

JOHN 12:27-36

FOR THIS PURPOSE I HAVE COME

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So, the crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’ So, Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’”¹

Drawing near to the cross and the crucifixion which He would suffer on that cross, Jesus repeatedly referred to His Passion. The Father Himself verified Jesus’ origin and the purpose for His coming. Those who heard both the Son and the Father were ignorant of what they were hearing, though they knew they had heard something significant.

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN — “A voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified [My Name], and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him’” [JOHN 12:28-29]. So often, we hear or see something, and we cannot process what we heard or saw. It is difficult to grasp that which is beyond our normal experience. Those about Jesus at this time could not comprehend what they heard. John says that it was a voice from heaven, but most said, “It thundered.”

Others, perhaps feeling somewhat more spiritual, thought that an angel had spoken. Having never heard an angel speak when I was assured that it was the voice of an angel, I would be ill-equipped to identify a voice as belonging to an angel. Frankly, I question whether those who thought that an angel had spoken on that occasion would have known what an angel’s voice sounded like. We are left with the understanding that it was the voice of God speaking.

There had been other occasions when a voice came from Heaven to command those listening to pay attention to what they witnessed. When Jesus was baptized by His cousin, John the Baptist, those who witnessed that event heard a voice from Heaven. This is Matthew’s account of what happened on that occasion. “Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” [MATTHEW 3:13-17]. The Evangelist Mark records the same event [MARK 1:9-11], as does Paul’s companion, Luke [LUKE 3:21-22].

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On another occasion, Jesus, accompanied by three of His disciples, was praying on a mountain. These three disciples heard the voice of the Father. This is their account as recorded by Matthew. “After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only”

[MATTHEW 17:1-8].

This was a major event in the ministry of the Master, since Mark [MARK 9:2-8] and Luke [LUKE 9:28-36] also provided a record of this same event. It appears that John Mark gave Peter’s first-hand account of what happened at that time, and Luke reported Mary’s account, which was in turn likely dependent upon first-hand observations provided by John and James. We can be reasonably assured that these men heard the voice of God. They understood what the Living God said and they faithfully communicated what they heard soon after coming down.

Thus, the Synoptic Gospels provide us with quite a complete account of what took place when Jesus came to John to be baptised and what took place as He was transfigured in the presence of the three disciples. In either of these instances, the testimony was united in declaring that a voice from Heaven, understood to be God’s voice, certified the Son of God.

A voice from Heaven was heard as Jesus began His ministry and a voice from Heaven was again heard as He drew near to the end of His ministry. Thus, the Father intervened during the days of Jesus’ ministry in the flesh. Multiple witnesses heard His voice. Think of that! Hearing the voice of the Living God! It must have been awesome for those who were present at those times. What an impact that experience must have had? Or not!

We might question what impact the voice of God would have in the life of mere mortals. I marvel when I read Moses’ words recited to Israel. “Ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore, you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time”

[DEUTERONOMY 4:32-40].

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All those within the nation of former slaves heard the voice of God at that time, and yet, most of those who heard His voice rebelled in the wilderness—they turned back from following the LORD God! Let the horror of that statement sink in! Though God had revealed His awesome power repeatedly, they lusted after leeks, onions and garlic. One can only stand astounded at what is written in the Word: “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” [NUMBERS 11:5].

Conscientious Bible readers must be astonished by the hubris of these former slaves! The fish cost them nothing, except their freedom, except their dignity, except their very lives. Cucumbers may be fine for making pickles, but when one is in a pickle there is no need for more cucumbers! Melons can be a nice touch as a conclusion for a meal, but there isn’t all that much nutrition in a melon. Leeks, onions and garlic may flavour the stew, but when one is in a stew there is little need for more flavour! Moreover, the leeks, onions and garlic would leave a bad taste in their mouths, ensuring that their breaths stank! The people whom the LORD had rescued from crushing bondage, the very people who saw God’s power unleashed for their benefit, turn away from following Him and doing His will. An entire generation was destroyed because of unbelief, because they were disobedient. They were more like us than we might imagine!

This was a terrible betrayal of the Holy One, but it was even worse when the children of that generation at last entered into the Land God had promised their fathers. Though God delivered the children of the first generation, bringing them through the wilderness, feeding them with manna and ensuring that not even their shoes would wear out, as soon as they entered into the Promised Land they forgot God. The children of the generation that was destroyed in the wilderness themselves went astray soon after they entered the land God had promised the fathers. They wouldn’t even conquer the inhabitants or occupy the land as the LORD had commanded!

How quickly we forget what God has done for us! How quickly we forget His might and power! How quickly we turn to our own puerile ways. We are not all that different from Israel. The Psalmist reviews the perfidy of God’s people when he writes:

“The Ephraimites, armed with the bow,
turned back on the day of battle.
They did not keep God’s covenant,
but refused to walk according to his law.
They forgot his works
and the wonders that he had shown them.
...
“Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebellious against the Most High in the desert.
They tested God in their heart
...
“In spite of all this, they still sinned;
despite his wonders, they did not believe.”

[PSALM 78:9-11, 17, 18a, 32]

Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that if only you could hear audibly the voice of God, you would serve Him as you know you should. Don’t imagine that you must see great wonders in order to believe. Don’t think that God works only in the dramatic, in the sensational. God is at work in the darkness, in the quiet of the moment when we think nothing is happening.

We need but think of Elijah after he fled for his life in the face of a threat of an enraged queen. God found His exhausted prophet, fed him and ensured that he received some rest. At last, Elijah fled to a cave where he retreated into the darkness of the interior. “Behold, the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], and he said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He said, ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.’ And he said, ‘Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He said, ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away’” [1 KINGS 19:9-14]. It is startling that the evidence of God’s presence was a low whisper. The evidence of God’s presence is often a gentle voice speaking encouragement to the exhausted saint.

I fear that too many of the supposed saints of God live for the spectacular, failing to accomplish much of significance because they are waiting for something dramatic. Yet, the Living God works in the pedestrian, in the mundane, in the drone of daily life. It is in the repetitious teaching of a dad that a son becomes a man of character, a man who understands his responsibility to employ his strength for the benefit of others. A mother does not become a Super Woman in order to build women of character. Her children rise up and call her “Blessed” because she loved them and invested herself in them. She sat up with them through sleepless nights when they were sick, prayed for them to be righteous and good and gently guided them between Scylla and Charybdis as they matured.

It is through the quiet instruction of a godly Sunday School teacher that children hear the voice of the Saviour and look to Him early in their days. It is through the repeated pleas of a fellow Christian that a weary saint receives strength to continue for another step when her spiritual energies are drained. It is God rebuking the evil one when the Christian is terrified that reveals the Lord’s great power.

How often we’ve heard of professed saints of God who accomplish nothing in the work of the Kingdom. Perhaps they occupy a pew from time-to-time. Perhaps they give a dollar or two whenever the offering plate is passed, but they have never done anything of consequence to fulfil the purpose for which they imagine they were saved. I had such a man as a member of a congregation on one occasion. “Sir, do you pray for the work of Christ? Do you ever speak to another concerning the Saviour? Do you ever read the Word or participate in one of the studies we provide?” I asked this man.

“I’ve done my duty,” he said blithely as he dismissed my expressed concern. “I’m just taking it easy now. I don’t need to do any more.”

He was what I might call a Montreal Christian. You know the sort. Though they live in Vancouver, they just can’t do anything as they once did in Montreal. If only they could get back to Montreal, they would do something great for the cause of Christ. Of course, if he lived in Montreal, he would be an Edmonton Christian—if only he could get back to Edmonton, he would do something great for the cause of Christ.

Such people may have heard the voice of God at one time, but they are unaware of Him now; and it is *now* that counts in the work of the Kingdom. Moreover, though they may have once heard the voice of the Lord God, there is no evidence that they have obeyed the voice of God. The Living God calls us to obedience to His voice; He never calls us to mere profession that we heard that voice at some point in the distant past.

It is a truism that *the fruit verifies the root*. Jesus cautioned those who would hear Him, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits” [MATTHEW 7:15-20].

The context begins with a warning against “false prophets,” but the principle stated is that *the fruit verifies the root*. Character, what a person is, is expressed through what one does or what one says. As the Master says elsewhere, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” [MATTHEW 15:18-19]. Who you are is revealed through the manner in which you live. And how you live reveals whether you have heard the voice of God, submitting to Him and to His reign over your life.

JESUS’ STRUGGLE — “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’” [JOHN 12:27a]? It seems almost sacrilegious to speak of our Saviour struggling with doubt, doesn’t it? Could it be true that the Son of God struggled with His emotions? Watching a documentary of United States Marines during the Pacific Island campaigns, one man spoke of the trepidation as battle drew near. He said everyone was afraid—those who had not seen combat because they didn’t know what was coming, and those who had been in combat because they knew what was coming. Jesus knew what He faced in the cross, and He recoiled at the cost.

We are somewhat uncomfortable with the thought that Jesus shrank from the cost that would be demanded by the cross. However, Jesus’ statement to His disciples at this point reveals the humanity of the Master. We struggle with that concept, though we are prepared to assent to the fact that Jesus was fully man and also very God. He was not man that became divine—He was the unique God-man. Jesus the Christ was born of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit. For the moment, focus on the fact that Jesus’ humanity shone through as He faced the cross. He knew the cost, and He willingly paid the cost because He loved fallen mankind.

An unknown writer focused on this struggle that Jesus faced as He neared the cross. The Word informs us, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” [HEBREWS 5:7-9].

So very often Christians will boast of their stamina; they imagine they have great ability to stand firm in the face of trials. Nevertheless, most of us quail at physical challenges, much less spiritual challenges. We shrink from standing firm in the face of opposition, especially when the opposition is of a spiritual nature. Ridicule will cause the most ardent follower of the Master to retreat in too many instances. How often have we heard someone begin to equivocate because someone nearby laughed at them when they thought to stand for Christ and for righteousness! “You’re not one of those Bible thumpers?” is enough to silence many.

If mere laughter at our expense is so effective, should we be surprised that most followers of the Saviour shrink from genuine struggle against sin? That writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians was prompted by the Spirit of God to challenge readers to stand firm when he wrote, “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” [**HEBREWS 12:3-4**]. This admonition was delivered to a population that was marginalised and experiencing opposition! While not all within the community were being physically assaulted, all were despised because of their faith.

I recall an account of believers in the old Soviet Union that was related by my pastor. Doctor Criswell had gone to the Soviet Union at the request of the registered Christians in Leningrad. Upon arrival in the nation, he was assigned a “handler.” Ostensibly, she was a “translator” assigned by Intourist, the official state travel agency of the Soviet Union; however, she was responsible to ensure that he saw only what she wanted him to see and ensure that he spoke with only those individuals who had been approved by the government. While in Leningrad, Dr. Criswell requested and received permission to visit the only Baptist church in that city. That church was unregistered; it was considered to be a problem for the Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, they agreed to permit Dr. Criswell to visit the congregation on a Sunday morning.

The automobile carrying the Pastor and his Soviet handler wound its way through the city until it arrived at a district situated on the edge of the metropolis. Stopping at the mouth of a dead-end street, the guide informed Doctor Criswell that they would be required to walk the final few blocks to the church. As they walked toward the end of the street, Dr. Criswell became aware of a knot of people at the end of the street, most of whom were straining to look in the direction from which he and the guide were walking.

As he and the Intourist guide walked, she kept up a derogatory commentary on those saints gathered to see this preacher from America who had received permission to visit them. “Look at them!” she scoffed. “They are drones, the scum of the earth. Living off the labours of our people, they steal the productivity from our glorious motherland. They are all worthless.” As she continued her diatribe against these precious saints, the Pastor interrupted, “Don’t say that! Don’t say that! These are my people, we share in the Saviour. And though they have little of this world’s goods, they share in the glory of the Living God. Though you cannot see it now, they shall appear in glory when the Saviour returns.”

Though ridiculed by the world, though oppressed and despised, God has planned great things for His beloved people. They shall reign in glory with Him. Undoubtedly, some of these dear people broke under the pressures exerted by the state. That is clearly the case for German Christians when the files of the Stasi were opened. The failure of some to stand up under the persecutions they endured did not change the reality that Christ stood with them and considered His suffering people as precious in His sight.

Though he was writing about Jews, the principle applies to the saints of the Saviour when Paul wrote, “What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar” [**ROMANS 3:3-4a**].

I quote one passage of Scripture so frequently because it encourages me, just as it has encouraged believers for centuries. Paul revealed to the Thessalonians that the Master will come “on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” [**2 THESSALONIANS 1:10**]. On that day when Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven, He comes to be glorified in His saints. At that time, He shall be marvelled at among all who have believed. That is glorious! That is so very encouraging!

Jesus struggled for our sake. He paid the awful price so that we could be spared that eternal expense. Though we may be called to suffer now, we are delivered from judgement. You have heard me speak of the martyrdom of Polycarp on several occasions in recent messages. In part, that is because the account is so relevant to the suffering experienced by the early followers of the Christ, and in part, it is because his death was so well-documented. You will recall that the proconsul sought with kindness to induce Polycarp to deny the Master, but the effort was a failure. Civic leaders attempted to appeal to his age, but he would not listen. They then threatened him with being delivered to wild beasts in the arena, but the old man was not moved. At last, the proconsul threatened Polycarp with fire, saying, "If you despise the beasts, unless you change your mind, I shall have you burnt." Listen to Polycarp's answer to this threat, for it speaks to what God has done for us in Christ the Lord. "You threaten the fire that burns for an hour, and after a little while is quenched; for you are ignorant of the fire of the judgement to come, and of everlasting punishment reserved for the ungodly."²

What can the wicked do? Yes, they can torture the body, but they can never touch the soul. Yes, they can inflict pain, but they cannot shake the faith of that one whose mind is fixed on the Saviour. We have this testimony from the pen of Isaiah:

"You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you."

[ISAIAH 26:3]

The Master has taught His followers, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" [LUKE 12:4-5]! If our Saviour shrank from the terrors of divine judgement, how much greater should be our terror of displeasing the Living God! How much greater should be our horror at the thought of sin contaminating the life of a child of the Living God.

In **HEBREWS 10:19-31**, the writer was prompted by the Holy Spirit to write of Jesus' shed blood and the impact His death should have on each individual who follows Him as Master. "Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"

² James Stevenson, **A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337** (SPCK, London 1987) 26

“The Passion of the Christ” was hailed throughout western Christendom as a great presentation of the Gospel of Christ. Members of the church I then pastored insisted that I see the movie and give my honest opinion. I was reluctant to go, in part because I have serious doubts that Hollywood can ever do justice to a biblical theme. It seemed doubtful to me that a star known for abusive language and coarse actions could do justice directing a film of the sacrifice of the Prince of Peace. If that was insufficient to give me pause, I confess that I am opposed to charging for the privilege of hearing a Gospel message—the emphasis at the time was for churches to think of the movie as an evangelistic tool. Therefore, the churches were urged to invite people to the movie. I read of great numbers of people in the Middle East coming to faith through watching the movie. Unfortunately, if those people did come to faith, it has not resulted in a significant transformation of that part of our world. Certainly, it is impossible to speak of a great movement of the Spirit of God there, or anywhere else, as result of this movie.

After viewing the movie, I found that I was offended on at least two levels. I was offended because the movie ended with the death of the Master, only briefly and tangentially referencing His mighty conquest of death and the grave. However, beyond all else the movie was a glorification of torture and suffering. To be sure, it was Christ the Lord who was portrayed as being tortured. However, the portrayal missed the point.

Let me explain what I mean by that statement. Did Jesus suffer physically? Of course He suffered; however, physically, His suffering was not necessarily greater than the suffering of any other Jewish person who was hanged on the tree. It was precisely because He is the sinless Son of God that His suffering was so intense. During the time Jesus was making expiation for our sin, He was separated from the Father. It is a mystery that can neither be explained nor revealed to the eye of mankind.

In the sermon Peter preached on that first Pentecost as the Spirit of God was poured out on the disciples, he said, “God raised [Jesus] up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” [ACTS 2:24]. The Apostle speaks of “the pangs of death” without attempting to explain what was meant because it would not be possible to describe what Jesus experienced. Pinioned to the cross, the Master cried out, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” We are informed that the meaning of this is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” [MARK 15:34]?

The sinless Son of God had never been separated from the Father until He became sin because of our helpless condition. As explained in the Letter to Hebrew Christians, “We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” [HEBREWS 2:9].

I understand that many people wish to reject the idea of hell. It is almost as though people wanted to create their own doctrine, write their own systematic theology, craft a god after their own image. The attempt to reject the concept of hell is especially true for a surprising number of people who might otherwise come to church in this day. Modern church-goers will often times say to the preacher, or certainly excuse their absence from attendance at the services by saying, “I won’t worship a god who is so cruel as to send a person to hell. What kind of God would do that?”

Focus on the Son of God for a brief moment. His body was being destroyed in the worst possible way, but what He was experiencing was no worse than what many other people had experienced. The physical pain could not be compared to what was happening to his soul. When Jesus cried out that his God had forsaken him, he was experiencing hell itself.

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If someone you know casually should speak ill of you and reject you—their action hurts. If a good friend rejects you—the hurt is far worse, the pain is far more intense. However, if your spouse walks out on you, angrily declaring, “I never want to see you again,” that is beyond any fractured friendship—the rejection and the pain is devastating. The longer, deeper and more intimate the relationship, the more torturous is any separation.

Now, think of the relationship of the Son of God with the Father. Though we dare not imagine that we can truly understand the relationship between the Son of God and the Father, we are nevertheless taught that Jesus’ relationship with the Father was without beginning. His relationship was infinitely greater than the most intimate, the most passionate human relationship. When Jesus was cut off from the Father, He went into the deepest pit and into the most powerful furnace—what he experienced was beyond all imagining. And He did this voluntarily, for us. No man took Jesus’ life, He laid it down willingly.

Remember Jesus’ testimony when He said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” [JOHN 10:14-18].

Long years before Jesus yielded up His life, Isaiah wrote of His sacrifice.

“He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so, he opened not his mouth.”

[ISAIAH 53:3-7]

When I read that Jesus tasted death for everyone [see **HEBREWS 2:9**], I am humbled. Reading those words, I realise that the scope of what He accomplished on the cross is beyond human comprehension. He took upon Himself all the sin of all mankind. Only God could embrace an entire race as Jesus did. This is especially true when you consider that our race stands opposed to the True and Living God. It is this inability to fully grasp what Jesus accomplished that should humble us and cause us to approach with deepest humility every consideration of the deliberate rupture of the divine relationship for our benefit.

We witness God's assessment of mankind as recorded in the Apostle's words. "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot" [**ROMANS 8:6-7**]. The mind set on the flesh cannot submit to God's law. The mind set on the flesh cannot comprehend the validity of God's righteous commands. Indeed, the mind set on the flesh continually exalts the self in a foolish attempt to displace God from the throne.

There is mystery in Jesus' words, just as there is mystery in His actions on the cross. Mere mortals can never fully understand what He experienced, but we can know the impact of His obedience to the cross by receiving the gift of life that He offers when we look to Him in faith. We might imagine that we can understand what it meant for Him to lay down His life because of us, but in reality, we are incapable of knowing what He experienced.

JESUS' PURPOSE — "For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" [**JOHN 12:27b-28a**]. At last, we come to consideration of the purpose for Jesus coming into the world. And what is the purpose to which the Master testified? It should be obvious that whatever that purpose may have been, it would serve to glorify the Name of the Living God, bringing Him and His majesty into sharp relief against the black backdrop of this fallen world. The Son of God knew that He had come to present His life as a sacrifice in the place of people who were excluded from the life and the love of the Father by sin. Jesus knew from the foundation of the world that He would give His life as a sacrifice to redeem His fallen creation.

Peter has provided sound instructions for those who follow the Saviour. He has written, "If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" [**1 PETER 1:17-21**]. Christmas is, if you will receive it, a celebration of the sacrifice of God's own Son for sinful people. Easter is a celebration of the Saviour's conquest over death, hell and the grave; but Christmas is a commemoration of His sacrifice in our place. If we focus on His purpose in coming, we will be driven to a sombre, contemplative observance.

The joy that marks this season is truly joy because the Son of God tasted death for every person. However, there can be no joy, no genuine joy, for those who are still under sentence of death. Recall the words the Evangelist recorded, words that are immediately recognised by all. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" [**JOHN 3:16-17**]. To be sure, these are words intended to cause us to rejoice.

JOHN 12:27-36
FOR THIS PURPOSE I HAVE COME...

The promise of these verses has scant meaning without reading the verse that follows. Listen carefully, for the verse will either pronounce unrestrained joy or deepest grief for you. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” [JOHN 3:18]. The one who believes in God’s Son is not condemned; the one who has not believed in Him is condemned. The danger lies in the fact that many people are prepared to believe about the Son of God, though they are unwilling to commit themselves to Him. Trusting Him means that we rely on Him, that we are prepared to be transformed by Him, that we are obedient to His will.

The Saviour says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” [JOHN 14:15]. Those who are born from above are indelibly marked by the Spirit of God. Peter instructs these twice-born individuals, “This is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” [1 PETER 2:15-17].

It is evident that for one to say “I love God” while using the freedom we have in Him as a cover-up for evil exposes that person as a fraud. Is it any less evident that one who professes to love God without loving the brotherhood is equally fraudulent? Another Scriptural writer has commanded those who follow the Master, “Let brotherly love continue” [HEBREWS 13:1]. However, it is fraudulent to profess brotherly love while absenting ourselves from the assembly. Going to the House of the Lord at Christmas and Easter is no more indicative of love for Christ than a man professing love for his family while going to his own home only for his birthday and for his anniversary. Of such a man, we would rightly say that he has no love for his wife and that he does not love his family. Why, then, would we say that someone loves God when they worship Him twice a year, or even worship only occasionally? Such a person may whine that we are judging him, but aren’t we actually reflecting the reality of what is shown by his own choice?

Jesus came to present His life as a sacrifice because of our fallen, broken condition. When we receive His sacrifice as our own, the Spirit of the Living Saviour takes up residence in our life. We are redeemed, brought to life in Him, and His Spirit begins the work of transforming us, preparing us for eternity in the presence of the True and Living God. The individual continuing unchanged and as she has always lived must ask herself whether she is twice-born or whether she is merely pretending to be a follower of the Master. This is the reason that the Apostle challenged the saints in Corinth, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:5].

On this first Sunday in Advent, our call is for each individual to realise the purpose of Christ’s coming. We call on each one who hears the message to recognise the reality of Christ’s sacrifice, and how this season is a call to receive His sacrifice for your own sinful condition. Seeing Him as the sacrificial lamb of God, believe Him. The Word of God invites each one, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13]. Believe Him and be saved. Do it today. Amen.