

## WHEN JESUS CHOSE THE CROSS

By the time a child reaches the age of twelve, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife.

Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. The latter mouthed phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp. For four thousand years God's servants and offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth's inquiring "Why?" no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is it possible, wondered Jesus, for the "blood of bulls and goats" to take away sin?

Even as a child, Jesus must walk alone. He turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as he came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed the same heart commitment He had made in heaven:

"For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: 'You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but You have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said, 'Here I am, to *do Your* will, O God.'" Hebrews 10:5-7, REV.

It was as He prayed, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts' blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! *I* have blood that I can shed. Here *I* am, Father—let *Me* be the Lamb of God! *I will die for the sins of the world. My* blood will be the atonement! *I* will be that "suffering servant" of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let Me be wounded

for man's transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with *My* stripes he may be healed. Lo, / come—to do Your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Himself:

“So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all.” Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV.

No memory of his preexistence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when “the counsel of peace” was “between them both” (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices “cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9), and that “the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” Hebrews 10:1.

This is all a *type*, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice. This was a conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times “not discerning the Lord’s body,” this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the unresisted power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. *He will sacrifice Himself*. The Boy of twelve “saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.” Isaiah 59:15, 16. “Christ . . . through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.” Hebrews 9:14.

It is more fruitful to pursue Paul's line of thought in 2 Cor. 5:21, as taking place at the Incarnation. At the age of twelve Jesus went to the Passover at Jerusalem with his parents. There as he wondered at the meaning of the sacrifices of animals and inquired of the priests and teachers, who could not give Him an answer, His pure, holy mind grasped the truth expressed in the words of the Apostle: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me." Heb. 10:5. Then it was that Jesus chose the cross. He realized that the blood of animals could never purify the conscience from sin. God had given him a body which had not been defiled by sin, which could be the Lamb without spot or wrinkle.

This body had been prepared for Jesus by God at His Incarnation. It was at the Incarnation that God "made Him to be sin for us." That was when "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." Gal. 4:4. Being born of a woman, Jesus was "made under the law"—i.e., under the condemnation of the law and thus subject to death.

Paul says that Christ at His death on the cross stripped off the flesh (Col. 2:15),—*ἀπεκδυσάμενος*, "having put off", or "unclothed," putting off the flesh by death; and thus gave the death blow to Satan, and the powers of evil. By this act "in the body of his flesh through death" (Col. 1:22), He reconciled us.<sup>1</sup> It was at the cross when He so finally and utterly condemned sin in the flesh and proved that sin had no reason to exist even in sinful flesh. Romans 8:3.

At the Incarnation He was "made to be sin for us." The word "sin" is a reference to His flesh, His body. Christ assumed "fallen nature." Christ did not assume a sinning nature, for He "knew no sin" and He was "the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. 5:21. Paul is not self-contradictory. Had Christ taken a sinning nature at the Incarnation, it could not be said of Him that He "knew no sin." Paul makes it absolutely clear what he means by "sin" with these qualifying words. "He who had no personal acquaintance with sin 'was made to be sin for us'—yet He never became a sinner; He never allowed the sin to have sway over him."<sup>2</sup> The "sin" principle which Christ took was never

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<sup>1</sup> ". . . The powers of evil had entrenched themselves in Christ's fleshly nature. 'He that knew no sin was made sin for us' and in his death he threw off this contaminated nature which he had assumed for our sakes, thus breaking free from his enemies." E. F. Scott, *MNTC*, "Colossians", p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), p. 103.

activated in Him by thought or action. The sinful nature which Christ took never became for Him a sinning nature. Therefore it cannot be said of Christ that He *had* a sinful nature.

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of tender years, with the mysterious past all unknown to Him except by faith in the Written Word. He makes the same decision which as Commander of the heavenly hosts He made in the councils of heaven. *He chooses to go to the cross.*

When the love of God (*agape*) is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, we choose the way of the cross as readily as the Son of God chose it in the heavenly council ages ago, and again as a Boy of twelve in the Jerusalem temple. In each instance, whether in the heart of the Son of God or in the heart of a believing sinner, the results lead to resurrection—which is as much a part of the principle as is the cross. There is Good News: “He who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal.” John 12:25.

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and the cross for you and me on which we die with Christ as did the penitent thief.

There was a third cross at Calvary, but there was no redemption for the impenitent thief who died on it. He was caught in a suffering and death to which he never surrendered. Rebellious, he cursed his fate and God unto the bitter end, *and perished.*

Shall we rebel against the principle of the cross and follow him to eternal darkness?

Bearing our cross is made easy through seeing that other cross on which our divine Example died. “My yoke is easy,” the crucified One tells us. Through understanding His cross, we can discern our own and find strength to bear it gladly.

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My riches gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a tribute far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

(Isaac Watts)