, ‘He is righteous’ (*tsaddiq*). While some understand ‘righteous’ in a military sense, translating ‘triumphant’ (e.g., NRSV), or ‘victorious’ (JPS) it is best understood in its usual sense. Not only is ‘righteous’ to be a key character of the Davidic king, his essential role is to establish ‘justice and righteousness’ (e.g., 1 Sam. 24:17; 2 Sam. 8:15; 23:3-5; Ps. 72:1-7; Isa. 9:7; 11:4-5; 32:1; Jer. 23:5).

Second, this king is ‘saved’ (*yasha*). The Hebrew actually has a passive sense, so that with Yahweh’s conquest of the nations the king has ‘been saved’ and is enabled to assume power. Many take it as a reflexive, ‘having salvation’ (ESV, NIV2011), or extend the reflexive idea and that of the previous description to ‘victorious’ (NRSV, NIV1984) or ‘triumphant’ (JPS). Yet there are only two other instances of

this verb form in the OT and both have a passive sense (Deut. 33:29; Ps. 33:16). What it most naturally means is that the coming king has been saved, not by his own might, but by God's. In the context of Yahweh's conquest in 9:1-8, the salvation of the king implies the salvation of the people (cf. Isa. 49:6), but Zechariah here seems to be drawing on a suffering David tradition seen in the Psalms and developed in Isaiah's servant songs. I will return to discuss this further.

There are two ways of translating the next description (*'āni*): 'humble' (e.g., Num. 12:3; Ps. 18:28; Isa. 66:2; Zeph. 3:12) or 'afflicted' (e.g., Ps. 22:24; Isa. 53:4, 7). The translation is closely connected with how 'riding on a donkey' is understood. This latter description is often taken to be a contrast to the king who rides on a warhorse and trusts in his own might and despotism (cf. Zech. 9:10; Ps. 33:17). Zion's king trusts in God and rides on a donkey. In this case, 'humble' complements this picture and is a positive image of the one who trusts in God. Alternatively, Pamela Scalise in her recent Zechariah commentary suggests that the background for Zechariah's portrait is David's return to Jerusalem after putting down Absalom's revolt. During this period of exile he rode on a donkey (cf. 2 Sam. 16:2). Furthermore, in this episode, David was humiliated and nearly defeated by his enemies, before God saved him. The picture of David as he returns to Jerusalem is one of distress and suffering (e.g., 2 Sam. 16:12) and the translation 'afflicted' complements this negative picture. Given the wider connections in the book of Zechariah between the suffering David, the suffering servant of Isaiah, and Zechariah's coming king, then this second suggestion is compelling. Indeed, the contrasting ideologies of kingship

in the first proposal still lie behind the second proposal as well. There may also be an echo of the promise of 'kingship' to Judah in Gen. 49:8-12, which is the only other instance of the phrase 'the foal of a donkey' (lit. 'son of a jenny') in the OT (v. 9). Nevertheless, Zion's future king stands apart from most kings of Israel and Judah, including David, who used their power so often in arrogance, defiance, and self-service. Zion's future king trusts in Yahweh who has delivered him.

Therefore, a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew is:

Look! Your king will come to you. He is righteous and saved, afflicted and riding upon a donkey...

The portrait of this king draws particularly on the suffering David of 2 Samuel, the book of Psalms, and Isaiah's servant. He is not a mighty warrior king who trusts in his own strength, but one who trusts in God. Some suggest that this king is almost passive and Zechariah's focus shifts to God who is the true king who saves, but this is overstated, especially in light of v. 10 where this human king preaches peace and rules over all the earth. If he is 'passive' it is only because he trusts in God in his work, much like the 'silent action' of Isaiah's servant (Isa. 42:1-4).

Zechariah's portrait of a suffering Messiah, of weakness and power, is clearly seen in Jesus' life, climaxing in his crucifixion and resurrection. All four Gospels record that Jesus acquired and rode a donkey into Jerusalem, claiming to be this king (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-38; John 12:12-19). His righteousness and suffering to the point of death meant that he was saved by God in his resurrection and now through his gospel proclaims peace to the nations (cf. Eph. 2:17; Php. 2:6-11). While we now serve a victorious

Messiah, the path of suffering must never be forgotten or downplayed. Not least because the power of the gospel displayed in human weakness is the pattern for Christian ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 1-4).

Anthony Petterson



AT THE FOOT(NOTE) OF THE CROSS: ON MISSION COVENANTS AND THE MISSION OF JESUS

One of the earliest fruit of the Directions 2012 project was the Mission One Covenant that was designed to reinvigorate our churches' commitment to the mission of Jesus, and to do so in a holistic manner. As the covenant's rubric puts it, "Christian mission is the announcement and demonstration of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in the way of Jesus, to our world, both locally and globally." In pithy and clear terms the covenant sets out a practical 'missional' template for our churches.

At some point in the covenant's development and adoption the criticism was made that it insufficiently emphasised the cross, and the response was to add a footnote: "*As stated in the preamble, we understand the Lordship of Jesus to include his salvific work on the cross and through his resurrection. He is both Lord and Saviour." So what did the preamble have to say about Christ's cross and resurrection? "We believe that through his death and resurrection, Jesus is the Saviour of all those who accept him as such by faith through grace. It is as our resurrected Saviour that we acknowledge him as our Lord." These are fine shorthand statements of the gospel, so why the criticism, and does the footnote genuinely address the concern?

Speaking for myself, I see the footnote as a lost opportunity. The covenant's emphasis falls on the Lordship of Jesus, which is a clear biblical emphasis. Paul can certainly speak in isolated locutions about preaching "Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4:5) and the repeated emphasis in the New Testament is on believing

and declaring "Jesus is Lord" (e.g. 1 Cor 12:3). The footnote also in its brief way indicates that announcing the Lordship of Jesus implies announcing the cross and resurrection. But has the emphasis shifted too far from the centrality of the cross? The appeal throughout the covenant is to "the way of Jesus" — to Jesus and his "missional priorities, lifestyle and message." What then are Jesus' priorities, lifestyle and message as found in the gospels?

As a fresh uni student I remember finding a new church and being disappointed that they insisted on all new folks working through one of the gospels with them during their first year at the church. I wanted some "real meat" — give me some Romans, or Hebrews, even Revelation, why spend a whole year on the "milk" of Gospel stories?! They were wise, I was young. A year of Mark was an eye-opener. There I saw clearly the Jesus who preached a gospel of repentance and faith, whose aim was to declare the approaching kingdom, rescue sinners and to die so the many might live. If we look for mission statements and missional purposes they all point ultimately to the cross and the resurrection. The deepest revelation of his purpose and message is that he is the servant king, rejected, crucified, raised to rescue many (especially Mark 8:29-31 with 10:45, but see also 9:9-13, 30-31; 10:33-34; 14:22-24). Matthew, Luke and John teach likewise.

There is a liberal presupposition that somehow the early church transformed the message of Jesus into a message about Jesus. But the only Jesus we have is the

Jesus of the Gospels and the apostolic application of the gospel as found in Acts and their letters. The Jesus of the gospels is a Jesus who is resolutely on his way to the cross. The way of Jesus is the way of atonement. It may be more, but it is certainly not less.

The footnoted cross of the Mission Covenant is a missed opportunity to really clarify that we are engaged in the work of proclaiming a rescuer and a rescue. By all means let's make it clear that our rescuer is our Lord, by virtue of our creation and new creation. But let's not play down that our Lord is the crucified Christ.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

1 Corinthians 1:23 ...we preach Christ crucified...

Hefin Jones



BOOK REVIEW: 'THE CROSS IS NOT ENOUGH'

BY ROSS CLIFFORD & PHILIP JOHNSON

Clifford and Johnson's book has a deliberately provocative title, which gets to the heart of their main argument. Their thesis is that the resurrection of Jesus is the lynchpin of Christianity, and yet the prevailing focus on the Cross has rendered this central event as an appendage which is given scant attention. Not only have they sought to redress that perceived imbalance, but they have presented the resurrection in a holistic manner. Not content with the resurrection simply being given more apologetic weight as the proof of the efficacy of the Cross to defeat sin and death, they have shown how it applies to the believer's life in the present and the future. This holistic approach makes it arguably a ground-breaking book, which addresses a yawning gap in this area of theology as it's applied to the everyday life of a Christian.

It contains thirteen chapters, broken up into four sections. However, the flow of the book might be considered backwards, as the author's note towards the end of the first chapter. Instead of developing their arguments towards a conclusion, they effectively begin with their summary. This works as the reader is immediately confronted with their main thesis. It sets the tone as a polemic which seeks to correct the anecdotal evidence that the resurrection often only receives passing interest on Easter Sundays, at funerals, or in answering skeptics. As they argue that the resurrection has been eclipsed in evangelical theology in chapter one, they take aim at John Stott and James Denny as leading examples of Cross-centred theologies that effectively render the resurrection as secondary.

The opening section was certainly arresting, but the second section on

'Thumbprints of the resurrection in culture' seemed to meander. Although this was arguably the most interesting section and the unique contribution of the book, the order was somewhat mystifying with general revelation occurring in the middle and church history at the end. More importantly, it is so eclectic, covering everything from theories of selfhood to vampire spirituality, that it was easy to lose track of the main point. It lends itself to dipping in and out to explore topics of interest, rather than being read in a linear fashion, which they did acknowledge in the opening chapter. Again, the order of the chapters in the third section ('Back to the bible') seemed unwarranted, with their summary of New Testament resurrection theology preceding the Hebrew scriptures, with the latter being one of the most interesting and polemical in this reviewer's opinion.

I was challenged to think about my own 'skinny' theology of the resurrection, which has largely focused on apologetic issues, or the pastoral assurance it brings as a Christian faces death. It is a thought-provoking book which deserves to be widely read, particularly by local pastors and church leaders. The practical application is broad, and well captured by the book's subtitle: 'Living as witnesses to the resurrection.' It is not hard to agree with their argument that our lack of focus and teaching on the resurrection is naturally having implications in the lives of believers, including our witness to our post-modern world in the west. We need to recapture the biblical emphasis on the resurrection, which is perhaps most evident in the early church's preaching in Acts. As the second section of their book demonstrates, the resurrection provides

many connection points within today's popular culture. As Clifford and Johnson state in their conclusion to chapter eight,

"Many seekers who start journeys of reflection begin with questions about meaning, long before they will ponder the truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection."

Though the modernist Josh McDowell approach won't connect with Gen Y and beyond, the resurrection life of a believer offers other bridges just waiting to be explored.

Rod Bayley

Senior Pastor, Wollongong



JOHN MURRAY, **REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED AND APPLIED**, EERDMANS, 1955, 76-78.

“IT IS TRUE WE BEAR THE PUNISHMENT OF OUR SINS AND WE MAY KNOW SOMETHING OF THAT BITTERNESS ...BUT THERE WAS ONLY ONE, AND THERE WILL NOT NEED TO BE ANOTHER, WHO BORE THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT UPON SIN AND BORE IT SO AS TO END IT. THE LOST WILL ETERNALLY SUFFER IN THE SATISFACTION OF JUSTICE. BUT THEY WILL NEVER SATISFY IT. CHRIST SATISFIED JUSTICE. “THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL” (ISA. 53:6). HE WAS MADE SIN AND HE WAS MADE A CURSE. HE BORE OUR INIQUITIES. HE BORE THE UNRELIEVED AND UNMITIGATED DAMNATION OF SIN, AND HE FINISHED IT. THAT IS THE SPECTACLE THAT CONFRONTS US IN GETHSEMANE AND CALVARY. THIS IS THE EXPLANATION OF GETHSEMANE WITH ITS BLOODY SWEAT AND AGONIZING CRY, “O MY FATHER, IF IT BE POSSIBLE, LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME” (MATT 26: 39). AND THIS IS THE EXPLANATION OF THE MOST MYSTERIOUS UTTERANCE THAT EVER ASCENDED FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAS THOU FORSAKEN ME?” PERISH THE THOUGHT THAT “THERE IS A GETHSEMANE HID IN ALL LOVE!” AND PERISH THE PRESUMPTION THAT DARES TO SPEAK OF OUR GETHSEMANES AND CALVARIES! IT IS TRIFLING WITH THE MOST SOLEMN SPECTACLE IN ALL HISTORY, A SPECTACLE UNPARALLELED, UNIQUE, UNREPEATED, UNREPEATABLE. TO APPROXIMATE THIS SPECTACLE TO THE ANALOGY OF OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCE IS TO DISCLOSE A STATE OF MIND AND FEELING INSENSITIVE TO THE ALPHABET OF CHRISTIANITY. HERE WE ARE THE SPECTATORS OF A WONDER THE PRAISE AND GLORY OF WHICH ETERNITY WILL NOT EXHAUST. IT IS THE LORD OF GLORY, THE SON OF GOD INCARNATE, THE GOD-MAN, DRINKING THE CUP GIVEN HIM BY THE ETERNAL FATHER, THE CUP OF WOE AND INDESCRIBABLE AGONY. WE ALMOST HESITATE TO SAY SO. BUT IT MUST BE SAID. IT IS GOD IN OUR NATURE FORSAKEN AS GOD. THE CRY FROM THE ACCURSED TREE EVINCES NOTHING LESS THAN THE ABANDONMENT THAT IS THE WAGES OF SIN. AND IT WAS THE ABANDONMENT ENDURED VICARIOUSLY BECAUSE HE BORE OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BODY ON THE TREE. THERE IS NO ANALOGY... THERE IS NO REPRODUCTION OF PARALLEL IN THE EXPERIENCE OF ARCHANGELS OR OF THE GREATEST SAINTS. THE FAINTEST PARALLEL WOULD CRUSH THE HOLIEST OF MEN AND THE MIGHTIEST OF THE ANGELIC HOST.

WHO WILL SAY THAT THE VICARIOUS ENDURANCE OF THE UNRELIEVED AND UNMITIGATED JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON SIN IMPAIRS THE INITIATIVE AND CHARACTER OF ETERNAL LOVE? IT IS THE SPECTACLE OF GETHSEMANE AND CALVARY, THUS INTERPRETED, THAT OPENS TO US THE FOLDS OF UNSPEAKABLE LOVE. THE FATHER DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON. HE SPARED NOTHING THAT THE DICTATES OF UNRELENTING RECTITUDE DEMANDED. AND IT IS THE UNDERCURRENT OF THE SON'S ACQUIESCENCE THAT WE HEAR WHEN HE SAYS, “NEVERTHELESS NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE” (LUKE 22: 42). BUT WHY? IT WAS IN ORDER THAT ETERNAL AND INVINCIBLE LOVE MIGHT FIND THE FULL REALIZATION OF ITS URGE AND PURPOSE IN REDEMPTION BY PRICE AND POWER. OF CALVARY THE SPIRIT IS ETERNAL LOVE AND THE BASIS ETERNAL JUSTICE. IT IS THE SAME LOVE MANIFESTED IN THE MYSTERY OF GETHSEMANE'S AGONY AND OF CALVARY'S ACCURSED TREE THAT WRAPS ETERNAL SECURITY AROUND THE PEOPLE OF GOD. “HE THAT SPARED NOT HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM UP FOR US ALL, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?” (ROM 8: 32)...THAT IS THE SECURITY WHICH A PERFECT ATONEMENT SECURES AND IT IS THE PERFECTION OF THE ATONEMENT THAT SECURES IT.”

A GOOD FRIDAY SERMON: THE KING AND THEM, THE KING AND I ✿ LUKE 23: 32-43

IS IT TOO LATE FOR ME?

I had a friend at school when I was about, 11. He was a remarkably talented kid and fun to be around. He was picked on mercilessly by the other children. This caused me a great deal of distress. I can't recall the reason why, or the circumstances, but I can vividly recall the occasion when I humiliated him with other kids looking on, and seeing him at the end of the school day crying as he walked home – and I knew why – because I had betrayed him. And I also vividly remember my own emotional state; it was pangs of guilt and regret. And I thought, well, that's it. The one thing he trusted me never to do, I went and did it. How bad can you get? I've blown our friendship, there's surely no way back from there. It's a sickening sinking feeling. Well, we were just boys and he was very forgiving. That's how it is for a school boy, not such a big deal, perhaps. Imagine feeling that way as a mother to your daughter. As a husband to a wife. A friend to a life-long friend. I've mucked it completely, there's no way back from that mistake. It's too late. Surely I've disqualified myself from ever hoping this could come right. There's no dread quite like it.

We know what it is to feel these things toward others, but do we know what it is to feel this way toward God? We might think nobody asks that question today in 21st century Australia. Nobody feels that spiritual dread, that mortal fear, that sinking feeling with respect to God. Nobody. But people do. Many people. They don't bring it up at weekend sport, but they feel it in the quiet of the

night. That shadow falls across the hearts of many. And you'd do well to ask this question of God. It's a dreadful fear to know I can't possibly be on perfect terms with God and wondering if it can get right. The answer that is given in the person of Jesus is one that shatters us completely, but remakes us as well.

THE KING AND THEM: THE FIRST MAN.

Two men were crucified with Jesus. They were asking very different questions and reacted to the king in two very different ways. Let's see what we learn from observing the first man, and those like him from v35:

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us."

I wonder if you've noticed how the gospel writers don't focus on the physical agony of crucifixion. Luke says, v33, they crucified him. That's it, no detailed gruesome description. What is the focus? v35, the rulers sneered at him, let him save himself if he is the Christ. v36 the soldiers mocked him. v38 the word order of the sign in Greek emphasises the joke of it, literally the king of the Jews, this

one. The other gospels tell us that the sign was written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Why? To maximise the shame. You're walking past and you speak Latin? You can have a laugh. You speak Greek? You can have a laugh. Hebrew? You too can have a laugh. Everyone can have laugh! v39 the criminal hurled insults. It's the sheer shame and mockery Jesus experiences that Luke wants us to see. To the first criminal Jesus' crucifixion is a contradiction of his kingship. His own suffering fills him with rage that he spews onto Christ. Perhaps the purest form of anger is not physical violence, but mockery. That's the darkest way to dismiss, and of all forms of hurt the worst that people experience are those acts and words that aim to shame and humiliate and dehumanise and degrade.

Spiritually speaking this is what is happening in every blasphemy uttered a hundred times a day. 'I have it in my power to mock Christ. I can spit out his name as a curse and my anger at God (conscious or unconscious) is satisfied for a few brief moments. If I reduce him he can't tell me what to do.' That's what I think is beneath people's blasphemies.

When the Soviet Union realised they were going to defeat Adolf Hitler in the Second World War they began to contemplate what they would do to him if they caught him alive, which they were desperately hoping they would do. Their plans were not swift execution. They wanted to put him in a cage and walk through the streets of Stalingrad and Leningrad and Moscow and let a million Russians pour their hatred and spit and bile upon him. Mockery. Many scoff at

Christ. Is it too late for me to get things right with God? Many don't care. They scoff. Perhaps that's you.

THE SECOND MAN

But the second man sees Jesus very differently. V39:

but the other criminal rebuked him, 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'

We learn a remarkable thing from the other gospels. They say that both thieves hurled insults at him. Both. But something happens in this second man. Was it when he heard the forgiving heart of Jesus in v34? Was it the sheer character of Christ? We don't know but in coming face to face with Christ he comes face to face with himself. He becomes in brief moments an almost perfect example of how it is a person becomes a Christian. There is *admission* of his own guilt, v41. This is more than the justice of his sentence by the Romans; there is a spiritual awareness here because unlike the first man, he doesn't ask Jesus to save him from his current suffering, he asks him for eternal life. He has realised that his real issue is not his agony and impending death, his real issue is what comes next when he comes face to face with the living God. It's God, v40, that he has come to fear. His is an admission not just of his crimes against people but of sin against God.

And it takes us back to what we noticed about the shame and mockery that is emphasised. Why is shame so central to

the death of Jesus? Do you see what it's trying to tell us? It shows how ugly and repugnant sin is to God; that it shames him. This *arrogant* mockery of God is what sin is, in the Bible. It's not so much being 'bad' and it's not a bunch of naughty actions – it's a proud independence from God, the belief that I can live on my terms, I can successfully reduce God to a point of no impact, I can go my own way. If Jesus is to deal with sin, he must embody its shame. The good for which God made us is so defiled by what we do, by the wrong in us, the wrongness if I can make up a word, the bentness, the way we tread on God's claims and then tread on each other. If I could describe it in an almost irreverent way, God blushed, in his purity, it shames him, and that depth of divine grief and disappointment and offense is here in the death of Jesus.

And it highlights, by comparison, the innocence of Jesus. This is what the criminal becomes *aware* of: not just *his* guilt, which he admits to, but the *goodness* of Christ. He doesn't deserve this, but he receives it. Why? Well, that is the gospel. This must happen to him because he stands between us and God and this is what our sin does to God and by rights this is what God ought to do to us in return; to punish and mock our foolish sin. God's justice demands it, but the thief doesn't receive it because Jesus satisfies it. If Jesus is to take the judgement and shame that belongs to me then he must die this way, receive this death and feel this death in the very soul of God. The thief can't understand all this but he understands Christ is the king, and he knows the King is good.

And so he *asks* – he pleads, though he's lived a life of rebellion and sin he's bold enough to ask, 'remember me, have mercy on me. Don't let it be too late for

me.' Some people demand God's grace based on their own merit. This man requests God's grace based on God's kindness.

And Jesus' *assurance* is extraordinary. It is not too late for you. And he doesn't say, 'you will be with me if the priest says so.' Not 'you will be with me if you can make up for all you've done.' No, 'you will be with me because in your admission and your awareness, you had faith to ask.' The thief has not secured anything or contributed anything to his place in Paradise. Jesus himself has secured it, by dying for his sins.

It's so interesting that Jesus refers to paradise. It's the word used to describe the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2. And the same word to describe the future earth in Revelation. The Garden of Eden was guarded by two flaming swords after the humans were ejected because of sin. In other words, as the writer Tim Keller has said, we cannot come back to God's presence – if we try on our own the sword will fall. You can't just say sorry, the sword must fall, the price must be paid, but who can survive the sword? No one. The prophets said we will return to paradise, the garden, to God, but still: how to get past the sword? Even the Messiah will be cut off from the living; he will die, and when the sword falls on him it breaks his body, but it also breaks itself. He receives our punishment and so he can promise this rebel: I can bring you into paradise.

Is it too late for you? No. Is God's grace wide enough to include you in it? Yes. Though many scoff, we are all in need of the mercy the criminal receives; we are never too far gone in this life because God's love in Christ is so shamelessly deep. Admit to this, be aware of who Jesus is, ask for that mercy. That's how

we begin a new start with God. I hope you have. I hope you feel the drama of this man's shattering and restorative encounter with Jesus. Sometimes it takes a poem to capture it. And I want to recite one for you. It's a narrative poem about the crucifixion by the songwriter Don Francisco, it's called

TOO SMALL A PRICE

I awoke to hear the jailer
turn the key and push the door
"Get out here!" he shouted,
but I stayed there on the floor
frozen in the terror
that rose and filled my brain
for I knew what they intended;
I could not face the pain.
Then soldier's came into the cell
and they dragged me to the yard.
They threw me down before a cross
and brought the whip down hard.
"Carry it!" they shouted
as I struggled to my feet
I put my shoulder under it;
dragged it to the street.
I stumbled through a wall of screams
as they drove me through the gate.
It seemed that thousands lined the streets,
their voices filled with hate.
Like a wolf pack in the night
that moves in for the kill
they closed the gap and followed us
as we started up the hill.
It seemed I'd barely reached the top
when they grabbed me from behind
they threw the cross down under me
and tied the ropes that bind.
The arms close to the beams
as they nailed the feet and hands
they raised the cross up in the air
and dropped it in its stand.
Through a blur of pain
I saw the cross there next to mine.
There were people all around it
so I looked to read the sign.

It was nailed there up above His head
so the world could see the news
that the man who seemed so helpless there
was the King of all the Jews.
The crowd that stood around His cross
made jokes about His name.
They shouted, laughed and spat on Him
so I joined in the game.
I said, "Hey if you're the King
why don't You get us down from here?"
The taunt just sounded hollow
and it echoed in my ears
because He looked at me
with eyes that seemed to reach into my heart.
They shone a light on all my lies
and tore my life apart.
There was more that lay behind His gaze
than simply blood and clay
but knowing was too much for me;
I had to look away.
Then I chanced another look at Him
as He was looking down
where the soldiers who'd just crucified us
drank there on the ground.
And although He spoke them quietly,
somehow His words came through.
He said, "Father, please forgive them;
they don't know what they do."
Then as if they'd heard Him speaking
the crowd began to roar
whipped to frenzy by the priests
who urged them on to more.
But the worse the accusations, now,
the plainer I could see
the guilt of the accusers
not the One there next to me.
Then the man upon the other cross
began to curse and swear
and his voice was filled with venom
as he hurled it through the air.
All the horror that was in him,
and had laid his life to waste
came out in every syllable
he flung in Jesus' face.
And Jesus only looked at him

but something rose inside of me
and in spite of all that watched us there
it couldn't be denied
because His righteousness and innocence
were shining bright and strong
I just couldn't keep my silence
as that cursing still went on
I cried out, "Don't you fear the wrath of God
even at the end?
You'll curse us both into the pit
is that what you intend?
We're only getting what we're due
we've sinned our whole lives long.
But don't you talk to Him that way
He's done nothing wrong."
Then with all my courage
in a voice not quite my own
I asked Him, "Lord, remember me
when you come into your throne."
He answered me and even then,
his love was undisguised.
He said, "Before the sun has set today,
you'll be with Me in Paradise."
Well the shouts and curses did not stop
even when the sunlight ceased
but somehow in the midst of it
my soul had been released.
And though the agony continued
it was still too small a price
to be allowed to hear those words,
and to die beside the Christ.



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