

CHRIST'S EYES AS A FLAME OF FIRE

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 15 November 2020
Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

In today's session, we will commence a series of Bible studies that are drawn from an open letter that Victor Hall, as part of the presbytery, has penned to our fellowship of churches.

This letter, which is both to the presbytery, and from the presbytery to us all, is an exhortation to receive and to demonstrate the culture of fellowship that should characterise sonship in the body of Christ.

Today, we will particularly consider *how* Christ comes to us and the responses that we make as He comes to us with *eyes like a flame of fire*.

Through the messenger's word, Christ's eyes search our hearts

Let us begin with the point that Christ is coming among us *to search our hearts* in this way. He is searching our hearts *with eyes like a flame of fire*.

Our key passage for this session is from the book of Revelation. 'And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, "These things says the Son of God, who has *eyes like a flame of fire*, and His feet like fine brass: 'I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you.' " ' Rev 2:18-20.

How does Christ come to us with 'eyes like a flame of fire' and 'feet like burnished brass'?

He does so *through His word*, as it is ministered by the *messengers* whom He sends.

The effect of the proceeding word on our hearts

What does it feel like to *receive* Christ's eyes like a flame of fire? It is the *effect on our hearts* of the proceeding word as it comes from Christ, through His presbytery.

This is the point that the apostle Paul made in the letter to the Hebrews. He wrote, 'For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.'

'And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.' Heb 4:12-13.

Christ comes with *eyes like a flame of fire*. A fire is a light, isn't it? When those eyes come in that way, they *expose* what is otherwise hidden, or in the dark.

Paul was explaining the effect of the word which comes, *sharper* than any two-edged sword. It exposes our heart, so that Christ's eyes can reveal the thoughts and intents of our heart.

Christ's word comes firstly as a 'goad' to *pierce* and open our heart to His sight

Our heart is laid bare before Christ's eyes because His word first comes to us as a *goad*. It is not firstly coming as a sword.

Paul made the point that the word of God is 'living and powerful and *sharper* than any two-edged sword'. It is even sharper than the sword!

The 'sword' also speaks of the word; but the sword has a *different action* upon us.

When the word *first* comes to us, it *pierces* our heart; it is *opening* our heart, so that as Christ's eyes come to us, He is able to search our hearts, and there is nothing *hidden* from His sight.

This is *how* our heart is 'open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account'. The word pierces our hearts, causing the thoughts and intents of our hearts to be laid bare before Him.

Christ's eyes are initially confronting, revealing our sin and self-centredness

When Christ first comes to us, His eyes are *confronting*, aren't they? When the word comes and causes our hearts to be pierced, there is a 'confrontation'; we *feel* the *effect* of the word on our spirit, don't we?

This is because His eyes reveal our sin and self-centredness.

Even our 'goodness', when the Lord comes, is exposed as being *not of Him*. Our 'goodness' is not of God. It is from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which we partake of through disobedience.

So, our own goodness is still sin and self-centredness. It *conceals* the reality of our life which is in *darkness*.

Two differing responses to the word as a goad

There are two responses that we can make to this goading, or piercing, effect of Christ's word as He comes to us with eyes as a flame of fire.

The effect of a goad – if we think of someone 'prodding' us with a goad – will be either to cause us to *react violently against* the one who is goading us, or it will cause a piercing and a pain which, as we will consider, leads to *broken-heartedness*.

These are the two effects of the goad of the word, as it comes to us *as the initiative of Christ* – either a *reaction against the word* or *broken-heartedness* in the one who receives the word.

A negative response to the goading of the word

Let us first consider the negative response.

This is particularly exemplified through the Jewish leaders' response to the ministry and proclamation of the gospel by Stephen. Act 7:1-60.

Stephen had given quite a long account and was coming to the conclusion of his message. He said, 'You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!' Act 7:51.

This sounds a little like the word coming to expose the condition of these people's hearts!

This is what we understood in Hebrews Chapter 4. 'The word of God is living and powerful ... piercing even to the division of the soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' Heb 4:12.

To these Jewish leaders, Stephen proclaimed, 'You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!' We can see that he exposed, or that his word exposed, the *condition of their heart*.

'You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.'

'When they heard these things [this was the effect of *the word*] they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

'Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him.' Act 7:51-58.

There is much we can say about this passage. I want to bring just one aspect to our attention – the reality that these people *believed in their self-righteousness*.

The word exposes our belief in our own righteousness

Stephen brought to their attention that they were no different from their forefathers, who persecuted the prophets. These people responded, however, 'We're not like them, because we believe the prophets!'

Their sense of goodness was so strong! Yet the word came and declared, 'Your goodness is evil and not even true!'

The word comes and first reveals to us *our deluded perspective*.

Stephen said to them, 'Not only are you stiff-necked, you are uncircumcised of heart!' Act 7:51.

This is a key point, isn't it? The *sword* of the word is the *action* that comes to bring *circumcision* to the *heart*.

Here was a goad that was *exposing* their heart and their uncircumcised condition. It revealed that they *believed in their own righteousness*, and believed that they were not like their forefathers; and Stephen said, 'In the light of this word, that is *not true!*'

So, the *effect* of this word was that they were *cut to their heart* and the evil condition of their heart was exposed. Act 7:54. Remember that these were the *Jewish leaders*. This was occurring under the direction of the high priest.

Responding to alleviate the effect of the word upon our heart

All of Stephen's hearers were cut to the heart.

However, their response was to *alleviate the effect* of the word upon their spirits.

Their response was not, in the first instance, to try to 'shut down an untruth'.

The effect of the word was causing them pain, it was piercing their heart; and their reaction was to alleviate the effect of the word upon them.

How did they respond? They *cried out with a loud voice*, stopped their ears, they ran at him with one accord, cast him out and killed him. Act 7:57-58.

'Crying out' against the messenger and their word

'Crying out with a loud voice' describes a person's strong objection to, or complaint against, and vilification of, Christ's messengers and their message.

Not every person who reacts to the word that they hear will 'cry out' in this same way.

It is more likely that they will sit around the table in other people's houses and *complain* about the word and the messenger. This is the same 'crying out' of reaction *against the word*.

'Crying out with a loud voice' was the first element of negative response to the word.

Stopping our ears – drawing back from the word

The second element was the 'shutting of their ears'. 'Shutting our ears' is the means by which a person draws back from the word.

Remember that it is the 'eyes like a flame of fire' that are causing both the *breach* upon our heart and the *searching* of our heart; but it is a *word* that is doing this.

The best way to draw back from the effect of the eyes, eyes which are like a flame of fire piercing our heart, is to *shut our ear*, isn't it, so that we do not hear that word anymore?

That is exactly what Stephen's hearers did – they literally put their hands over their ears!

When we react to the word, we simply *draw back* from it and *stop listening* to it. That is how we shut our ears to the word.

We begin to *doubt its veracity* and its *relevance* for us, and we simply draw back from it and stop listening to it.

That is called *shutting our ears*.

Violence against the messenger

The third negative response to a goading word is the violence that is perpetrated against a messenger.

This is the offended person's endeavour to *undermine* and *silence* the voice of Christ's messengers in the community to which they presume to belong.

It is one thing to shut our ears in order to alleviate the effect of the word on our *own* heart. It is another to then perpetrate violence against the messenger, to *shut down* and *silence that voice* in the community to which we presume to belong.

Remember that that community is itself *established by the word*; so this is a great presumption based in delusion.

But this is what happens! It is not just a 'strong voice' anymore. It is actually an *action* to try to *undermine and invalidate* the messenger. This is a violence!

What can happen is that we say, and promote the notion, that that messenger, who is part of a *corporate* messenger, is *dead to me*. We write them off: 'They are dead to me and they should be dead to you, too.' This is what we tend to do.

Jesus said that that *anger*, which motivates the notion that the messenger is dead to you, is *murder*. They are dead to you, because you are *killing* them! It is murder; and is what they did, literally, to Stephen. Mat 5:21-22. Act 7:58.

It is murder, even if we do not literally kill them because, as far as we are concerned, that person is dead to us. And we perpetrate or multiply that violence by seeking to *gather to ourselves* those who are also offended or disaffected.

Now, this response is not always as vivid as the murderous action of the Jews against Stephen. We do not, in fact, have murders every week, do we!

The effect of the word as a goad

But every time the word of God is proclaimed, it will come like a *goad* to *expose our hearts*.

There will be many for whom the word is having an effect in our lives and is causing us to become broken-hearted.

And there will be some – hopefully, a small number – who react against the word.

We see these reactions of complaint and dissent, or shutting of our ears, or perpetrating the undermining of the messenger, in the *community of the church* to which we belong.

This drawing back always has a *relational* implication that does *violence* to the *fellowship* of the body of Christ.

A negative response to the goading of the word is *progressive*. It becomes progressively agitated and violent. It starts with a complaint, goes to the shutting of ears, and then to an undermining of the messenger.

The effect of the word as a sword

The outcome is that the *sword* of the word – this is a *different dimension* of the word now – cuts that person out.

What tends to happen is that people say, 'I cannot abide this anymore!', and they simply take themselves out.

They believe that they have exercised their autonomy and their 'righteousness' to remove themselves from this 'heretical community'.

But what has happened is that the sword of the word has *removed them from Christ*, because He is removing *from His own fellowship* everything that defiles it.

The point is that *everyone* in the whole world has been joined to the body of Christ, and the sufferings that are being incurred – pain, frustration, agitation, discontent, psychological torment – are the effect of the sword, to *cut them out* from Christ Himself, as part of the body of sin.

The more we react *against* the goad, the more we come under the *judgement* of the sword, which *should be cutting us in*.

But if we will not receive the word, and allow it to search our hearts; if we hold on to the mindset and the understanding that we believe is true, we are *taken out with that* – because this is 'everything that offends'. Mat 13:41.

Hopefully, that does not include many of us; but it will always be an element of the body of Christ until the conclusion, until Christ returns.

We have to accept that we do have this *propensity* in us, and we do need to *humble ourselves*, because that is where we *find grace*, isn't it?

Responding, poor in spirit, as the word comes to address us

Let's now move on from 'the negative response', and consider what should be the response for most of us, when the word is coming to address us.

This does not mean that the effect of the word is any less confronting! It simply means that we can be those who obtain the blessing of being *poor in spirit*, so that every time the word comes, we find its *blessing* in our *repentance and faith*.

Repentance through turning to fellowship

The alternative response to the word that cuts us to the heart when Christ comes to us with eyes like a flame of fire is to repent by *turning to fellowship with those who proclaim the word*.

This is a 'sharpening up' of the point on repentance.

Repentance is turning from what the Lord is highlighting to us, to what He is calling us to walk in. But the reality is that we *do not know* what to walk in, unless we are found *in the fellowship of light from which the word is proceeding*.

So, we see that the first point of repentance is actually to *turn to fellowship*.

It is turning not simply from all the *deeds* – it is turning from the *darkness of our own perspective* to the light of fellowship, where truth is established.

This is our repentance.

We do not fully understand what we are turning to, unless we are *in the light* and able to see how to walk.

We are not to turn to what we think is the righteousness to which we are attaining. We are to turn to the *fellowship* where the *word of God* is being established in us and in our understanding.

Acknowledging the lordship of Christ – turning in repentance

An example is the response of the multitude to the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:36-39.

Again, Peter was coming to the conclusion of his sermon, and we see that he was no less sharp on the point of the condition of their heart and their activities than Stephen was!

Peter declared, 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' Act 2:36.

There were two elements here. The first was that Peter declared, 'You are the murderers! You have crucified Christ through your deeds!'; and the second was 'Christ has been made Lord and Christ'.

The amazing thing about this is that Peter had *already* said to them that by wicked hands they had condemned Him to death. Act 2:23.

But the thing that broke in on them was the proclamation of *Christ's lordship!*

It was not simply the fact that they realised, 'Yes, we are wicked'.

It was the fact that Peter had proclaimed to them the lordship of Jesus, and that He was Christ the Messiah – that *broke in on them*, on their heart.

'Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call".' Act 2:37-39.

Now, in response to being *cut to the heart*, these hearers acknowledged the *lordship of Christ*, and that what was being said *concerning them* was *true*.

Receiving the truth from outside ourselves

Immediately, we are to *let go* of the thought that *our* understanding, and *our* view of ourselves and our lives is the truth.

Rather, *Jesus'* word is *true* and it is ministered by the Spirit of truth, who is the *Holy Spirit*.

This is what they accepted. 'We have been deceived in killing this man.'

That is the first point: they were to acknowledge the lordship of Christ and that what *He* said concerning them was true. The truth was outside of them.

Accepting our inability to change ourselves – turning in repentance to fellowship

They accepted, as those who were broken-hearted and poor in spirit, that they were *unable to change themselves*.

Isn't that one of the steps that we often miss?

Sometimes, when we hear the word and recognise what is simply blatantly obvious, we then endeavour to *fix it ourselves*. That is still carnal and fleshly.

What these people said was, 'We do not even know what to do! We know that what you are saying is true, but we do not know how to walk in the way that this word is revealing to us.'

So, what did they say? '*Men and brethren*, what shall we do?' Act 2:37.

What did they look for? They looked for *fellowship*.

This was the first action of repentance and faith. They had received the faith that was proclaimed in the word; and the first *speaking of faith* was in *fellowship with the messengers* to say, 'How do we proceed? How do we get understanding?'

They had received the wisdom that had come down from above and now wanted to know, 'How do we walk in the light of that word?'

So, their repentance was to *return to fellowship*. This was the face of Christ *from which* the light had shone into their hearts.

Joined through the presbytery's word to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

The *presbytery* joined them.

This is the beautiful point! It was the fact that these ones of presbytery had come to them, *revealing Christ* to them and, through *their* word, these ones were now *able to be joined* to the fellowship of Christ's offerings and sufferings.

They had to repent and be baptised into Christ – baptised into His death, burial and resurrection, which is the *fellowship of His body*, the *fellowship of His sufferings*. Act 2:38.

So, the presbytery joined them to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings through baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and they received the Holy Spirit, to enable them to live as *sons of God in the fellowship of Christ*.

Baptism was their connection to the *circumcision of Christ*, for their inclusion as part of the body of Christ.

The word as a sword to cut us into Christ

The word now moved from being a goad. It was still coming as a *sword*; but this sword was *no longer cutting them out* because of their rebellion. This sword was cutting them *into Christ*!

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, called baptism 'the circumcision of Christ', didn't he? Col 2:11-12.

As they came into Christ, suffering, instead of being the mark of their judgement and damnation, was now part of the 'persecution that arises because of the word'. Mar 4:17.

It was having an *effect* on their life, to cast out from their heart, or *cut out from their heart*, the very thing that offends, so that they could be made alive from the dead with Christ.

The critical nature of our response to the goad of the word

Every person will come under the *effect* of the *goad* and the *sword of the word* – every person in the entire earth.

We either *receive the goad*, and allow it to expose our heart, through *repentance to fellowship*; or we hold on to our 'right', and the uncircumcision of our heart, cry out against the word, stop our ears, perpetrate violence against the messenger – and the work of the *sword cuts us out*.

But if we do repent; if we do *receive* the word; if we are those who are established as *poor in spirit* with Christ, *that same sword* is cutting us *into the body*. It *delivers us* from everything that offends, which is actually *inside* our heart.

That is great, isn't it! That is what the word should be doing *every week*, as we *walk in the light of the word* and *receive Christ* as He comes with eyes as a flame of fire.

Christ's confronting word is His mercy to us to reveal to us our sin

Christ comes to us with eyes as a flame of fire to make our sin *known* to us. This is the *first expression of His mercy* toward us.

We have to get past the initial jarring of the word in our hearts, the initial confrontation of it, the 'prod' of it; and, when we do, we recognise very

quickly that this is actually the mercy of God to us.

Why is this so? It is because, *unless He reveals our sin* to us, we will be *unable to confess* our sins, and they will remain; and *we will remain under judgment* because of sin.

You see, we cannot confess our sins, and find forgiveness, *unless He comes* with His eyes and exposes them!

Do you see the dilemma for us? If *we* make a judgement about our sinful condition on the basis of the knowledge of good and evil, we are still in darkness. We cannot make that assessment *of ourselves*.

We *need His eyes* to come, and His word to expose our heart, so that we can *confess* our sins. And, when we do, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins', and we are *delivered from the very thing* that is causing us to come under judgement. 1Jn 1:9.

This is *great mercy*, to us even though it feels difficult when the word first comes!

Responding to the word as it comes, not drawing back

We must not draw back from Him, and from His word, when we feel this way.

When the word comes and we do feel as though it is measuring us, it is! But the key is to *not draw back*. Do not shut your ears!

This is what Paul said to the Hebrews. 'Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith [this is faith that comes from hearing that word]; but if anyone draws back ...'. Heb 10:37-38.

Paul was saying that 'drawing back' is in contrast to 'living by faith'. Faith comes by hearing, so 'drawing back' means *stopping ourselves from hearing*.

'The just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' Heb 10:38.

That means we are not living *by His life*.

Faith comes by *hearing*; so 'drawing back' means 'stopping ourselves from hearing'.

'The just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him [This means that we are not living by His life.]. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those

who believe to the saving of the soul.' Heb 10:38-39.

I believe that the faith that God wants to impart to us by His word, even though He does come with 'eyes like a flame of fire', is for all of us.

We are not those who 'draw back to perdition', because we do not turn away from the word and stop our ears to it. We are those who 'believe to the saving of the soul'.

Christ's eyes express His love and mercy to us

If we do not draw back from Christ's gaze, we realise that His eyes express His *love* and *mercy* to us. The very eyes that are as a flame of fire are the eyes that reveal the love of God, which is as a vehement flame. This is the jealous love of God. Son 8:6.

And the reason why it feels a little 'hot' at times is because it is burning on all that is not of Him. For what reason?

It is so that we can *be of Him*; so that the things that keep us separate from the fellowship of Christ are being removed from our lives.

This is great *mercy*. This is the true *love* of God being extended to us.

Christ's judgement begins in the household of God

If we do not see our sin, we remain under judgement.

Outside of the light, we cannot see our own sins. We can only assess and judge ourselves and others from the basis of good and evil.

Now, it is important to make the point that, when Jesus comes with eyes as a flame of fire, He is *coming with judgement*.

We cannot escape the reality that He, first, is exposing the uncircumcision of our heart. His eyes are coming, and He is coming in judgement.

In fact, this is the judgement that is going to be executed over the whole earth; but it begins in the household of God.

So, no-one escapes the judgement of God, but as we receive it and are processed by it, we are not condemned by it.

This is because we are allowing it to do its work in our lives.

It is important, then, for us to recognise that Christ's judgements are also among us when He comes with His word.

Those who judge the word come under its condemnation

And He has said that He will give to each one of us according to our works. Rom 2:6.

Reading from the book of Romans, 'Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge.' Rom 2:1.

The word is coming, and it pierces our heart. If we are the judges of that word, we come under its condemnation.

Isn't that exactly what happened to those who were 'cut to the heart' as Stephen proclaimed the word to them? Act 7:54.

They judged him, saying, in effect, 'Who are you to speak this word to us?'

'Therefore you are inexcusable [before the judgement seat of God there is no movement on this.], O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practise the same things [It's *the same things* that you are accusing the other of.].

'But we know that the judgement of God is according to truth against those who practise such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practising such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgement of God?'

'Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance.' Rom 2:1-4.

I think that this is one of the classic Scriptures, and is certainly the classic one for today.

The goodness of God leads us to repentance, and His eyes reveal our works of offering

Many people claim the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God as the overlooking of their sin, as if they can continue to live the way that they like and God, in His goodness and His longsuffering and His forbearance, overlooks their sin. That is complete rubbish!

That is not what is recorded in the Bible. What did Paul write?

He wrote that, if you do that, you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering.

Why? It is because those three elements of Christ's virtue should lead us to *repentance*. They should lead to the effect of 'the piercing of our heart', which is to turn to *fellowship*.

'Repent, be baptised in the name of Jesus, and you will receive the Holy Spirit.' Act 2:38.

That is what the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God is. It is leading us to *turn* from our darkness to the light.

We have to let go of our 'imagined' view of what the goodness of God is. The goodness of God is that He comes with eyes as a flame of fire to lead us to *repentance*, through which we can be forgiven, and can get on and do the works that His eyes are also revealing to us – that is, the *works of offering*.

The torment of obeying unrighteousness

'But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God who "will render to each according to His deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness.' Rom 2:5-8.

That's a classic statement – 'obey unrighteousness'. It means that they are hearing *another word*. It is a word that is fathered by Satan, and they are obedient to it; they are feeding on it.

We need *illumination* to help us to distinguish between what is of the tree of life and what is from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Otherwise, we will simply think that our own 'goodness' is the truth, but *we will feed on unrighteousness*.

So, what happens? What will we be storing up?

'Indignation and wrath, tribulation, and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil.' Rom 2:8-9.

And, the more that we sit under the word and reject it, the more those conditions – indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish, which will be ours as a torment forever – become a foretaste in our lives right now. That is hell on earth.

The simple answer is to *humble ourselves*, because 'He gives grace to the humble'. Grace is the context of fellowship with Him. 1Pe 5:5.

Christ comes to join us to Himself – by His initiative, we receive faith in His word

The next key point that we need to understand is that, when Christ comes to us with eyes as a flame of fire, Jesus Christ is joining Himself to us. *He is joining Himself to us, in our condition*. I find this a most amazing point.

It is not as though He is far off from us and is coming to try to draw us to Him. Rather, He is coming and *finding us where we are*. He is not far off. He is actually coming to where we are, but He is coming with these eyes.

This is how He enables us to join His offering and the fellowship of His crucifixion so that we can be saved.

Now, we can't simply decide whether we want to be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as though it is in our hand to decide whether we will or won't.

We are able to join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a provision for our deliverance, *only* because *He comes and joins us* in our condition.

He says, 'I am crucified with you. You now need to hear My word and join the fellowship of My offering and sufferings. I joined your death and now I am dying it My way. Stop dying it your way, and come and die it with Me.'

There is salvation.

There is the transition from suffering which leads to judgement, to suffering which leads to life out of death.

This is where the gospel transaction is happening – in coming to us with eyes as a flame of fire, Jesus Christ has joined Himself to us.

This is how He enables us to *join* His offering and the fellowship of His crucifixion so that we can be saved. This is a key point that many of us have failed to understand.

We are *not* the source of the initiative to join Christ's offering and sufferings, as if *we* decide what that is. We have to receive His word, which is Him, so that, by the faith received in that word, we can walk in a new and living way.

We have been co-crucified with Christ; joined to Him

We have access to this provision for life *only* because He joins Himself to us. It is only then, through repentance and faith, that we are able to join ourselves to Him.

Because of His initiative toward us in this way, we can say that we have been co-crucified with Christ. I love this point. It has been lit up in my own heart that this was the reality of the two thieves on the cross with Christ.

He was crucified with them, but the thief who received illumination as Christ's eyes as a flame of fire revealed it to him, said, in effect, 'I am crucified with you now, Christ.' That was an amazing transition.

The other man continued in his own self-righteousness and was 'cut out'.

Both saw the same thing and heard the same word. So, because of Christ's initiative toward us, we can say, 'I have been crucified with Christ.'

Christ's eyes bring illumination

Here is another detail to do with this statement. To speak this way is to confess that we need *sight* so that we can see what needs to be circumcised, or removed, from our hearts, in order to be saved from sin and death.

It is not that merely saying, 'I have been co-crucified with Christ', means that I am going to continue to walk in the fellowship of His sufferings.

It *does* mean that, but the confession first means that I need *sight from outside of myself to reveal the condition of my heart*, so that, as I walk in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, those things that need to be 'put off' *can* be 'put off'.

In our quickness to say that all the difficulties that we are facing are fellowship in His offering and sufferings, we sometimes skip the part about *needing illumination*, don't we?

They *are* that fellowship – when we, by *repentance* and *faith*, are *joined to Him* in it.

The confession, 'I have been crucified with Christ', is not a 'position'. It is the *speech* of one who is *poor in spirit*. It is the acceptance that we cannot change ourselves, because we don't even know where we have to change.

Outside of the illumination that Christ's eyes give to us, we can know our failings only in relation to the knowledge of good and evil. Every time that we judge ourself as 'evil' by that knowledge or 'good' by that knowledge, we remain condemned.

That is not true sight. What we need is a *light from outside of ourselves*.

We confess our sins in the light of His word

Regarding this confession, we note the words of the apostle John, who wrote, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' 1Jn 1:8-9.

The key is: what do we *need* in order to confess our sins? We need to *know* what they are.

When we are the judge and assessor of our sin, as we *are* because of the other law, it means that we need someone from outside of ourselves, who is Christ, to bring *illumination* as to our condition, so that we can confess that.

And when we confess our sin in the light of His word, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.'

Our dilemma is that we cannot confess what we do not *know*, and we are unable to know our own condition.

In his mercy, God brings illumination by the word of His messengers

This point was most powerfully demonstrated in King David's dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah. It is amazing to consider that, after committing adultery with Bathsheba and then orchestrating the death of her husband, Uriah, David continued to function as a king, remaining completely self-justified.

As we consider that scenario, we read it with some paraphrasing to our children, and they wonder how he could have done that. How could someone commit adultery, orchestrate the death of a man to cover it up, and then simply live with that!

Unless we receive the light of the word that comes from Christ, there is much in our lives that we tolerate and remain self-justified in. This is the power or the delusion of the knowledge of good and evil on which we feed.

It is amazing that it was not until David heard from the Lord's messenger, Nathan, who came to him as one of the faces of Christ - the prophetic face - that he could even see his situation.

It was not only the *activity* that was the problem for David, even though we know that that was 'bad'. David didn't realise that *his whole spirit was corrupt*; it was an abomination.

That is what he had to see - not merely all the 'naughty' deeds that he did. He needed to see the condition of his heart, which resulted in the naughty deeds.

That is what God is coming to expose; He is coming to *expose our hearts*. You might think that all your 'deeds' are wonderful, but your *heart* might be fully self-righteous.

Paul is the classic example of this. He wrote that, concerning the Law, he was perfect. But what did he do? He killed many people in the name of that righteous Law. Php 3:6. Act 8:3.

When that 'dawned' on him, I suspect that he was very sober, as David was sobered when the word of Nathan came to him and exposed his heart.

The focal point in this account was not the *deeds*, even though they were wicked; the point was that the wickedness of those deeds came *from the wickedness of David's heart*.

It was not until Nathan the prophet spoke to David and identified him as the offender, that David received illumination regarding his corrupt heart, and was granted repentance.

It is confronting to realise that, if David had died before receiving this illumination and finding forgiveness, he would have been condemned to hell because of his adultery and murder. Do you understand that?

He was the Lord's anointed, yet he would have been condemned to hell for the wickedness in his heart that led to this adultery and this murder.

The great mercy was not, firstly, forgiveness for David. The great *mercy* was that Nathan came, *speaking the word of the Lord to bring illumination* to David.

Forgiveness and cleansing – repentance and faith

What did David realise?

'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.' Psa 51:10.

The illumination revealed to David that his entire identity was corrupt; he realised that his deeds were dramatic and repulsive.

But he understood that it was *deep* within him, and his cry, in the light of the word, was, 'Create in me a clean heart; do not only forgive all my deeds. Something fundamental must change in my heart.'

Nathan had come with the word of Christ; the eyes as a flame of fire exposed David's heart. In the grief of it, what was David *seeing*? In those eyes, he was seeing the condition of his heart. He needed a clean heart and a new spirit.

Then he said, 'Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.' Psa 51:11.

David had found *repentance*. He realised that if he did not find change, fundamentally, he would be cast out; he would be gone. David understood that he was going to hell on this point. This is the point of repentance and faith.

Now, every time that the word comes, we do not always have a similar moment, because we are not being adulterers and murderers all the time.

But we should have laid the foundation of *repentance* and *faith*, because we are *poor in spirit*, able to *turn* and respond quickly and easily to the word.

This is because the word is calling us forward to be who the Lord made us to be. He does not desire anyone to be lost.

He desires us *all* to come to the marvellous treasure of inheritance that He has prepared for the sons of God. That is what we have to believe. That is what we are given to choose.

We *all* need to *receive the illumination and the conviction of the Holy Spirit* that is ministered to us when Christ looks into our hearts.

If we harden our heart and resist the Holy Spirit when Christ addresses us by His word, we will inevitably become locked up to self-righteousness, and will remain under condemnation.

However, if we will receive illumination, and will confess our sins under the conviction of the Spirit, we will receive *forgiveness* and *cleansing* from our sin. 1Jn 1:9.

Turning to the fellowship of the presbytery from which the word comes

Christ, then, comes to us with eyes as a flame of fire through the word spoken by His messengers. As was the case when Nathan addressed David, it is no different for you and me.

David did not have this revelation by himself; neither do we. We need, and should entreat, that word into our hearts and our houses. This is the light of the word. No-one is exempt from this initiative of Christ.

The apostle Paul used the term 'presbytery' to describe a fellowship of overseers, elders and deacons whom the Father has called to care for the church. 1Ti 4:14.

As believers receive the word proclaimed by God's messengers who are part of a presbytery, the Holy Spirit joins them to the fellowship of the presbytery. This is the fellowship with the Father and His Son. 1Jn 1:3.

That is how Christ comes to us.

He comes through a messenger administration called an 'angel'. 'Angel' literally means 'messenger'.

We know that the 'angel' is a *corporate* messenger, and that they proclaim the word of Christ to us.

The word does come as a goad, and it does reveal Christ's eyes as a flame of fire. But it is so that we can *turn* to the very *fellowship* from which the word is coming, and we can be *established in the truth*.

Well pleasing to Him every day – a process of deliverance

That 'truth' is not only that we understand aspects of theology.

The *truth* is *who the Lord named you to be*, so that you can be well-pleasing to Him.

And this is a *daily* walk for us, walking in a manner that is pleasing and acceptable to Him every day.

Paul said that we can be 'spotless and blameless at the appearing of Christ'. 1Ti 6:14.

That is not only so in the end of time. We can be 'spotless and blameless' *every day*, even though we know that we do have sin.

We are not saying that we do not have sin. We *are* saying that we know that we are in a process through which we are being delivered from sin. Sin is being dealt with in our lives. We rejoice in that.

In our next session, we will talk about the operation of the church and the presbytery, so that we are joined to this fellowship activity.