

THE MYSTERY OF HELL
And How to Avoid It
The Cross Can Be Offensive

November 5, 2017
5th Sunday of Luke
Revision E

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

In the West today’s Gospel lesson is used at about the same time in the Church year as in the East.

The Gospel lesson is one part of a series of teachings on the Kingdom of God (see below) that, except for the last two, is found only in Luke. This series contains a number of parables, events, and stories addressing various aspects of the Kingdom of God:

Luke 15	The Lost Sheep	Parable
	The Lost Coin	Story
	The Prodigal Son	Story
Luke 16	The Unjust Steward	Story
	The Rich Man & Lazarus	
Luke 17	The Ten Lepers	Event
Luke 18	The Tenacious Widow	Parable
	The Pharisee and the Publican	Parable
	The Rich Young Ruler	Event (also Matthew 9, Mark 10)
	The Blind Man of Jericho	Event (also Mark 10)

In this series, some are called parables, some aren’t. Parables are fictional “what-if” stories used to teach a moral lesson. Some of the stories in this series are not called parables, and since this one names Lazarus as a certain individual (rather than just “a poor man”), the implication is that this event actually happened.

This series of kingdom teachings from Luke took place in late 29 AD and early 30 AD as Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem knowing He would be crucified. Two of these lessons – The Prodigal Son and the Pharisee and the Publican – are used in the Eastern Church during the weeks just prior to Lent. The Prodigal Son lesson is also used in the West during Lent. In addition, the Eastern lectionary covers the Ten Lepers, the Rich Young Ruler and the Blind Man of Jericho on successive Sundays: the 12th, 13th and 14th Sundays of Luke. The other four are used as weekday readings in the Eastern lectionary.

The Luke 16:19-31 passage describes a conversation between a man in Hades and one in Abraham’s bosom. The rich man in Hades may not have done anything grossly immoral or evil

in the eyes of the world, but, like many people in our affluent Western society today, he lived to please himself in any way he could; pleasure was his god. We Americans are similarly obsessed with entertainment and sensual gratification. We seek to be entertained every minute thus preventing the silence that allows one to pray or commune with God. Yet we are indeed accountable to Him. Since he created us with free will that we might respond to His great love for us, He beckons us to love Him with all our being and our neighbor (made in God's image) as we love ourselves).

In verse 22, we find the beggar, who had been helpless and in misery in this life, carried to a place of great love, comfort and glory – sitting with Abraham. The Lord, who told this story also said that people from all over the world would thus sit down with Abraham, while those who were his physical children, but unbelieving, would be left out (Matthew 8:11-2). Verses 23-24 contrast the rich man in a state of torment due to great heat from a flame and very thirsty to say the least!

Many times, the Scriptures speak about the wrath of God. It is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18) and abides on him who does not believe (John 3:36; Ephesians 5:6). Those with hard and unrepentant hearts treasure up for themselves wrath on Judgment Day (Romans 2:5), while those justified by His Blood are saved from wrath (Romans 5:9). When the Wrath of God comes at the end times, it will be fierce (Revelation 16:19) and has been compared to a winepress squeezing out the last bit of juice (Revelation 14:19, 19:15). Those on the receiving end of the Wrath of God will get it full strength and will be tormented forever (Revelation 14:10-11). With these events at the end times, the Wrath of God is described as being complete (Revelation 15:1).

Appendix A summarized Scriptural descriptions of “hell.” Some descriptive characteristics are: flame, heat, wailing, gnashing of teeth, but yet also black darkness. How this can be is somewhat of a mystery. Its location is also a mystery. It is described as just outside the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:15, 14:9-11), where the righteous will be able to see and be abhorred at the place of the ungodly (Isaiah 66:24; compare Mark 9:43-48). This image of the so-near-yet-so-far is reinforced from the use of the term “Gehenna,” the smoldering garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:29-33).

Another aspect of “hell” is suggested by Basil the Great (4th Century). He suggests that the “cutting in half” of the ungodly on Judgment Day (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46) refers to the eternal alienation of the soul from the Spirit. “Thus in hell there is no one who confesses, no one in death who remembers God, because the help of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3, Matthew 16:17) is no longer available” (On the Holy Spirit, 40).

John Chrysostom (4th Century) makes a similar conclusion in discussing the death of the soul: “I will show you (not just) the bodies of men, but the souls of men slaughtered in the other world. For it is possible for a soul to be slain with the slaughter peculiar to the soul. For as there is a death of the body, so there is also of the soul. ‘The soul that sins’, says the Prophet, ‘it shall die’ (Ezekiel 18:4). The death of the soul, however, is not like the death of the body; it is far more shocking. For this bodily death, separating the soul from the body...when the body has been in time dissolved and crumbled away, it is again gathered together in incorruption, and receives back its own proper soul. Such is this bodily death. But that of the soul is awful. For this death (of the soul), when dissolution takes place, does not let (the soul) pass or separate, as the death of the body does, but binds it down again to an imperishable body and consigns it to

the unquenchable fire. This then is the death of the soul. And as therefore there is a death of the soul, so there is also a slaughter of the soul. What is the slaughter of the body? It is the being turned into a corpse, the being stripped of the energy derived from the soul. What is the slaughter of the soul? It is its being made a corpse also. And how is the soul made a corpse? Because as the body then becomes a corpse when the soul leaves it destitute of its own vital energy, so also does the soul then become a corpse when the Holy Spirit leaves it destitute of His spiritual energy” (Homily XVIII on Ephesians 5).

Isaac of Nineveh (7th Century) suggests that the love of God toward the ungodly in hell is a torment in itself (Homily 84). Gregory of Nyssa (4th Century) suggests that the gulf separating Lazarus and the rich man is made by decisions we make in this life and not necessarily by a parting of the earth (on the Soul and the Resurrection, Para 40).

When the New Jerusalem comes, there will be no night, nor will there be any sun or moon to give light (Revelation 21:22-25). The Glory of God illumines everything. This obviously refers to the uncreated light of God.

Similarly, the fires of hell are said to burn forever (Revelation 14:9-11, 21:8, 20:10). If this were physical fire, it would eventually burn itself out when all its fuel is consumed. Thus the fires of hell must be uncreated fire. God Himself is often described as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29, Exodus 24:17, Isaiah 33:14), and the Throne of God as being in the midst of fire (Ezekiel 1).

Could the uncreated light of God that illumines the earth and the uncreated fire from His Presence also cause the fires of hell? The Scriptures speak of how God will not be angry forever (Psalm 85:5, Isaiah 57:16). But yet God cannot change Who He is either. Perhaps another aspect to the torment of hell is for the unrighteous to live forever in the light of God where they would be continually repelled by His Holiness.

In discussing the good things the rich man had in his life verses the evil things Lazarus had (v.25), we are reminded of the suffering and groaning of Job, who complained that the wicked tend to live in ease and prosperity, often up to the very time of death, whereas others suffer so much. But Job was also aware that things would be quite different in the hereafter! (Job 21:7-16). Therefore, the Lord warns those who are rich, full of good earthly things, or well-spoken of by men in this life (Luke 6:24-26). James cries out that the rich would “weep and howl” if only they could see the eternal realities they face because of their life of wanton pleasure (James 5:1-6). This is covered in more detail in the Gospel lesson for the 9th Sunday of Luke (the rich Fool).

The Lord in His wisdom and mercy often does things deliberately to give us an opportunity to repent. Lazarus was “laid at the rich man’s gate” in order that the rich man might have an opportunity to do some good work (v.20). All Lazarus wanted was the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table (v.21). But what did he get? The only mercy that was showed to him was via the dogs who licked his sores (v.21). The saliva of dogs has some medicinal value, even if it isn’t very aesthetically pleasing. However, the rich man’s life was so focused on his own pleasure that he failed to take advantage of this opportunity at his gate.

In verses 28-31, the rich man was remorseful and begged that his five brothers might be warned by Lazarus rising from the dead so that they might not find themselves in his

predicament. Abraham stated that this would do no good. Throughout the Scriptures we are told that if a person sees and obeys Scripture, he will be saved. Thus Isaiah warned the people not to listen to mediums and wizards, false sources of spiritual enlightenment, but to hear the Law and the Prophets (Isaiah 8:19-20). He insisted that every word of Scripture is spoken by God (Isaiah 34:16).

But the Apostle John and the Lord tell us how Scripture saves us: not by our obeying the letter of the Law, but by obeying the spirit of the Law (Matthew 22:37-40), Matthew 5:18), which brings us to Christ. That is, Moses himself accuses those who reject the Lord (John 5:39-40, 45-47); he is read in every synagogue, on every Sabbath, throughout many generations (Acts 15:21). Those in Berea are commended for honestly searching the Scriptures, leading them to faith in Christ (Acts 17:11-22). The Apostle Paul also says that the purpose of Scripture is to lead us to Christ and equip us for good works (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Faith itself is a gift (Ephesians 2:9); the written word is the chief visible means by which God gives us this gift of faith.

In the story of our Gospel lesson, Abraham stated that those who refused to heed these sacred writings would not believe even when confronted with someone rising from death (v.31). This was demonstrated by the chief priests seeking to kill Lazarus after he had been raised (John 12:10-11).

While the study and contemplation of hell and eternal punishment may be difficult to bear and even frightening to consider, there are good purposes for doing so. As John Chrysostom said: "None of those who have hell before their eyes will fall into hell. No one of those who belittle hell will escape hell. If the Ninevites had not feared destruction, they would have been overthrown; but because they feared, they were not overthrown. If in the time of Noah they had feared the deluge, they would not have been drowned. Nothing is so profitable as to converse concerning hell. It renders our souls purer than any silver. For hear the prophet saying, 'Your judgments were always before me' (Psalm 18:22). But when we are about to come before the Judgment-seat of Christ, it will be too late to entreat the Judge. And yet He grants a long season of forbearance. He does not snatch us away in the midst of our sins, but permits us time to put them off" (Homily II on 2 Thessalonians 1).

APPENDIX A Descriptions of Hell in the Scriptures

Words Used to Describe Hell

Hebrew

Sheol (7585): Hades, implying a subterranean location

Shakhat (7845): a pit or a trap used figuratively implying destruction

Abaddon (11): destruction, from the verb “to wander away”

Greek

Hades (86): lit. The unseen; in Greek Mythology, the subterranean abode of the dead corresponding to the Hebrew Sheol (Compare Philippians 2:10, Ephesians 4:9)

Tartaros (5020): In Greek Mythology, the deepest abyss in Hades for the worst offenders

Abussos (12): From negative participle plus buthos = sea; implies the ocean bottom and below; abyss. Note that in Revelation 21:1 there is no more sea.

Phrear (5421): a hole in the ground; a pit. Used to describe a shaft leading to the abyss

Gehenna (1067): Gay-Hinnom; Valley of Hinnom, a smoldering garbage dump outside Jerusalem. Besides trash, the Valley of Hinnom also included the effluent of all the latrines in Jerusalem

Limnen tou puros (3041 & 4442): Lake of Fire

Passages Describing Hell

Deuteronomy 32:21-22 – Sheol, as a subterranean place, includes fire

Isaiah 66:21-24 – For those in Sheol, their worm (lit. maggot) will not die and their fire shall not be quenched. This passage is amplified in Revelation 20-22, and is quoted in Mark 9:42-48

Job 33:17-18 – Sheol and shakhat are sometimes used together to imply hell

Proverbs 15:11 – Sheol and abaddon are also used together to imply hell

Job 31:12 – Fire is also associated with abaddon

Acts 2:27, 31 – In the Nicene Creed, we say that Jesus descended into hell. Here we see one place where that statement comes from: Jesus was not left in Hades.

Revelation 20:13-14 – The sea, death and Hades gave up the dead in them for judgment. Then, death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire and there was no more sea.

2 Peter 2:4 – God did not spare the angels who sinned, but consigning to Tartarus delivered (them) in chains of gloom. They were being watched and guarded awaiting judgment.

Revelation 9:1-4 – A star fell from heaven and was given the key to the shaft (Gk *phrear*) of the abyss (abussos). Out of the shaft came smoke like from a great furnace and from the smoke came locusts (or demons) to torment unbelievers. Perhaps these are the ones consigned to “Tartarus” in 2 Peter 2:4.

Genesis 7:11 – (Septuagint) In the Greek rendering of the Old Testament (200 BC), it was the fountains of the great abyss (abussos) that burst open to create the major source of the flood water. Even today, the ocean bottoms are referred to as the “abyssal plains” (National Geographic World Atlas).

Matthew 13:41-43 – This is the conclusion of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Here Hell is described as a furnace where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Jude 13 – Here hell is described as “the black darkness.”

What is Abraham’s Bosom?

The Greek word for bosom, *kolpos*, is similar to the English word bosom and implies more than just physical anatomy.

John 13:23 – John leaned on Jesus’ bosom at the Last Supper. Here physical anatomy is obvious.

John 1:18 – The Only Begotten Son is in the bosom of the Father. More than physical anatomy is implied: “bosom” here implies a true oneness.

Luke 6:38 – The reward for generosity is “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom.” This is not an allusion to some type of trash compactor. “Bosom” here implies generally things within one’s control or possession.

Thus Abraham’s bosom in our Gospel lesson implies (1) a oneness of Lazarus with Abraham and (2) a place that is under Abraham’s control as one of the Patriarchs of the Faith.

Luke 13:27-29 – A further aspect of Abraham’s bosom is the gathering of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the saints and the righteous in the Kingdom of God. With the eyes of faith in the Liturgy, we can get a tiny glimpse of this as we look through the windows of heaven (icons).

All this represents a bewildering array of terms: Hades, the abyss, the Lake of Fire, Abraham’s bosom, heaven. There is a mystery to this that we won’t know until the Lord returns. Just as the New Jerusalem is the place prepared for the righteous (Revelation 21:2, John 14:2-34), so hell (in its various descriptive terms) is the place prepared for the devil and his legions (Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4) and for the ungodly (Jude 13, 2 Peter 1:17). We are told hell will consist of darkness, flame, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and that it will not be part of the New Jerusalem, but will be outside (Revelation 22:15, 14:9-11, Isaiah 66:24). But how can Hades, much less death, be thrown into the Lake of Fire? This suggests that Hades (and consequently

Abraham's bosom) are temporary abodes and that the Lake of Fire and the New Jerusalem are the final destinations. To consider such merely adds to the mystery.

The Cross Can Be Offensive

November 5, 2017
22nd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision G

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Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18

Peter wrote to beware of “your adversary the devil, who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Do we ever wonder why? He’s been judged and outsmarted by the Cross and he knows his time is limited (Revelation 12:12). Is it any wonder then, that Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan and who were “enemies of the Cross of Christ”? (Philippians 3:18).

In today’s Epistle lesson, Paul addressed a situation where some Jewish Christians insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised (Galatians 6:12), even though James and the Apostles in Jerusalem had already written to all the Gentile churches that this wasn’t necessary (Acts 15:13-29). Why would they do this? Perhaps due to the strong influence worldwide of the Pharisees in Jerusalem who insisted on it. Paul said that they do this “only that they may not suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). Much of the persecution Paul experienced came at the hands of the Jewish leaders or was instigated by them. Thus these Jewish Christians Paul wrote about chose to offend God rather than men, and just to avoid taking up their cross.

Crucified to the World

Paul stated that he was “crucified to the world and the world to him” (Galatians 6:14). What he means by this is that he has abandoned all benefits of the life in the flesh, and looks forward to his proper life with the saints in heaven. This is not a boast on Paul’s part; it is a simple statement of where he has placed his hope.

Moses had recorded the Lord’s word as, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’, and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’, and Christ repeated the same thing¹. The Patriarchs, who lived before Moses, knew this and followed the Lord’s direction without the need of written laws. When Christ came, He clarified what He had said to Moses and the Patriarchs. Throughout His three-year ministry, He repeatedly mentioned that the “Word of the Cross” was a way of life. For example, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

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¹ Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). And again, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27, Mark 8:34). What does this mean?

John Chrysostom considered² what were the implications when Paul said, ‘I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me’. Simply put, Paul’s life in the flesh was an altered one, and he was hastening on to another life.

“The word ‘life’ is very significant as is the word ‘death’. There is this life of the body; there is the life of sin (Romans 6:2). On one hand, it is possible to live the life of sin. On the other hand, there is the life everlasting and immortal, ‘for our citizenship is in heaven’ (Philippians in 20). There is also the life of the body of which he speaks, ‘through Him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). Paul acknowledges that he lives the natural life, but denies the life of sin, which other men live. He who does not desire the present life, who is hastening to another life, who despises death, and who desires nothing, how does he live this life? For as one made of adamant³, though he were struck a thousand blows, would never be bothered by it. It is no longer the old man; as he said, ‘Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death!’ (Romans 7:24) How does he live who does nothing for the sake of food, clothing, or for any of these present things? Such a one does not live the natural life; if he takes no thought for the things, which sustain life, he does not live it. Paul did not live it; he busied himself with none of the things of this life”.

“Paul shows that he accepts the natural life. ‘The life which I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). That is, I live a certain new life, an altered one. Think not that I shall be deprived of this life, for neither while alive did I live this life, but that which Christ willed. For tell me, he who despises money, luxury, hunger, thirst, dangers, health, safety, does he live this life? He who has nothing here, and is oftentimes willing to cast life away, if need be, and does not cling to it, does he live this life? By no means! Consider an example. Let us imagine someone with great wealth, with many servants, and much gold, but who makes no use of all these things. Is such a person rich for all his wealth? No! Let him see his children dissipating his property, strolling idly about; let him feel no concern for them. When beaten let him not even think about the pain. Shall we call him a man of wealth? By no means, even though his wealth is his own. ‘To me to live is Christ’; if you will inquire into my life, it is He. ‘And to die is gain’ (Philippians 1:21). Why? Because I shall more clearly be present with Him; so that my death is rather a coming to life! They who kill me will work on me no dreadful thing, they will only send me onward to my proper life, and free me from that which is not mine”.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, III, v. 21.

³ Adamant was a very hard legendary material, possible associated with diamond.

Chrysostom also compared⁴ the Christian life to birds soaring too high to be trapped by fowlers. Birds are easily caught in nets when they fly low, where the devil is a fowler with nets to ensnare Christians in the things of this world.

“Often a wife, children, friend, neighbor have proved a snare to the unheeding! And why, it is asked, are there so many snares? That we may not fly low, but seek the things that are above. For just as birds, as long as they stay in the upper air, are not easily caught; so also you, as long as you look to things above, will not be easily captured, whether by a snare, or by any other device. The devil is a fowler. Soar, then, too high for his arrows. The man who has mounted aloft will no longer admire anything in the affairs of this life. But when we have ascended to the top of the mountains, the city and its walls seem to us to be small, and the men appear to us to be going along upon the earth like ants. So when you have ascended to the heights of spiritual wisdom, nothing upon the earth will be able to fascinate you. Everything, even riches, glory, honor, and whatever else there be of that kind, will appear insignificant when you regard heavenly things. According to Paul all the glories of the present life appeared trifling, and more unprofitable than dead things. Therefore his exclamation, ‘The world is crucified to me’ (Galatians 6:14). Therefore also his admonition, ‘Set your affections on things above’. That is, ‘Where Christ sits at the right hand of God’” (Colossians 3:1).

Chrysostom, referring to the saints and prophets who wandered about and of whom the world was not worthy (Hebrews 11:37-38), compared⁵ their situation to that of people in his day. The saints were citizens of heaven but many people of his day were unwilling to be separated from the things on earth.

“The saints and prophets called themselves therefore ‘strangers’; but Paul went beyond this. Not merely did he call himself a stranger to this world, but said that he was dead to the world, and that the world was dead to him. ‘The world has been crucified to me and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). But we busy ourselves about everything here in this world as active citizens. And what righteous men were to the world, i.e. as ‘strangers’ and ‘dead’ that we are to Heaven. And what they were to Heaven, i.e. as active citizens that we are to the world. Therefore we are dead, because we have refused that which is truly life, and have chosen this, which is transitory. We have provoked God to wrath, because when the enjoyments of Heaven have been set before us, we are not willing to be separated from things on earth. Like worms, we turn about from the earth to the earth. In short, we are not willing to look up even for a little while, nor to withdraw ourselves from human affairs, but as if drowned in sleep and drunkenness, we are stupefied with imaginary things”.

Gregory of Nyssa, speaking of Paul’s words, “As many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death” (Romans 6:3), compared⁶ our life to that of a corpse. Just as a corpse does not seek the things of this life, so should we be.

⁴ John Chrysostom, The Homilies on the Statutes, XV, 8.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXIV, 1.

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Baptism of Christ, A Sermon for the Day of the Lights”, in Oratorical Works, V.

“Now if we have been conformed to His death, sin from now on in us is surely a corpse, pierced through by the javelin of Baptism, as that fornicator was thrust through by the zealous Phinehas (Numbers 25:6-8). Flee therefore from us, ill-omened one! It is a corpse you seek to destroy, one long ago joined to you, one who long since lost his senses for pleasures. A corpse is not attracted to beautiful bodies, or captivated by wealth. A corpse does not slander and lie, snatch at what is not its own, or revile those who encounter it. My way of living is regulated for another life. I have learned to despise the things that are in the world, to pass by the things of earth, to hasten to the things of heaven, even as Paul expressly testifies, that the world is crucified to him, and he to the world (Galatians 6:14). These are the words of a soul truly regenerated. These are the utterances of the newly-baptized man, who remembers his own profession, which he made to God when the sacrament was administered to him, promising for the sake of love towards Him that he would despise all torment and all pleasure alike”.

Clement of Alexandria stated⁷ that death should be a freeing of the soul to a better life with God. Many times, however, death is only a strengthening of the chains that tie a person to the body and judgment.

“‘Death’ is the result of fellowship of the soul, in a state of sin, with the body; and ‘life’ the result of separation from sin. Many are the stakes and ditches of lust, which impede us, and the pits of wrath and anger, which must be leaped over. We must avoid many machinations of those who plot against us, who would no longer see the knowledge of God ‘through a mirror’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). The Scripture views as slaves those ‘under sin’ and ‘sold to sin’ (Romans 6:6-20), the lovers of pleasure and of the body. They are beasts rather than men, ‘those who have become like cattle and horses, neighing after their neighbors’ wives’ (Jeremiah 5:8). The licentious is ‘the lustful ass’, the covetous is the ‘savage wolf’, and the deceiver is ‘a serpent’. The severance, therefore, of the soul from the body, made a life-long study, produces a cheerful readiness in the Christian, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of the chains, which bind the soul to the body. ‘For the world is crucified to me, and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14), the Apostle says; ‘and now I live, though in the flesh, as having my conversation in heaven’ (Philippians 3:20).

Boasting or Glorifying in the Cross

Paul also spoke of boasting in the Cross (Galatians 6:14). This can be done simply by displaying the Cross in our homes and altars, by venerating the Cross in Church and by making the sign of the Cross. Chrysostom expressed⁸ another aspect:

“And what is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me, the slave, the enemy, the ungrateful one; He even so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. What can be comparable to this! Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable

⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 3.

⁸ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Galatians*, chapter 6.

tenderness; He was not ashamed of being crucified for our sake, and will we be ashamed to confess His infinite solicitude?”

Chrysostom also stated⁹ that we have spectators in heaven, and we should be careful not to provoke the Master. Praise and flattery from those at enmity with God is like the taunts of children at play. The only thing worthy of glory is humility.

“It is then a sad thing, and replete with disgrace of every kind, to be in love with glory in civil matters. But when in spiritual things you are in the same plight, what excuse is there for you, when you do not give God even as much honor as you get yourself from your servants? For even the slave ‘looks to the eyes of his master’ (Psalm 123:2), and the hireling to his employer, who is to pay him wages, and the disciple to his master. But you do just the contrary. Having left the God that hired you, you look to your fellow servants; and this knowing that God remembers your well doings even after this life, but man only remembers the present. And when you have spectators assembled in Heaven, you are gathering together spectators upon earth. And where the wrestler struggles, there he wants to be honored; but while your wrestling is above, you are anxious to gain a crown below. And what can be worse than madness like this?”

“But let us look at the crowns also. For one is formed by haughtiness and a second by grudging against another, and a third by flattery, another by wealth, and another by servile obedience. Like children at their childish play put crowns of grass upon one another, and many a time laugh at him that is crowned behind his back. They that pass their praises upon you, many a time joke by themselves at their putting the grass upon us. How many would you have to praise you; ten thousand? These are no better than so many crows cawing from the sky. Taking the assembly of the angels into consideration, these will seem viler than worms and their good word no better than a cobweb”.

“Hear then how Paul, who saw through these things thoroughly, is so far from seeking after them, that he even belittles them, in the words ‘But God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of Christ’ (Galatians 6:14). This glory let us emulate, that we may not provoke the Master, because in seeking worldly glory we are insulting God, and not our self. For if you were a painter, and had some pupil, and he were to omit showing you his practice of the art, but set forth his painting publicly just to anybody that chanced to observe it, you would not take it quietly. But if this with your fellow servants was an insult, how much more with the Master! Remember to say to your soul as Paul did, ‘Do you not know that we shall judge angels?’ (1 Corinthians 6:3) You that judge the angels, will you let yourself be judged by off scourging, and be praised by dancers, mimics, gladiators and horse-drivers?”

Chrysostom went on¹⁰ to compare the lust of unbelievers for their passions to the love of a believer for his God. Each seeks a kind of glory, one temporary the other eternal.

“Those who cherish earthly passion, which men call love, think nothing glorious or precious, but concentrate on those things which tend to gratify their

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, v. 1.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, LII, 25:23.

lust. Their mistress is everything to them. Much more do those, who have been taken captive by this heavenly love, think nothing of the cost. For if anyone is caught with the fire of Christ's love, he becomes like a man who dwelt alone on the earth, so utterly does he care less for glory or disgrace. As for trials, he so despises them, both scourges and imprisonments, as though the body in which he suffers these things were another's and not his own, or as though he had a body made of adamant. As for the sweet things of this life, he so laughs them to scorn, is so insensitive to them, as we are insensitive to dead bodies, being ourselves dead. He is as far from being taken captive by any passion, as the gold refined in the fire and purified is free from alloy. For even as flies would not dart into the midst of a flame, but fly from it, so the passions dare not even to come near this man".

"Take the Apostle Paul as an example. Observe how he felt towards the whole world. 'The world is crucified to me and I unto the world' (Galatians 6:14). 'I am dead to the world, and the world is dead to me'. And again, 'It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me'" (Philippians 2:20).

Enemies of the Cross

Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan and who were "enemies of the Cross of Christ"? (Philippians 3:18). John Chrysostom endeavored to define¹¹ what Paul meant by "Enemies of the Cross". By seeking the comforts and pleasures of this world, making a pretense of Christianity and refusing to acknowledge the Cross, people become enemies of the Cross.

"Nothing is so incongruous in a Christian, and foreign to his character, as to seek ease and rest; to be engrossed with the present life is foreign to our profession and enlistment. Your Master was crucified, and do you seek ease? Your Master was pierced with nails, and do you live delicately? Do these things become a noble soldier? Paul said, 'Many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ' (Philippians 3:18). There were some, who made a pretense of Christianity, yet lived in ease and luxury, and this is contrary to the Cross; therefore, he thus spoke. The cross belongs to a soul at its post for the fight, seeking nothing like ease, while their conduct is of the contrary sort. So that even if they say, they are Christ's, still they are, as it were, enemies of the Cross. If they loved the Cross, they would strive to live the crucified life. Crucify yourself, not that you may slay yourself, God forbid, for that is a wicked thing, but as Paul said, 'The world has been crucified to me and I to the world' (Galatians 6:14). If you love your Master, die to the things of this world like He did".

"Learn how great is the power of the Cross; how many good things it has achieved, and does still; how it is the safety of our life; through it everything is done. Baptism is through the Cross, for we must receive that seal. The laying on of hands is through the Cross. If we are on journeys, if we are at home, wherever we are, the Cross is a great good, the armor of salvation, a shield that cannot be beaten down, a weapon to oppose the devil. You bear the Cross, when you are at enmity with the devil, not simply when you seal yourself by it, but when you

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XIII.

suffer the things belonging to the Cross. Christ thought fit to call our sufferings by the name of the Cross. As when he said, 'Except a man take up his cross and follow Me' (Matthew 16:24), i.e. except he be prepared to die".

"But these who are engrossed with the present life, and lovers of their bodies, are enemies of the Cross. And everyone, who is a friend of luxury, and of present safety, is an enemy of that Cross in which Paul makes his boast, which he embraces, with which he desires to be incorporated. As when he said, 'I am crucified to the world, and the world to me' (Galatians 6:14). But here he said, 'I now tell you weeping' (Philippians 3:18). Why? The evil was urgent, and it deserved tears. Truthfully, the luxurious are worthy of tears, who fatten the body, and take no thought of that soul which must give account. Behold you live delicately, behold you are drunken, today and tomorrow, ten years, twenty, thirty, fifty. What is the end? What is the gain? Nothing at all! Does it not then deserve tears, and lamentations, to lead such a life? God has brought us into this course, that He may crown us, and we take our departure without doing any noble action. Therefore Paul weeps, where others laugh, and live in pleasure. So sympathetic is he; he takes thought for all men. 'Whose God is the belly' (Philippians 3:19). For this they have a God! That is, 'let us eat and drink!' (1 Corinthians 15:32, Isaiah 22:13) Do you see, how great an evil luxury is? To some their wealth, and to others their belly is a God. Are not these too idolaters, and worse than the common? And their 'glory is in their shame'" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

To get a better insight into this, it is helpful to understand the reference to the "needle's eye gate" of many ancient cities. The "needle's eye gate" was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus¹². A man could fit easily through the "needle's eye gate", but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel's pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the "needle's eye gate."

Jesus stated that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle's eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The parable of the sower refers to this pack as "the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things" (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas, sold a large amount of property and brought the entire proceeds to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37). Ananias and Sapphria on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

This does not mean that no Christian can be rich. The Patriarch Job was very wealthy (Job 1:1-3, 42:12-17), yet the Lord referred to him as a blameless and upright man who had no peers in his righteousness (Job 1:8, 2:3). The key here is discerning the deceitfulness of wealth and the strength of its pull on one's heart. Job was able to let his pack be taken off without remorse. "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21; also Job 2:9-10).

¹² Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, pp. 24-25.

Many Christians throughout the ages have been unable or unwilling to continue fighting this pull and have taken oaths of poverty to thrust a sword (so to speak) into the heart of the demon of wealth.

Chrysostom marveled¹³ and was humbled not at the miracles performed by the Apostle Paul, but by the chains and abuse he endured. Here was a man who performed incredible miracles everywhere he went, yet he was chained up like a common criminal, because of the urging of his enemies. Did these “enemies of the Cross”, that he dealt with, have any idea who Paul was? When Paul is honored at the Resurrection, and their deeds are reviewed, there may be some embarrassment on their part.

“Oh! Those blessed hands, which that chain adorned! Not so worthy were Paul’s hands when they lifted up and raised the lame man at Lystra (Acts 14:10), as when they were bound with those chains (Acts 28:20). Do you marvel at Paul, when the viper fastened on his hand, and did him no harm? (Acts 28:3) Don’t marvel; it revered his chain. The whole sea revered it also; for then too was he bound, when he was saved from shipwreck (Acts 27:13-44). Were any one to grant me power to raise the dead at this moment, I would not choose that power, but this chain. If I were free from the cares of the Church, if my body was strong and vigorous, I would not shrink from undertaking so long a journey, only for the sake of beholding those chains, for the sake of seeing the prison where he was bound. The traces indeed of his miracles are numerous in all parts of the world, yet they are not so dear as those of his scars (Galatians 6:17). In the Scriptures, he does not delight me as much when he is working miracles, as when he is suffering evil, being scourged, and dragged about. From his body were carried away handkerchiefs or aprons to use to heal the sick (Acts 19:12). Marvelous, truly marvelous, are these things, and yet not so marvelous as ‘When they had laid many stripes upon him, they cast him into prison’ (Acts 16:23). And again; being in bonds, ‘they were singing hymns to God’ (Acts 16:25). And again, ‘They stoned him, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead’” (Acts 14:19).

“Do you know how mighty a thing an iron chain is for Christ’s sake, bound about His servant’s body? Listen to what Christ Himself said, ‘Blessed are you’ (Matthew 5:11). Why? When you raise the dead? No! When you shall heal the blind? Not at all! ‘When men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake’ (Matthew 5:11). Now, if being spoken evil of (i.e. only words) renders men blessed, what may being treated as evil (i.e. deeds also) achieve? Listen to what Paul himself said elsewhere, ‘Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness’ (2 Timothy 4:8). Yet more glorious than this crown is the chain; of this, Paul said, the Lord will count me worthy, and I am not inquisitive about those things. Enough it is for me to suffer evil for Christ’s sake. Let Him but grant me to say, that ‘I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ’ (Colossians 1:24), and I ask nothing further”.

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, v. 4:1.

John Chrysostom continued to say¹⁴ that we are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them, even if they are enemies of the Cross. But there comes a time, after they have rejected us repeatedly, that their blood is on their own heads.

“Let us be ashamed, who though we have no preaching to occupy us, live in idleness. ‘And he disputed in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks’; but ‘when they opposed and blasphemed’ (Acts 18:4-6), he withdrew, by this expecting to draw them more. Why, having left that house, did he come to live next door to the synagogue? (Acts 18:7) Was it not for this? For it was not that he saw any danger here. But Paul having testified to them — not teaching now, but testifying — ‘having shaken his garments’, to terrify them not by word only but by action, said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads’ (Acts 18:6). He spoke more vehemently as having already persuaded many. ‘I am clean’. Thus we also are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them. ‘From this time forth I will go to the Gentiles’. So also when he says, ‘Henceforth let no man trouble me’ (Galatians 6:17), he says it to terrify. The punishment of Paul’s abandoning them did not terrify them, but it did sting them”.

Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:44-48).

Offense of the Cross

Paul’s preaching of the Cross offended some people, and Paul was persecuted as a result (Galatians 5:11). Chrysostom also spoke¹⁵ on the offense of the Cross. Jews demand a sign in the form of miracles, but the answer is the Cross; Greeks demand eloquent teaching, but the answer is again the Cross. By contraries, God has overcome, and by the things that offend people, He attracts to Himself those who are able to see beyond the first impression.

“Vast is the import of the things here spoken! For he means to say how by contraries God has overcome, and how the Gospel is not of man. What he says is something of this sort. When we say unto the Jews, ‘Believe’, they answer, ‘Raise the dead, heal the demoniacs, show us signs.’ But instead what do we say? That He was crucified, and died, who is preached. And this is enough, not only to fail in drawing over the unwilling, but even to drive away those who are willing. Nevertheless, it does not drive away, but attracts and holds and overcomes”.

“Again; the Greeks demand of us a rhetorical style, and the acuteness of sophistry. But we preach to these also the Cross: and that which, in the case of the Jews seemed to be weakness, this in the case of the Greeks is foolishness. We not only fail in producing what they demand, but also produce the very opposites

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXIX, v. 18:4-7.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 5.

of their demand. For the Cross is not a sign sought out by reasoning, but the opposite. It is not a proof of power, but a conviction of weakness; not a display of wisdom, but a suggestion of foolishness. They who seek for signs and wisdom not only don't receive the things, which they ask, but hear the contrary to what they desire. And then, by means of contraries, they are persuaded; how is not the power of Him that is preached unspeakable? As if to someone tempest-tossed and longing for a haven, you were to show not a haven but another wilder portion of the sea, and so could make him follow with thankfulness? Or as if a physician could attract to himself the man that was wounded and in need of remedies, by promising to cure him not with drugs, but with burning him again! For this is a result of great power indeed. So also the Apostles prevailed, not simply without a sign, but by a thing, which seemed contrary to all the known signs. Which thing also Christ did in the case of the blind man. For when He healed him, He took away the blindness by a thing that increased it: i.e., He put on clay (John 9:6). Just as by means of clay He healed the blind man, so also by means of the Cross He brought the world to Himself. That certainly was adding an offense not taking an offense away. By means of the prophets again with a small piece of wood He raised up iron from the bottom of the river (2 Kings 6:5-7). In like manner also with the Cross He has drawn the world to Himself. You see now, it is proof of great power and wisdom, to convince by means of the things that speak directly against us. Thus the Cross seems to be matter of offense; and yet far from offending, it even attracts".

Conclusion of the Word of the Cross, Part I

We have considered the first aspect of the Word of the Cross: the lifting up of the Son of Man and several aspects of the effects of the Cross. This was a mystery: announced by the Prophets, announced by Jesus as His reason for becoming incarnate, but yet Satan considered it foolishness. At His crucifixion, all of creation groaned. As a result of His passion:

- Much grain was produced -- the Holy Spirit in us.
- The world was judged along with its ruler (Satan).
- The world was reconciled to Christ.
- The Cross was established as a new standard, clarifying the words in the Mosaic Law regarding loving God and our neighbor.

Jesus may have been humiliated in the eyes of the world, but He suffered no permanent harm and accomplished quite a lot! On the Sunday after the Exaltation, we will see how we are to do the same and how we incur no permanent harm either.