

Message Seven

The Cross—the Center of the Universe

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 43:13-18; Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Col. 1:20; 2:14-15

Outline

Day 1

I. According to the record in Ezekiel, the altar is the center of the compound, the center of the premises of the temple—43:13-18:

A. The altar is the center not only of the inner court but also of the whole premises of the temple.

B. The altar, which signifies the cross, is actually the center of the universe:

1. The altar is the center of the temple compound; the temple compound is the center of Jerusalem; the city of Jerusalem is the center of the good land; the good land is the center of the inhabited earth; and, as far as the relationship of God and man is concerned, the earth is the center of the universe; thus, ultimately the altar is the center of the universe.
2. Since the altar signifies the cross, the cross is the center of the universe.
3. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not the death merely of one person; it was an all-inclusive death involving God, man, and all the creatures—Rom. 6:6; Col. 1:20; Heb. 2:14.

II. The principle of the cross is that by the cross everything of the old creation and all things related to us have been terminated, put to death—Col. 1:20; 2:14-15; Rom. 6:6;

2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 2:14; John 12:31; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 2:14-16.

Day 2

III. The crucified Christ was the unique subject, the center, the content, and the substance of the apostle's ministry—1 Cor. 2:2:

A. The death of Christ has become God's power to eliminate all the problems in the universe; thus, Christ crucified is God's power to abolish all negative things and carry out His plan—1:23-24:

1. The human way of solving problems is to negotiate, but God's way is to terminate; the best way to solve problems among people is to terminate everyone involved—Gal. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 6:7-8.
2. The crucifixion of Christ has silenced the entire universe and simplified the extremely complicated situation in the universe—cf. 2 Cor. 11:2-3.

B. When we experience the crucified Christ, all that we are, all that we have, and all that we can do are completely terminated, and His resurrection life is imparted through us into others—John 12:24-26; 2 Cor. 4:10-12.

Day 3

IV. In His economy God gives us one person—Christ—and one way—the cross—1 Cor. 2:2; Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 6:14:

A. The one person—Christ—is the center of God's economy, and the one way—the cross—is the center of God's government—1 Cor. 2:2; 1:17-18, 23; Gal. 6:14:

1. God governs everything by the cross and deals with everything by the cross—Col. 1:20; 2:14-15.

2. By the cross God has dealt with all the negative things in the universe, and He is still governing everything through the cross—Eph. 2:14-16.
3. In the church life Christ must be all and in all; everything that is not Christ must go to the cross—Col. 1:18; 3:10-11.
4. Through the cross we need to become nothing, to have nothing, and to be able to do nothing; otherwise, what we are, what we have, and what we can do will become a substitute for Christ—1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23.

B. In the book of Colossians we see a clear vision of the cross as God's way in His administration—1:20-22; 2:11-15:

1. “Through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens”—1:20:
 - a. To reconcile all things to Himself is to make peace with Himself for all things; this was accomplished through the blood of the cross of Christ.
 - b. Because we were sinners, we needed redemption, and because we were also enemies of God, we needed reconciliation—vv. 14, 21-22.
2. “Wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross”—2:14:
 - a. Ordinances refers to the ordinances of the ceremonial law with its rituals, which are the forms or ways of living and worship—Eph. 2:15.
 - b. Nailing it to the cross means to abolish the law of the commandments in ordinances.

C. “Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it”—Col. 2:15:

1. This verse portrays the fighting that took place at the time of Christ's crucifixion:
 - a. Activities involving Christ, God, and the evil angelic rulers and authorities were

brought to a focus on the cross; thus, the cross became God's eternal, central, and unique way—vv. 14-15.

- b. At the same time, the evil rulers and authorities were busy in their attempt to frustrate the work of God and Christ, pressing in close to God and Christ; thus, a warfare was raging at the cross.
2. God openly made a display of the evil angelic rulers and authorities on the cross and triumphed over them in it, putting them to shame—v. 15.

Day 4

V. In Matthew 27:51-53 we see the effect of Christ's crucifixion:

- A. *"The veil of the temple was split in two from top to bottom" (v. 51a), which signifies that the separation between God and man had been abolished because the flesh of sin taken by Christ had been crucified.*
- B. *"The earth was shaken" (v. 51b), which signifies that the base of Satan's rebellion was shaken.*
- C. *"The rocks were split" (v. 51c), which signifies that the strongholds of Satan's earthly kingdom were broken.*
- D. *"The tombs were opened" (v. 52a), which signifies that the power of death and Hades was conquered and subdued.*
- E. *"Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised" (v. 52b), which signifies the releasing power of the death of Christ.*

VI. In the Gospel of John we see the life-releasing aspect of Christ's crucifixion—19:34, 36; 12:24:

- A. *The water that flowed out of the Lord's pierced side is for imparting life, dealing with death, and producing the*

church—19:34; 3:14-15; Eph. 5:29-30.

B. As a grain of wheat, the Lord Jesus fell into the ground and died in order to produce many grains for the church—John 12:24.

C. The bone is a symbol of the Lord's resurrection life, which nothing can break; this is the life with which the church is produced and built—19:36.

Day 5

VII. The cross leads us to the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:18; 12:12-13, 27:

A. The cross operates in the sphere of the Body—Rom. 6:6; 8:13; 12:4-5:

1. The work of the cross goes as far as the Body of Christ and consummates with the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:1-2; 12:12-27.
2. Not only does the work of the cross bring us into the Body, but also the Body becomes the realm within which the cross works—Col. 1:20; 3:15.

B. In the Body of Christ we cannot go on without the cross—Eph. 2:16:

1. The cross will dig away our natural life, our own activities, and any disproportionate growth—Matt. 16:24-26.
2. Life and work in the Body necessitate drastic dealings with the flesh, and such dealings necessitate a deep knowledge of the cross of Christ—Gal. 5:24.
3. The restriction of the Body will take away our freedom and drive us to the cross—Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:13-15; Eph. 4:7, 16.
4. All of God's dealings with us have been with a view to prepare us for the Body; all His work in us is a process of elimination so that we can become functioning members of the Body—Rom. 6:6; 8:13; 12:4-8.

5. If our natural life is dealt with by the cross and if we submit to the headship of Christ and live the Body life, we will have the Spirit's anointing and enjoy the fellowship of the Body—Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 10:16.

Day 6

VIII. Although we meet the cross everywhere in our Christian life, we experience the cross in a particular way when we come to the altar at the center of God's building—Ezek. 43:13-18:

- A. *To come to the altar at the center is to realize that all that we are and all that we have, have been terminated at the cross—Rom. 6:6.*
- B. *In our fellowship with the Lord, we are brought to the point where we touch the cross in a definite way and sense that God will no longer allow us to live in our natural man—Gal. 2:20.*
- C. *As we pass through the cross, our flesh, our old creation, our self, and our natural man with the natural life will all be dealt with—6:14.*
- D. *This is the experience of the cross—the center of the universe—Matt. 16:24.*

WEEK 7 — DAY 1

Morning Nourishment

Heb. 2:14 ...That through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil.

2 Cor. 5:21 Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The altar is at the center of the compound. The altar is the center not only of the inner court but also of the whole premises of the temple. This altar, which signifies the cross, is actually the center of the universe.

It is crucial for us to know the full significance of the cross. According to superficial Christian teachings, the cross is the place where the Lord Jesus died for us. This is surely true, but the cross means much more than this. As the center of the universe, the cross signifies the all-inclusive death of God, of man, and of all the creatures. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not the death merely of one single person; it was an all-inclusive death involving God, man, and all the creatures. (Life-study of Ezekiel, p. 236)

Today's Reading

Christ first put on such a man, who was all-inclusive of the old creation, and then brought this man to the cross...This means that all things were put to an end. This is the principle of the cross. By this kind of death Christ brought man to the cross and thereby brought everything to an end. Not only was Christ crucified there but so were man, the world, Satan and his kingdom, sin, sins, the old man, etc... We must experience this all-inclusive death. The following verses reveal the principle of the cross in putting all things of the old creation to an end: 1. The angelic life (Col. 1:20). 2. The human life (Gal. 2:20). 3. Satan (Heb. 2:14; John 12:31). 4. The kingdom of Satan (Col. 2:15...). 5. Sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3). 6. Sins (1 Pet. 2:24; Isa. 53:6). 7. The world (Gal. 6:14; John 12:31). 8. Death (Heb. 2:14). 9. Flesh (Gal. 5:24). 10. The old man (Rom. 6:6). 11. Self (Gal. 2:20). 12. All things, or

creation (Col. 1:20).

John 12:31 says that the world and the ruler of this world, who is Satan, were to be judged and cast out.... According to verse 24, it happened at the death of Christ on the cross. By His death, the world was judged and the ruler of the world was cast out. Hebrews 2:14 declares that Christ partook of blood and flesh that through death He might destroy, or annul, him who has the might of death, that is, the devil. This verse reveals that Christ, by His death in flesh and blood, destroyed, or annulled, Satan, who has the might of death. Colossians 1:20 says that Christ reconciled “all things” to Himself. This proves that not only man was wrong with God, but all things were also wrong with God; otherwise, there would be no need for reconciliation. According to the context of this passage, all creation was dealt with by the cross.

We need to be deeply impressed with the kind of death that Christ died on the cross. That death was an all-inclusive death—this is why we must experience it. All that we have, all that we are, all that we do, and all to which we are related have been brought to the cross. The cross is the end of all things related to us. Everything has been dealt with and already crucified on the cross. The cross is the only ground for all that we are and have. We have to put all things to the cross: our knowledge, our wisdom, our ability, etc. This is the principle of the cross. There is no other ground. We may think how “good” we are. The young people especially are always thinking how good they are: “We are young, we are good, we are not like the old folks....” No matter how good we are, we have to come to the cross. We have to be crucified and crossed out. The more good we are, the more we must be crossed out. We must never be proud of being good. Regardless of whether we are good or evil, we all have to pass through the cross. We should not evaluate ourselves wrongly. There is but one evaluation; that is, we must put ourselves to death. (CWWL, 1964, vol. 3, “The Economy of God,” pp. 260-262)

Further Reading: Life-study of Ezekiel, msg. 21; The Economy of God, ch. 14; The Christian Life, ch. 6; The Conclusion of the New Testament, msgs. 70-72; God’s New Testament Economy, ch. 3; Christ and the Cross, chs. 11-16, 18-22

WEEK 7 — DAY 2

Morning Nourishment

1 Cor. 2:2 For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified.

1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness.

When we experience the crucified Christ, we are terminated. All that we are, all that we have, and all that we can do—all is completely terminated. To be terminated, there is no need for you to crucify yourself. There is not even any need for you to reckon yourself dead. You are terminated simply by experiencing the crucified Christ. Actually, it is impossible for anyone to crucify himself. But when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, as we are enjoying Him and experiencing Him, His crucifixion will terminate us. All that we are is terminated by this crucified Christ. (Life-study of 1 Corinthians, p. 76)

Today's Reading

It takes the power of God to defeat Satan, the world, sin, fallen man, the flesh, the natural life, the old creation, and the ordinances....Only God has the power to accomplish these things. This power is not that of doing things by speaking, such as the power God exercised in creation. Rather, it is the power of crucifixion, the power of the wonderful death of Christ.... By one death, the death of Christ, all the problems in the universe have been cleared. Thus, Christ crucified is God's power to abolish all negative things and carry out His plan.

The cross of Christ is also part of the unique solution to the problems in the church. The first work the cross does in our experience is to terminate us.... Do you realize that every wedding is a termination? When a sister gets married, she puts a covering on her head. This covering is a sign of termination and burial. If a sister is not willing for such a termination, she should not cover her head at the time of her wedding. Furthermore, a married sister loses her maiden name and

takes another last name, the name of her husband.

On the one hand, Christ is our enjoyment; on the other hand, the cross is our termination. From experience we know that the more we enjoy Christ, the more we are terminated. When the cross works to terminate us, what should we do? We should not do anything except remain restfully in the place of termination. It is a wonderful fact that whatever is terminated by the cross is redeemed. How encouraging this is! The enjoyment of redemption depends on the experience of termination. Certain saints have little enjoyment of redemption because they are not willing to be terminated.

The cross solves all the entanglements we face in the church life and especially in our married life. According to my experience, married life can be very entangling, bothersome, and puzzling. What can untangle all the complications and solve the problems? We need an instrument to cut through the entanglement, and this instrument, this cutting knife, is the cross. Only the cross can save us from the entanglements of married life. When we are cut by the cross, we are not entangled by anything.

Human life is filled with problems and entanglements. Simply to be alive is to encounter problems and troubles. This is true not only in the married life and family life but also in the church life. According to the human way, negotiation is the means of solving problems or resolving entanglements. A brother and his wife may attempt to solve problems in this way. However, this is not the divine way. God's way is to supply you with Christ and terminate you by the cross. Whenever there is a problem in the family life or in the church life, the natural man may immediately try to negotiate and solve the problem through conversation. By the Lord's mercy I can testify that whenever I face this temptation, deep within I have the sense that there is no need for me to talk or negotiate. My only need is to go to the cross and be terminated. Then Christ comes in with the supply to solve every problem. This is God's way to solve all the problems in the church life. (Life-study of 1 Corinthians, pp. 73, 46-47)

Further Reading: Life-study of 1 Corinthians, msgs. 5, 8

WEEK 7 — DAY 3

Morning Nourishment

Col. 3:10-11 And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.

In His economy God gives us one person and one way. The one person is the preeminent, all-inclusive Christ, and the one way is the cross. As the all-inclusive One, Christ is everything to us. He is God, man, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe. God has given us this marvelous person to be our salvation. The one person, Christ, is the center of the universe; and the one way, the cross, is the center of God's government....Therefore, just as Christ is the focal point of the universe, so the cross is the center of God's government. (Life-study of Colossians, p. 211)

Today's Reading

Paul's purpose in the book of Colossians is to show that in the church nothing should be allowed to be a substitute for Christ. The church life must be constituted uniquely of Christ. He should be our only constituent and our very constitution.... In this short Epistle a number of elevated expressions are used to describe Christ. For example, He is called the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, the Firstborn from among the dead, and the body of all the shadows.... In the new man Christ is all and in all [3:10-11]. This means that Christ must be everyone and in everyone. In the new man there is no room for Chinese, Japanese, American, British, French, or Germans. Christ must be every one of us. In the new man Christ must be you and me. Not only must culture go, but even we have to go. It is crucial that we see this revelation.

The main point in the Epistle of Colossians is the fact that in the eyes of God nothing counts except Christ. This fact excludes both good things and bad things, both sinful things and cultured things. In particular, it eliminates all the

good aspects of culture.... The enemy of God utilizes culture to replace Christ. This is offensive to God. If Satan cannot corrupt us with evil things, God knows that he will try to use the good aspects of culture to replace Christ. Among today's Christians, where can you find a group of believers with whom you can sense nothing but Christ? Among the various Christian groups we see many good points. However, these good things are not the person of Christ Himself, but something that has replaced Him in a subtle way. For this reason, in many groups of Christians it is difficult to meet Christ. Some may preach Christ or teach the doctrines regarding Christ, but even this preaching and teaching becomes a substitute for Christ Himself. If we have a clear view of the situation among Christians today, we shall realize that the background of the book of Colossians exactly corresponds to today's situation. This book was written for us, not only for the saints at Colossae.

If we have a clear understanding of the background of this Epistle, we shall realize that the only way for us to take is the way of the cross. The cross is both a narrow way and a highway. For those not willing to take the cross, the cross is a narrow way. But for those who are willing to take this way, the cross becomes a highway. In the church we all should be nothing and nobody. This was Paul's attitude when he said that we have died and have been buried. To lay hold of this, we need revelation. Whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we do can become a substitute for Christ. The better we are or the more capable we are of doing things, the more Christ may be replaced in our experience. Through the cross, we need to become nothing, to have nothing, and to be able to do nothing. Otherwise, what we are, what we have, or what we can do will become a substitute for Christ. Then in our Christian life Christ will not be all in all. The book of Colossians teaches us that in the church life Christ must be all and in all. Everything that is not Christ must go. (Life-study of Colossians, pp. 5-7)

Further Reading: Life-study of Colossians, msgs. 1, 9-10, 22-23, 26-28

WEEK 7 — DAY 4

Morning Nourishment

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water.

The life of the grain of wheat is concealed in the shell of the wheat and is restricted by this outer shell. However, if this grain of wheat dies, death will have an effect which allows the life of the wheat to be released. Hence, the Lord Jesus said that once the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it begins to grow and bear much fruit. However, suppose we put this grain of wheat into a beautiful box to honor and respect it. If this grain of wheat could speak, it would plead with us, saying, “Do not honor and respect me in this way. I am greatly bound here. I would rather that you give me an environment in which I could die. I am very eager to die because death is my only way out. Only by death can the life within me break forth.” (The Crucified Christ, p. 37)

Today’s Reading

Those who know Christ will say that the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross is beyond human imagination. If you ask a Muslim why the Lord Jesus died, he may tell you that Jesus sacrificed Himself for the truth. If you ask a genuine Christian why Jesus died, he will reply that Jesus died to bear the sin of the world and become a curse for the world. We have to bear in mind, however, that knowing the Lord to this extent is not high enough or accurate enough. If we ask a more advanced and spiritual Christian, he will say, “The Lord Jesus not only bore the sin of the world on the cross, He also obtained a great release. His life, which was concealed in the human shell given to Him by Mary, was released. This was because the death of the cross broke His human shell and split the veil, His physical body. His life was thus released on the cross.”

When He was on the cross, a soldier pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water (John 19:34).... Hence, the death of the Lord Jesus was a redemptive death, as indicated by the blood. However, not only did blood come out on the cross but also water. Water refers to life. The Lord's death was not merely for the accomplishment of redemption but also for the release of life.... If He had not died, He would have remained a single grain. But since He died, the life of this single grain has entered into the many grains. He was a seed that was full of life. If He had not died, His life would have remained only in Himself and could not have entered into...all those who have believed in Him.... If He had not died, His life would have stayed only in Himself and could not have been in the disciples. If He had not died, He could have walked among the disciples, but He could not have lived in them.

Regrettably, the disciples only knew the preciousness of the Lord's presence among them, but it never occurred to them that the Lord would come into them and be mingled with them. The Lord intended to be in them as their life. The Lord said that He had a baptism to be baptized with, that He had to suffer death. The Lord felt that death was a glory and a release, but the disciples were sorrowful. Why were the disciples sorrowful? It was because the Lord had to die. There were originally thirteen of them altogether—the Lord Jesus plus the disciples. If the Lord died, however, they felt that they would be like orphans. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus told them not to be sorrowful because in only three days He would come back into their midst. Furthermore, not only would He be in their midst, but He would also enter into them and abide in them. Previously whenever the disciples were in Galilee, and the Lord was in the land of Judea, He had no way to be with them because He was restricted by His human shell. However, after the Lord's death His life was released from within Him, and after His resurrection this life entered into all those who believed in Him. (The Crucified Christ, pp. 37-39)

Further Reading: The Crucified Christ, chs. 3-6; Life-study of Matthew, msg. 70

WEEK 7 — DAY 5

Morning Nourishment

1 Cor. 1:18 For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

12:27 Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually.

The consummation of the work of the cross is the church. The work of the cross goes as far as the Body of Christ and consummates with the Body of Christ. Hence, the knowledge of the cross brings us to the knowledge of the Body of Christ. The cross brings a man to a state of weakness and inability, one in which he totally loses hope in the old creation. When he is brought to this point, he is delivered in a real way from the old creation and brought into the new creation.... The Body of Christ is the new creation; it has nothing to do with the old creation. If we resort to human methods, tactics, and skills (which we have used in the past) to deal with the affairs of the church, the result will only be disastrous.... Everything of the old creation must pass through the cross and remain on the cross. The church has no use for anything that comes from the old man. The church only takes that which issues from Christ. (CWWN, vol. 44, pp. 790-791)

Today's Reading

When man fell, he fell because of his own concepts, choices, and judgments. Therefore, God will not allow anything that issues from the old creation to gain the upper hand. The “backbone” of the natural man must be broken; the hollow of his thigh must be touched. Before he will submit to God, he must be crippled and fall flat on his face. This is what God is doing in the new creation. He is smashing everything of the old creation, and He is constituting us with everything that issues from Christ so that we can become the Body of Christ in practicality. I saw the evil of man's flesh twelve years ago in Philippians 3, Romans 5, and John 5. For seven months I was hesitant to make any move at all, because I knew that everything that issued from the flesh would be rejected by God. God wants to

remove everything in man that is from the flesh. God's children must first deal with the natural life. If they deal with their natural life, they will be in the Body spontaneously, because the Body of Christ is composed of everything that issues from Christ. Nothing of the old man can remain in the Body. As soon as a man passes through the experience in Romans 5 through 8, he can enter into the experience of Romans 12. (CWWN, vol. 44, p. 791)

The work of the cross not only brings us into the Body, but also the Body becomes the very realm within which the cross works. If we were here only as a congregation, we might not need the cross. However, since we are together as the Body, we cannot go on without the cross. The cross will dig away our natural life, our own activities, and any disproportionate growth. The cross is indispensable to the church.... Whether or not we like it, we have to communicate with other brothers and sisters because we are all in the Body. Because we are in the Body, we have to be restricted and cannot be so free. If we were not members, we could seek our personal enjoyment. Since we are members, we cannot seek our own enjoyment anymore. If we come across a troublesome brother, we need to take up the cross. The cross will test us and sift away all our mixture and uncleanness.... The restriction of the Body will take away our freedom; it will drive us to the cross. Only after the cross has wrought a deep work in us will we be able to coordinate with the brothers and sisters.

Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ. Hence, every Christian should come under the restriction of the Body of Christ and learn to bear the cross. Some have a very strong disposition. Such a strong disposition must be broken. Some are very peculiar. Such peculiarity must also be broken. No Christian can boast of his strength or his peculiarity in the church. In the church, anything sharp, glaring, or conspicuous has to be worn away. (CWWN, vol. 38, pp. 408-409)

Further Reading: CWWN, vol. 44, chs. 97, 100; CWWN, vol. 38, ch. 54; CWWN, vol. 46, ch. 174; Christ and the Cross, ch. 17

WEEK 7 — DAY 6

Morning Nourishment

Rom. 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves.

Gal. 6:14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Although we meet the cross everywhere in our Christian life, we experience the cross in a particular way when we come to the altar at the center of God's building. To come to the altar at the center is to realize that all that we are and all that we have were terminated at the cross. Here we have a definite experience of the cross and not merely a superficial knowledge about the cross. In our fellowship with the Lord, we are brought to the point where we touch the cross in a definite way and sense that God will no longer allow us to live in our natural man. This causes us to have a major breakthrough and an absolute submission to the cross. As a result, we will know what the natural life is and what it means for the old creation to be stripped away. This is the experience of the cross as the center. (Life-study of Ezekiel, pp. 239-240)

Today's Reading

I am grieved that although many of us have heard messages about the cross, only a few among us truly live a crucified life. For example, we may not live a crucified life in our married life. If a married brother and his wife argue with each other, this indicates that they are not living a crucified life...Those who live a crucified life do not vindicate themselves when they are attacked or criticized. They experience the termination of their Adamic life and of the old creation through the death of the cross and enjoy God's riches and His divine element, which were released through the cross.

When some, especially young people, hear this word about the altar, they may be frightened and think that it is better not to love the Lord and seek Him.... They may fear that it would be dangerous to reach the altar and become a burnt offering. We need to realize, however, that since the Lord has had mercy on us, we cannot escape Him.... While we were wandering in the world, having no intention of entering in through the gate, the Lord brought us through the gate. Apart from our own choice, we believed into Christ. This is altogether a matter of God's selection, of His mercy, and of His reaching us with His care. The principle is the same in our loving the Lord and pursuing Him.... The more we love the Lord and pursue Him, the more we are satisfied. This also is a matter of the Lord's mercy. Because of His mercy to us and His operation within us, we have no choice except to go forward; we cannot turn back. If we do not advance toward the altar but instead try to go back to the outer court, we will feel uncomfortable. Therefore, we need to go on and on until we reach the altar.

Eventually, all those who are spiritual and who pursue the Lord end up on the altar where they are terminated, even destroyed, by the Lord. Seemingly without reason, the Lord tears them down and strips them of everything. God puts to death all that we are and all that we have.... Because we love the Lord and pursue Him, sooner or later we will meet the cross, which will tear us down and bring everything into death. We will be forced to pass into death, even if we are not willing to do so.

We do not experience the cross once for all—we experience the cross again and again. Those who pursue the Lord will meet the cross at every turn. At one time they will meet the cross through their children. At another time they will meet the cross through their spouse or through illness. At other times, they may experience the cross through the church or through the co-workers. The reason that the cross is everywhere is that we must go through the cross in order to contact God. Thank the Lord that God gives us the cross and that the cross gives us God. The ones who love God the most and experience Him the most are the ones who have gone through the cross. (Life-study of Ezekiel, pp. 240-241)

Further Reading: Life-study of Ezekiel, msg. 21

WEEK 7 — HYMN

Through the Cross, O Lord, I pray

Fulness of the Spirit — By the Cross

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1. First the blood, and then the ointment, Cleansing, then anointing
comes; If we pass not through Golgotha, Ne'er to Pentecost we'll
come. If the blood has never cleansed us, Ne'er the Spirit's power we'll know, If for Christ we'd truly witness, Self-life to the Cross must
go. (Chorus) Through the Cross, O Lord, I pray, Put my soul-life all a -
way; Make me any price to pay, Full anointing to receive.

2. Christ, the Rock, must first be smitten,
That the living water flow;
Without death the Spirit's fulness
Ne'er could dwell in man below.
If with Christ we die completely,
Willing thus our all to lose,
He will clothe us with His power
And to win the world will use.
3. First the altar, then the fire,
If no loss, there'll be no gain;
If our all has not been offered,
To the throne we'll ne'er attain.
If to sacrifice we're willing,
All forsaking, God t'obey,
He to us will be committed
And thru us His pow'r display.
4. First we must prepare the vessels
That the Oil they may contain;
Dig the valley full of ditches
That they may be filled with Rain.
First we must go thru the Jordan
Ere anointed from above;
First in death we must be baptized,
Then experience the Dove.
5. When we see the ripened harvest
Of the golden countryside,
We may know that many seeds have
Fallen to the earth and died.
Ere the fruit of life may blossom,
We must surely suffer death;
If with Christ we've not been buried,
We'll not feel the Spirit's breath.
6. Since it must be thus, I pray, Lord,
Help me go the narrow way;
Deal with pride and make me willing
Thus to suffer, Thee t'obey.
I for greater power pray not,
Deeper death is what I need;
All the meaning of the Cross, Lord,
Work in me—for this I plead.

