

Coming to Christ

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Sorrow caused by time and chance

- In recent weeks, we have considered the scriptural principle of birth pangs. Jesus said that these 'sorrows' would begin prior to the time of the end, and would continue until the fulfilment of God's Everlasting Covenant on the earth. Mat 24:5-8. The progressive effect of these sorrows is twofold. It is the process of perfection for those who are born of God and are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as members of His body. However, for those who reject this 'so great salvation', the *same* sorrows are the foretaste of their eternal judgement.
- From the writings of the apostle Paul, we learn that sorrows, or birth pangs, are more than the initiation of the Lord's final judgement upon the earth. He said, 'The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. *For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.*' Rom 8:20-22.
- The sorrows associated with the judgement of mankind began when Adam and Eve, through their disobedience, fell from fellowship with Yahweh. As a consequence, the whole world was subject to futility, or time and chance. We note the words of King Solomon, who wrote, 'I returned and saw under the sun that – the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time: like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.' Ecc 9:11-12.
- Jesus also drew attention to the sorrows associated with time and chance when He was asked about the deaths of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Luk 13:1. He said, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.' Luk 13:2-5.

The offering of Christ

- The most dangerous and sinful attribute that we all possess as a consequence of the Fall is our disobedience. Through Adam's disobedience, the human race became sinners. Rom 5:19. Understanding within man's heart was darkened, and he was alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that was in him. Eph 4:18. The whole of mankind became sons and daughters of disobedience. Eph 2:2. Disobedience is, therefore, endemic within us as an expression of our other law. Rom 7:23. When we live according to this principle, we consider the attitudes and behaviours that spring

from our other law to be essential and defensible for survival in a world governed by time and chance. However, in reality, this way of living is the reason why a person remains captive to the law of sin and is under the condemnation of death.

Rom 7:23-24.

- Those who are alienated from the life of God are unable to have fellowship with others. Fellowship belongs only to those who are born again of the life of God. Love is the nature of God's life, for God *is* love. 1Jn 4:8. The practice, or works, of righteousness that belong to sons of God in Christ, is the practical expression of the love of God towards others in the body of Christ. 1Jn 3:10. We know, therefore, that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 1Jn 3:14.
- By offering, Christ has been joined to the death of every son and daughter of man. He made our death to be His death by joining us where we are - under the judgement and curse of time and chance. Christ's offering and sufferings embrace us in the realm of time and chance in which we live. Importantly, the offering of Christ does more than simply encompass the events of time and chance that govern our lives. It deals with the fallen, fleshly attitudes that govern our lives as we seek to escape the impact of the curse that has become our lot because of the Fall.
- The thief who was crucified with Christ was no more wicked than any other person. He had been caught by the Roman authorities who made him an example to the rest of the Jewish community. However, this situation brought the thief into proximity with Christ, enabling him to have a conversation with the Lord and to find salvation. Luk 23:43. This man would not have gone to be with Christ in Paradise if he had not accepted that the events governed by time and chance, and his own misguided actions, were a *just* judgement upon his life. Luk 23:40-42.
- Because of the Fall, we all experience the degenerating effects of time and chance upon our body, soul and spirit. However, because Christ has been joined to our death, time and chance, and our own misguided conduct, do not separate us from the conversation that we must have with Christ in order to be saved. Rom 8:38-39. As we receive Christ's word, we are able to find repentance and to walk by faith with Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. This is the way that leads to life for those who abide in Christ.

The true vine

- In the Scriptures, the kingdoms of men and of God are depicted as *vines*. For example, the apostle John wrote, 'And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and *gather the clusters of the vine of the earth*, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the *vine of the earth*, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.' Rev 14:18-19.
- Jesus described the kingdom of Israel as a vine in a vineyard. He said, 'Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants,

beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.' Mat 21:33-39.

- Significantly, Jesus described Himself as 'the true Vine' and identified the Father as the Vinedresser of the true Vine. Joh 15:1. He further explained, 'I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.' Joh 15:5-6. The true vine, which is the corporate body of Christ, is the kingdom of heaven!
- Further establishing this point, Jesus declared before Pilate that He was a king, and that His kingdom was not of this world. He said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Joh 18:36. John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of this heavenly kingdom. As Jesus Himself noted, 'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.' Mat 11:12. By this, Jesus meant that as men and women received the ministry of John the Baptist, and repented, they began to push into the kingdom that Christ had come to establish on earth.

The kingdom of heaven

- Under King David, the city of Jerusalem was established as the administrative centre of the kingdom of Israel. Having brought the ark of the covenant into the city, David desired to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. This work was fulfilled by his son, Solomon. Following the dedication of the temple, the Lord appeared to Solomon, saying, 'Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.' 2Ch 7:15-16.
- The kingdom of natural Israel was a shadow of the kingdom of heaven, which Christ established through His offering on the cross. At the centre of the kingdom of heaven is the heavenly Jerusalem, to which *we have all come*, by the Spirit, through new birth and baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Heb 12:22. In the middle of this city is the true temple of God. This is the place of our fellowship with Yahweh, and of our service as a kingdom of priests. 1Jn 1:3. Rev 1:6. Because we are king-priests who serve God with Christ in the temple of His body, we are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and of the kingdom of heaven. Php 3:20.
- When God's works have been fulfilled in this age, the present heavens and earth will be dissolved with fervent heat; the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 2Pe 3:10,12. In its place, God will establish a new heaven and a new earth. Rev 21:1. At the centre of this everlasting kingdom will be the bride city, the New Jerusalem, which will descend out of heaven from God. Rev 21:9-10. The apostle said that there will be no temple in the city, 'for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple'. Rev 21:22.

- Wonderfully, John also noted that its gates, right through to where the Father, Son and Holy Spirit reside, will not be shut. This means that the kings of the earth, and the nations of those who are saved, will all walk forever in the light of the Lamb who illuminates the city and the kingdom. They will have fellowship with one another and with Yahweh. Through their priestly service, as sons of God, they will bring their glory and honour into the city to the Lord. Rev 21:24-26.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit, who fills all things, has humbled Himself to come and live in the hearts of men and women. Joh 14:16. He dwells within us and has become for us the expression and glory of our sonship. He also speaks to us as we abide with Him in the fellowship of the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:3. The Holy Spirit takes the things that belong to the Son and speaks to us of them. Joh 16:14. He makes known to us the riches of glory that belong to the Son; He declares them and gives them to us. Joh 16:13-15.
- In this present season, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us of the things that are about to take place upon the earth. Rev 4:1. He is showing us things to come. Joh 16:13. Firstly, He is proclaiming the same word that He spoke to the prophet Ezekiel after Christ had called him and sent him as a prophet to speak the words of Christ to the children of Israel. Eze 2:3.
- After Christ had commissioned Ezekiel, the Spirit lifted Him up and carried him in the Spirit and brought him to the captives of Judah who dwelt at Tel Abib, by the River Chebar. Eze 3:15. When the Spirit lifted Ezekiel up into the dimension of the Spirit, the dimension in which He dwelt, He then spoke with a great thunderous voice, saying, 'Blessed is the glory of the Lord [Jesus Christ] from His place!' Eze 3:12. So, where is the place of Christ? It is where He is now seated – enthroned at the right hand of the Father in the most holy place of the true tabernacle. Heb 6:19. Heb 8:1. We are to know this place, for He is inviting men and women everywhere *to come to Him!*

The invitation to come

- In view of participation in the heavenly temple, and citizenship of the new heaven and earth, the apostle Peter exhorted us to *come to Jesus*. He wrote, '*Coming to Him* as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' 1Pe 2:4-5.
- To 'come to Christ' is to be built as a living stone into a spiritual house. This house is the true temple and the expression of Christ's fellowship, which is the fellowship of Yahweh. As it was in the days of David and Solomon, the temple is in the midst of the Jerusalem from above.
- In addition to being built into a spiritual house, coming to Christ means coming all the way into the holy of holies of the true temple, which is the presence beyond the veil. This is where Christ is now seated. In fact, our soul is anchored in the most holy place when we receive His call to come and be joined to Him, our great High Priest. As we journey with Christ in the fellowship of His offering, we are obtaining and living by the faith of the Son of God that He authored and perfected for us. Gal 2:20. Heb 12:2.

Furthermore, our hearts are being sprinkled clean from an evil conscience by His blood, enabling us to serve as priests to His God and Father. Heb 9:14. Rev 1:6.

- Jesus invited every person to ‘come to Him’ by joining the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. He said that to be yoked with Him in this manner is the means by which a person can find rest for their soul as they are delivered from the sorrow and fatigue that is associated with God’s judgement upon fallen mankind. Mat 11:28-30.
- Significantly, Jesus connected the call to ‘come to Him’ with eating and drinking. He said, ‘I am the Bread of life. *He who comes to Me shall never hunger*, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’ Joh 6:35. He also declared, ‘*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink*. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Joh 7:37-38. The call to come to Christ in this manner is the call to first love. It is to participate in the *agape* meal, which is our fellowship at the Tree of Life. This is our fellowship with the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we must hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches! Rev 2:7.

To him who overcomes

- Those who come to Christ, by eating His flesh and drinking His blood, are being built as living stones into a spiritual temple. This is the context of our priestly service as we, by the mercies of God, present ourselves as living sacrifices in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, we are overcoming the other law and the law of sin; Christ’s life is becoming our life; and we are living by the faith of the Son of God. Gal 2:20.
- This is what it means to be an overcomer! Jesus exhorted every believer in the church age to overcome in this manner. He said, ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and *he shall go out no more*. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. *And I will write on him My new name.*’ Rev 3:12.

Is it not a fellowship?

- In the Scriptures, there are numerous examples of a particular approach to making, or establishing, a point. Instead of directly stating the point, a question is posed for the purpose of eliciting a response. A person’s response demonstrates either their acceptance of the point or the maintenance of their own view on the subject.
- Consider, for example, the way in which the Jews discussed the identity of Jesus. The apostle John recounted, ‘And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, *will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?*” The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.’ Joh 7:31-32. In this instance, the question relating to Jesus’ works compelled the hearers either to believe that He was the Christ or to deny that He was the Christ. Furthermore, they were provoked to make a response that was commensurate with their belief.
- In his epistles, the apostle Paul also employed this way of making a point. In relation to the communion, he said, ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, *is it not the communion [fellowship] of the blood of Christ?* The bread which we break, *is it not the communion [fellowship] of the body of Christ?*’ 1Co 10:16.

- Paul's questions prompt us to consider what the bread and cup of communion *are to us*. If the elements *are* a fellowship, then they *are not* a memorial of Christ's historical offering. Neither are the bread or the cup being transubstantiated to become something else for us. Importantly, when *we* answer that the elements of communion *are* a fellowship in the body and blood of Christ, we are beginning to exercise faith for participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ as members of His body. We demonstrate this faith through our dialogue and conduct with one another as we eat and drink the *agape* meal.

Our prayer

- Let us, therefore, remind ourselves through prayer that we, being many, are one body in the Lord. 1Co 10:17. Let us also rejoice that we are able to share together in fellowship at the one table of the Lord. The *agape* meal that we are now blessing together expresses the reality that we are one bread and one body. We are members of the body of Christ and have been given the right, through fellowship, to participate in the table of the Lord.
- Together, we also give thanks to God for the privilege of being joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings from day to day. We are able, through grace, to show forth His death as a community of believers until He comes.
- In dialogue, as we eat and drink of the communion meal together, let us proclaim our faith in Christ's death, and also speak of our participation in His death as an expression of our obedience of faith.
- We accept, in faith, that Christ has joined our death to His death. Because of this, whether we live or die, we are able to show forth His offering capacity and overcoming death until He comes. 1Co 11:26.