Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Considering the Curse Christ Carried
Scripture: Galatians 3:13
Code: 80-333

Considering the Curse Christ Carried

I really do believe that our understanding of the cross, our grasp of the cross, our worship of the crucified Christ, our celebration of the cross, our understanding of the cross, the level of passion or emotion we bring to the cross is really a result of what informs our understanding of the cross. It is really what becomes the theological foundation for the cross that leads us to worship. It's not enough to know that Jesus was innocent. It's not enough to know that Jesus was betrayed, that's tragic, of course. Not enough to know that Jesus was hated by His own people. Not enough to know that He was beaten, scourged, mocked, humiliated, nailed. All of those things are true. All of those things elicit a certain degree of emotion, but fall short of what really informs our understanding of the cross. Those kinds of things have happened to a lot of people. A lot of people have been mistreated, betrayed, misunderstood, beaten, bruised, humiliated and executed.

There's something that is far more significant that informs the cross. It's not about sympathy. It's not just a simple matter of feeling badly on Good Friday because we remember the physical suffering of Jesus. There's much more that informs the cross than that. And I want you to look at a Scripture with me for a moment, Galatians chapter 3. This is what will help us tonight perhaps to get a fresh perspective on the cross, a way to inform our understanding of the cross that takes it to another level of worship.
In Galatians chapter 3 and verse 10, we read this: "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law to perform them.' Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident for the righteous man shall live by faith. However, the law is not of faith, on the contrary. He who practices them shall live by them." And then this key verse, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law having become a curse for us. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'"

If you are to understand the cross, if you are to be informed about the significance of the cross, then you must understand what it means that Christ became a curse for us. This is foundational.

What do we mean by this? Well the Bible is full of curses. Not popular to talk about them. You might think if you're unfamiliar with the Bible that it is simply a book full of expressions of God's love and God's grace and God's mercy. But the Bible is actually filled with curses from the very beginning to the very end and all the way through. And what is a curse? It is a pronunciation of destruction, it is a

pronunciation of doom, it is a pronunciation of damnation on someone. Outside the Bible, people living in primitive times and perhaps people still alive today in some places in our world understand what it is to pronounce a curse on someone, to invoke certain supernatural forces to bring destruction and damnation on someone they resent or hate.

In ancient times, efforts were made to bring curses on people who were despised and hated. There were curses, formulas for curses that were intended to induce crop failure. Other intended to bring about the death of flocks and herds of animals. Other curses were formulated, invoking the powers of the universe, demonic powers to defeat certain armies in battle, or to bring general misfortune on enemies or to bring death on a person particularly hated.

In those parts of our world where the occult still reigns supreme, such curses continue to be invoked. In the Old Testament, there was a prophet for hire by the name of Balaam, a diviner, a soothsayer, a prophet who enjoyed a great reputation. Numbers 22:6 says, “Because he was highly skilled in the area of cursing.” He could invoke curses that apparently came to pass. He lived near the upper Euphrates where he had received, no doubt, a great amount of influence from Babylon, long-famed in the art of cursing and invoking demonic power on people.

When the land across the Jordan was threatened by the invading Israelites, Balak, the king of Moab, called for this remarkable and effective curser, Balaam, to come and curse Israel so that Israel would be doomed to failure and death. He was the king of the cursers, was Balaam. However, God took over and Balaam wound up pronouncing a blessing on Israel rather than a curse.

I simply point that out to say cursing was a part of the ancient world. Pronouncing destruction and damnation on your enemies was part of life. Goliath cursed by invoking demonic gods in 1 Samuel 17, pronouncing a curse on David. Shimei of Saul’s house cursed David in his flight from Absalom. Both, by the way, were as futile as Balaam’s effort to curse.
The point that I’m making is there are many illustrations in the past of invoking curses on other people to bring about some destruction. Far more importantly than that. There are many curses in the Bible invoked by God...many curses in the Bible invoked by God Himself. Perhaps the most remarkable passage is the one in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 which I’ll only refer to, where the Lord says, “I’ve given you My Law, obey it. And if you do not obey it, I will curse you.” Obey, receive My blessing. Disobey, receive My cursing. And to dramatize this responsibility, God inaugurated a very interesting ceremony at Mount Shechem. Six tribes went to Mount Gerizim to symbolize blessing. Six tribes went to Mount Ebal to symbolize cursing. And this was a drama being played out.

In Deuteronomy 27 and 28, the blessings are not mentioned but the curses are mentioned. And they all are a result of violating the Law of God. This is to dramatize and symbolize not only for Israel but everybody else that if you violate the Word of God, you’re under a curse. And that is exactly what we read in Galatians chapter 3 verse 10. “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in

the book of the Law to perform them," and by the way, that comes out of Deuteronomy 27. Not just Israel, but anybody who violates the Law of God is cursed. And then following that, in chapter 28, is one of the most shocking portions in all the Bible. Here are some extracts in which the curses are stated. "If you disobey Me, if you break My Law," I'm quoting now from Deuteronomy 28, "the Lord will send upon you curses, confusion and frustration in all that you undertake to do until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your doings because you have forsaken Me. The Lord will smite you with consumption and with fever, inflamation, fiery heat, drought, blasting mildew. The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. You shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your dead body shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. There shall be no one to frighten them away. The Lord will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind. And you shall grope at noon day as the blind grope in darkness. You shall betroth the wife and another man shall lie with her. Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people. And it shall not be in the power of your hand to prevent it, so that you shall be driven mad by the sight which your eyes see. You shall become a horror, a proverb and a byword among all the peoples where the Lord will lead you away. All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you and upon your descendants."

Further it says, "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and want in all things. And you shall eat the offspring of your own body." That's what happens in famine conditions when people eat the afterbirth. "The flesh of your sons and daughter, even cannibalism, whom the Lord your God has given you in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you."
Further, "The most tender and delicately bred woman among you who would not venture to set the soul of her foot upon the ground because she's so delicate and tender will grudge to the husband of her bosom, to her son and to her daughter her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears because she will eat them secretly for want of all things in the siege and in the distress which will come on you. If you're not careful to do all the words of this Law which are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awful name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, severe and lasting, and sicknesses grieving and lasting. He will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt which you were afraid of. They shall cleave to you every sickness, every affliction which is not recorded in the book of this Law the Lord will bring upon you until you are destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone which neither you nor your fathers have known and among these nations you shall find no rest. In the morning you shall say, 'I wish it were evening.' And at evening you shall say, 'I wish it were morning,' because of the dread which your heart shall fear and the sights which your eyes shall see, you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no man will buy you."

Horrendous curses for violating the Law of God. Spoken to Israel but for anyone who breaks the Law of God. The Psalms we turn to which are so comforting and encouraging to us are also full of curses. “The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance. He will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. Statements by God will shatter the heads of his enemies.” Like add to them punishment upon punishment. Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors that taunts with which they have taunted Thee, O Lord. Let there be none to extend kindness to him or any to pity his fatherless children. Happy shall he be who takes your little ones...meaning God...and dashes them against the rock. Do not I hate them that hate Thee, O Lord, do not I loathe them that rise up against Thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred. I count them as my enemies.”

Those are called imprecatory prayers.

In 1901 a book was written called War Songs of the Prince of Peace and in it, it stated that no less than 39 Psalms were of this kind. One English study group in the 1970's concluded that 84 Psalms were not fit for Christians to sing. And so, they were to be jettisoned out of the hymnal.

But all of these curses come from God and they’re recorded in Scripture and many, many more. This is not just in the Pentateuch, which I read you from Deuteronomy, this is not just in the Psalms, the wisdom books, this is also in the prophets. Listen to Jeremiah, “O Lord of host who judges righteously, who tries the heart and the mind, let me see Thy vengeance upon them for to Thee have I committed my cause.” And God replies to Jeremiah, “Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword. Their sons and daughters shall die by famine and one of them shall be left.” Later God says in response to another prayer of Jeremiah that he will bring judgment. Here is that prayer. “Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to my plea. Is evil a recompense for good? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before Thee to speak good for them and turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to famine. Give them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widows. May their men meet death by pestilence and their ewes be slain by the sword in battle. Forgive not their iniquity and do not blot out their sin from Thy sight.”

This is a prophet of God praying down a curse from God on those who hate God and His truth. The prophet Nahum pronounces a terrible curse on Nineveh. “The Lord is a jealous God and avenging. The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries and keeps wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and of great might and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the heat of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken asunder by Him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him but with an overflowing flood He will make an end of His adversaries and pursue His enemies into darkness. Woe to that bloody city.”

Isaiah utters a similar curse on Babylon. “Behold, the day of the Lord comes cruel with wrath and fierce anger to make the earth a desolation and destroy its sinners from it.”

These are shocking curses. But they’re not just reserved for the Old Testament. Romans 1:18 says, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and all unrighteousness.”

Anyone who preaches a false gospel, Galatians 1 Paul says, “Let him be cursed...Let him be cursed.” In Revelation 16 it describes a future judgment coming on the world and verse 6 ends with this line, “They deserve it.”...they deserve it. In Revelation 19, when the Lord brings judgment on the final false religious system, hallelujahs ring through the universe as destruction comes and God is vindicated.

And even Jesus...Jesus describing the day when He will judge said that He will say, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into eternal fire.” All through the Bible, such curses are given. When Jesus was ministering in Galilee, He cursed Chorazin and Bethsaida. In Luke 11, He cursed the Pharisees and the scribes. In Luke 17 He cursed those who cause His own to stumble. In Luke 22 He cursed Judas, the betrayer.

This is a common threat. Paul says, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Jeremiah 17 begins with a prayer that God will destroy His persecutors with a double destruction. Strong language.

This is not a surprise if you understand the holiness of God. He is holy and just, hates sin, punishes sinners. Anyone who breaks His Law is a sinner and falls under this kind of curse. In fact, it all comes down to 1 Corinthians 16:22, a verse that everyone should know about. “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be cursed.” If anyone does not love the Lord, he is cursed, she is cursed. You say, “Why are you bringing all this up?” Because you have to understand what it means. Go back to Galatians 3:13 when it says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.” That’s what our redemption means. And that’s why I say, it isn’t about the emotion of a man scourged. It isn’t about the sympathy we have toward one who was betrayed and hated and rejected and misunderstood. It isn’t even that we feel sorry for the nails and the crown of thorns and the public humiliation. Those things occur to a lot of people.

What’s really going on here is that He is freeing us from the divine curse that falls on all who violate the Law of God by becoming a curse for us. To understand the cross is to understand that the curse that we deserve fell on Christ. He felt the full power of the destruction that should have come on us. He took the curse. This is a stupendous, monumental reality. If you don’t know what curse means, kind of hard to grasp what He did. He took the full impact of God’s wholly wrath against all our violations of His law. He felt the full curse in a brief period of time.

And the question always comes up, “How could He feel the full curse in such a brief period of time?” Because He is an infinite person. It’s as if all the curse that should have fallen on all the people who would ever believe and be saved, all hit Jesus at the same moment and He bore the full curse. And He could do that because of the infinity of His person.

So when you come to the cross, you think about the significance of the cross, you think about the curse. God pronounced some horrific judgments and, of course, ultimately the judgment of eternal hell on all who violated His Law and Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, snatched us out from under the wrath of God and took the wrath Himself.

And did He successfully take the wrath? Yes. That’s why throughout the New Testament, as we’ll see on Sunday, it says over and over and over and over and over, God raised Him from the dead, God raised Him from the dead, God raised Him from the dead, God raised Him from the dead, God raised Him from the dead. God killed Him and God raised Him. God killed Him under the weight of the curse. And when His wrath was satisfied and the curse was paid for, He raised Him from the dead.
Our Father, as we think about this, it is...it is what we are to understand about the cross, not the physical features of it but the spiritual reality of bearing the curse. It’s just an awesome thing to contemplate stretching way beyond our feeble minds. When we think about all the sins we’ve committed, all the violations of Your Law and how every time we sin in our whole life, we are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, accumulating a massive, massive accumulated judgment...every sin adding more weight to the mass of guilt. And so it is with all men and yet on behalf of those who are saved, Jesus Christ bears the full curse for all our sins. How wondrous is this...how rich is Your love, Your grace, and Your mercy to provide such a sacrifice for us? And such a sacrifice could only be borne by someone who is supernatural, someone who is infinite to bear such a massive curse for all men in a few hours and redeem them from the curse so we now are free from the curse and headed for the glories of heaven, all our sins having been punished on the cross.

This comes from, as Paul said to the Ephesians, the great love with which You love us. So now as we come to this table and we take of the bread and the cup, we want to look at the cross in maybe a little different way, seeing the body and the blood of our Lord, but understanding that He gave Himself to bear the curse for us. This is a time, Lord, for You to look into our hearts, and probe us by Your Holy Spirit, reveal any sin that is there that we need to confess, any sins that we have become attached to, any relentless occurring frequent sins that we cherish and perhaps even unknown to the people closest to us, root them out of our hearts and expose them to us and cleanse us from them. Since we have been delivered, since Christ has paid the penalty, since He bore the full weight of Your wrath, the fierceness of Your wrath for those sins, they’re nothing to be cherished, they’re nothing to be coddled, they’re to be abandoned. Free us from those things as we open our hearts to Your cleansing work.

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