

THE CHURCH IN BABYLON

Chapter 9

Taking the Cross into the World

Pg 223

Shamelessly sharing the message that can save us

Christianity is the only major religion to have its central event the humiliation of its God.

Crosses are worn as pendants by athletes and rock stars; it has become a symbol of general good will and acceptance. The cross is seen as an ancient symbol that can be easily combined with an undefined spirituality or, for that matter, with other religions.

Opportunity to preach Jesus.

Pg 224

Most people believe there are many ways to God. No other religion can claim their God is the Messiah.

The early Christians saw the cross as a horrid reality reserved for the worst criminals.

Paul writes that the cross is an offense to the Jews and the Greeks (I Corinthians 1:23-24)

And the Old Testament affirmed that those who hung on a cross, or tree, were cursed (Galatians 3:14)

Pg 225

The idea that the humiliating death of a self-proclaimed messiah was God's most glorious saving event. It simply didn't make sense to anyone, including the disciple, Peter.

Have we as Christians forgotten that we are asked *to gladly* bear the full weight of the offense of the cross?

Pg 227

Yet, no one gets saved unless, at least on some level, they are offended. Peter alluded to Psalm 118:22, the Stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. I Peter 2:7-8 The Stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

To empty the cross of its offense is to empty it of its power.

We empty the cross of its offense when we insist that Jesus did not bear God's righteous wrath on our behalf. (Isaiah 53:10-12)

Pg 231

John Stott said, "Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us...we have to see it as something done by us." Where is the greatest evidence of God's love seen? On the cross. Where is God's greatest judgment and wrath against sin most clearly seen? On the cross! So, Jesus actually bears the wrath that is due us.

We empty the cross of its offense when we believe that other religions are able to bring us to God.

Pg 234

Does Christ belong on the same shelf with Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad and others?

In 1993 Lutzer attended the Parliament of World Religions where 6,000 people from all over the world, represented more than 100 different religions. He goes on a search for a sinless savior who could take away his sin, because, after all, he couldn't have his sins taken away by a sinner, a man in his own predicament! He began with the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Muslims, asking those in charge if they had a sinless Savior to recommend to him. They all admitted they only had gurus and prophets, some who claimed enlightenment, but none claimed sinlessness and none claimed to be qualified as a Savior who could forgive sin and represent us to God as holy. He quickly confirmed what he already knew: **among the religious leaders of the world, Jesus stood out entirely alone.**

Prophecies about His advent alone: Just fulfilling 8 prophecies, the chances are 1 in 10 followed by 27 0's 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

All 351 prophecies to claim he is THE MESSIAH 1 in 10 followed by 96 0's ONE CHANCE IN A TRILLION, TRILLION, TRILLION, TRILLION, TRILLION, TRILLION, TRILLION, TRILLION

It is true, as some assert, that many other religions also demand a blood sacrifice for sins, but in Christianity, God become the sacrifice! (2 Corinthians 5:19) "In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself." Only in Christianity is God alone the Redeemer. Other religions are man trying to seek God; only in Christianity has God come to seek man.

Pg 236-243

How do we carry the cross to the world?

We carry it by serving others

We carry it through our gospel-driven racial unity

We carry it when we exalt it above political affiliations

We carry it by witnessing to our faith

We carry it by accepting rejection without retaliation

We carry it by inviting the worst of sinners-yes, evil criminals-to believe the gospel

CHAPTER 10

PG 247

The ministry of “One Cry” is committed to unifying Christians around the central theme, “Prayer for the Church” for our country and the world. ELABORATE PRAYER

(Read preamble from book)

This chapter is one of rebuke, and also one of hope and encouragement.

Pg 248

3 questions we seek to answer:

1. Why did Jesus find himself outside the church door at Laodicea, knocking, asking to be invited back in?
2. How do we invite Him back into our churches and individual lives?
3. What rewards does Jesus promise to those who take up His glorious invitation?

Pg 250

Why do so few of our churches see members delivered from addictions and failing marriages and wayward children brought back to the family of God? Jesus didn't mention prayerlessness in his letter, but as we will see, prayer was implied by His emphasis on repentance.

Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle was asked why people line up for blocks around their church before the doors open for prayer services on Tuesday nights, and he replied, “Your people would pray too if they actually believed that God answers prayer!”

If we just believed that God answers prayer!

Why is that we have gotten to this point? How many times have I not bothered to pray because I didn't believe it would make a difference?

Pg 252

Jesus outside the church:

Why would Jesus, the one who loves the church and created her for His own glory, feel unwelcomed in HIS church? Why is he knocking from the outside?

Unacknowledged lukewarmness

Revelation 3:15-16 “I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!”

Pg 253

Many of our churches are awash with lukewarmness, which could be defined as indifference, a feeling of self-satisfaction, a lack of passion for Christ, and a lack of desperation. Many no longer have prayer meetings, few members witness.

Today, we as evangelicals are intimidated by our culture. As already emphasized, we don't want to offend anybody, we do not want to take a stand that will put us at odds with onerous court decisions or cultural streams that carry us along like an aimless log of wood. We are silent when we should speak; we are passive when we should act. We are to be both salt and light. Matt 5.13

Pg 254

Revelation 3:17 "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are poor, blind, and naked.

Pg 255

It seems as if evangelicals have not distinguished between the American Way of life and the Christian Way of life. To what extent has my rather comfortable lifestyle blinded me to the true condition of my heart and affections?

Pg 256

Wilbur Rees wrote The Worth of God:

"I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough of Him to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack, please. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please."

Pg 257

2nd paragraph

Yet, Jesus says to us, "You are rich (and we are) and prosperous and self-satisfied, but I see you as poor and naked." Perhaps it's not too strong to say that the so-called gospel of prosperity, as taught by many TV preachers, is a devilish scheme to divert the church from its mission. This teaching lures believers to worldly desires while giving them the illusion that they're serving the Lord. What does such teachings say about the Christians who are being martyred in Iran, Iraq, and Egypt? Where is their theology of persecutions, martyrdom, and unanswered prayers for healing?

Laodicea was rebuked by Jesus because wealth gave the people a false view of how well they were doing spiritually. Such illusions die hard.

Pg 258

Jesus reminds us that we judge from the outer aspects, He judges from the heart. He judges us by our love for Him. He looks beneath the surface and seems to say, "Your self-deception runs deep. I feel as if My space in the church is being co-opted by other interests, so I've stepped outside the door. I've not left you. I'm knocking to return. Invite me back in!"

Inviting Jesus back into the church. Jesus loves us so much He doesn't leave us. He tells us how we can invite Him back into our church.

We are guided by our past to cherish Jesus above all else! Jesus asks us to buy from Him gold refined by fire

Do business with Me, What I have is more precious than gold! King David said this in Psalm 19:7-11

Pg 260-262

"Zealous Repentance"

Remember Revelation 3:19, "Those whom I love I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent!"

Of what should we repent?

There is a **cost** to repentance, a **cost** to seeing beyond ourselves, to our neighborhood, or co-workers, friends and family. There may be a **cost** to loving our LGBT neighbor or family member, or the Muslim family next door.

Without **heart-felt** repentance, new resolutions go nowhere.

1. Without repentance we have too much noise and not enough quietness.
2. ...we have too much self-promotion and narcissism.
3. ...we have too much self-righteousness
4. ...we have too little prayer, too little weeping for both the saved and the unsaved.
5. ...we are too selfish with our money and time.
6. ...we have too many marriages in crisis.
7. ...we have too little effort in preserving the unity of the body.

Repentance before God leads to sensitivity for people. Indifference for God leads to indifference for others.

Pg 263

Look at the last 2 paragraphs:

It's true that the world can outnumber us, out-entertain us, and out-finance us, but let it never be said that they can out-love us, or out-pray us, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

Jesus will not feel comfortable in the churches without our repentance, humility, and the exaltation of Him in all we do. Our love for Him welcomes Him back.

Pg 264-265

The Reward for Those Who Respond

Jesus dictated this letter to the entire church, but His actual appeal is to individuals in Revelation 3:20, "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me." If anyone hears My voice and opens the door ...Your church may not be open to the idea of seriously inviting Jesus back, but you can invite Him for full fellowship within your own heart. "I will eat with him and he with Me."

In each of the seven letters, He speaks about "the one who conquers." Is every Christian a conqueror? Many theologians say "yes" base on this promise, "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith." 1 John 5:4

So, on one level, yes, it is true that every Christian is a conqueror (overcome) in the sense that they will arrive in heaven. But I cannot imagine that a Christian who lived for self and sin is a conqueror as described in this verse.

All Christians will not be equally rewarded. Speaking to Christians, Paul warned, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." 2 Corinthians 5:10

Elsewhere, Paul speaks about Christians who build their lives on wood, hay, and stubble, and such will be saved in the end: "he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:15

In conclusion, Hearing What the Spirit Says

Jesus wrote to only one early church, the church at Laodicea. But now he addresses us all, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3:22 (Don't miss the plural churches)

This is the word from Christ for all churches in all eras. This is His letter to us.

CHAPTER 11

The Church that Will Survive in Babylon – Prevailing in a Hostile Culture

Pg 268

The Church of Jesus Christ is built “too well” to be demolished!

Satan would like for all believers to believe the church of our Lord is failing! Some churches may fail or close, some pastors may fail and never get up again, but the children of Jesus Christ will not fail!

Pillars that the Romans built were still standing when the final blows came.

Pg 270

A surviving church must invest in people, not buildings. The church can survive without buildings, but not without dedicated saints.

We had better think beyond the building and ask: what will happen if churches lose their tax-exempt status? What will happen if giving for the various ministries decreases and we can no longer pay our bills? What will happen if churches have to pay hefty fines if they don't use their facilities to wed same-sex couples? What will happen when more Christians are marginalized, lose their jobs, and support to the church plunges? We need to think outside the box and ask: how will the remnant survive when the larger majority of members judge that the price of living for Christ is just too high and too risky?

Pg 271

The church that survives hard times is the church that is bound together in community, not social media likes, but genuine friendships and unselfish caring for others. Members stand together, in good times and hard times, for accountability, ministry and prayer.

God never expects us to navigate our way through Babylon solo. Such commitment goes beyond attending church once a week then going home believing that one's duty has been done. What we need are more equipped individuals who share their faith in hospitals, banks, factories, warehouses, office buildings, and neighborhoods.

Jesus last words were, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

Pg 275

Only brokenness over our sin and constant dependence on God can raise the spiritually dead to life.

The surviving church is a church that preaches to felt needs, to be sure, but emphasizes that when we stand in the presence of a holy God, our greatest felt need will be for the righteousness of Christ. It is a church that teaches us how to live on earth but with the greater purpose of preparing for the life to come. It is a church that is not afraid of talking about hell.

Pg 276

We forget that we are called to suffer, a doctrine that is often neglected in the Western church. When Paul was converted, God called him not merely to preach, but also to suffer.

Acts 9:15-16 "For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name."

Pg 278

Life is short, eternity is long

The church that survives in Babylon is one whose members accept their lot with both sorrow but also a joy that is inexplicable. It is a church that attempts to silence its critics by its authenticity and commitment to others. It is a church that is willing to follow Jesus all the way to the cross.

It is not possible to have a heart for God without having a heart for people and their deep and abiding needs. Earlier, I emphasized that Christianity is at its best when even its critics have to admit that we are selfless, serving, and sacrificing. A church that is content with itself is a church that is on its way to its demise. A church that does not welcome the diversity of its neighborhood will soon wither and eventually die.

Someone has well said that farmers plant seed in a field, not a barn.

Pg 279

Finally, the church that survives in Babylon is one that continually sees Christ as the head of the church, as is totally committed to His sovereignty over all things.

Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"

He not only has authority over His church but over the entire world. A church like that will accept setbacks and discouragement as part of God's eternal plan.

Oswald Sanders said, "More failure comes from an excess of caution than from bold experimentation with new ideas."

Archbishop Mowl's wife said, "The frontiers of the kingdom of God were never advanced by men and women of caution."

Pg 280

We began this book by affirming that Jesus does not lead us into a future that He has not already prepared for us. We might not win in this life, but we will win in the life to come.

God's people have always been an island of righteousness in a sea of paganism.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer who stood against Hitler's Nazi Germany said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Jesus confirms that with a promise in Revelation 2:10

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you in prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."