

**HOLY WEEK TEACHINGS AT ALL SAINTS CATHEDRAL KAMPALA – 26 – 30 MARCH  
2018 THEME: THE CROSS THE MESSAGE OF HOPE. REVD CAN DR EDISON KALENGYO**

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**First Teaching on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2018: Topic: The Messiah Prophesied (Isaiah 7:10-17).**

□ **Introduction**

Messiah = to Saviour = God's anointed – one endowed with God's power to save and deliver God's people from bondage especially bondage from sin – a title designate for Jesus Christ. Prophecy – There is a lot of confusion about prophecy these days. A Prophet is one called and appointed by God to bring His (God's) new revelation or his word (prophecy) to his people. A prophet is the mouth piece of God, an organ of fresh revelation. In our time, prophecy is being tied to prediction of future which is erroneous. A prophet is one who proclaims and announces the will of God to his people – playing a role as both a mouthpiece of and spokesman of God.

That aside, let me sketch for you briefly the background to this prophecy about the Messiah in Isaiah 7:10-17

- At this time in the life of the children of Israel, the promised land (Israel) is divided into two kingdoms:
  - a) The Northern Kingdom – also called the Kingdom of Israel or the Kingdom of Samaria with its capital in Samaria – also referred to in this passage as Ephraim = Israel.
  - a) The Southern Kingdom also called the Kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital.
- The Northern Kingdom in an alliance with Syria, approaches the Southern Kingdom (being led by Ahaz) to unite with them so they could go fight and conquer Assyria that was the super power in the region at the time. Rezin was the King of Aram (Syria) and Pekah the son of Remaliah the King of Israel.
- But when Ahaz and Judah refused to cooperate, the Northern Kingdom and Syria went to attack Jerusalem the capital of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) – Isa 7:2. The plan was to remove Ahaz as King of Judah and replace him with their own man, *the son of Tabeel* (Isa 7:5-6).
- This brought fear to both Ahaz the King of Judah and all the people, 'When the house of David (Southern Kingdom) had that Aram (Syria) had allied itself with Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom of Israel), *the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the winds* (Isa 7:2). All were gripped with *fear*. Ahaz had been defeated by Aram (Syria) and Israel earlier (2 Ch 28:5-8). Because of this earlier defeat and devastation, Ahaz dreaded Aram and Israel – *fear* got the better of Ahaz, felt *terrorized* and was completely *paralyzed*. Have you been gripped b fear of this nature and got paralyzed – you cannot move or do anything. Many of us now live under the terror of fear – fear
  - of diseases – especially cancer
  - that someone may attack us and kill us anytime
  - that someone is up to steal from us – our phone, car, land etc
  - fear that the food we are eating is polluted
  - that the drugs are fake and everything else is fake
  - that the doctor carrying out an operation on you may also remove one of your organs for sell
  - of growing old!!!!

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- Out of fear, Ahaz plan to do the impossible – forming a counter-alliance with pagan Assyria (2 Ki 16:5-18, 2 Ch 28:16-21). Isaiah tries to stop Ahaz from forming this alliance as it would mean that Ahaz was now relying on pagan powers instead of trusting in God.
- Vv 3-4 – Isaiah intervention is timely and he comes with a message from God,
  - ‘*Be careful, keep calm and do not be afraid*’ – v4 – God’s constant appeal to trust in Him and not intrigue. **We all need this message in our turbulent times.**
  - What Ahaz is fearing i.e. Aram and Israel (the Northern Kingdom) are only ‘*two smouldering stubs*’ before the Almighty God – our God is greater and mightier than anything or situation that threatens us. Damascus, Aram’s capital fell in 732 BC and Israel fell in 722 BC.
- Vv7b-9a – The force of these verses seems to be that whereas by implication Judah is under the only God, her enemies are inevitably under men – and what men.
- The call to faith in v9b is the pitch of Isaiah’s preaching, ‘**If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all**’. The Southern Kingdom still has opportunity to hold fast to God, but the faith must be firm. Not believing God destabilizes everything for Ahaz, not just his religious life.

□ **The Sign of Emmanuel (vv10-17)**

- Vv10-11 – God was willing to strengthen the faith of Ahaz through a sign (cf. Ex 3:12).
- But Ahaz declines – not wanting to put the Lord to test v 12
- Nevertheless, God in his grace and mercy volunteers a sign vv13-16 – the sign of a virgin being with a child v14. The ‘you’ in vv 13 and 14 are plural – so the sign is for a wider audience than simply for Ahaz – it is for the whole of David’s dynasty.
- The virgin will be a child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel – cf. with the fulfilment of this in Mt 1:23. *The heart of the sign is Immanuel: who he is remains unsaid; it will emerge in 9:6-7; 11:1-5.*
- The meaning of the name ‘Emmanuel’ is ‘God is with us’. The name ‘God is with us’, was meant to convince Ahaz that God could rescue him from his enemies. God pledges his own presence to Ahaz and the people of Judah and appeals to them to trust him for victory. God presence accomplishes many things. His presence will:
  - Offer protection and guidance – pillar of cloud to provide protection and pillar of light to provide guidance – illuminate the path – Exodus 13:21-22.
  - Give us victory in all our battles and struggles – with God on our side – victory is assured
  - Bring blessings – God’s presence is our provision Deut 28:1-13.
  - Bring repentance and reconciliation – reconciliation with God and each other – vertical and horizontal reconciliation
  - Brings healing – Jairus’ daughter, Centurion’s servant, Peter’s mother-in-law
  - Transform our lives – God’s presence is life now and in the life to come Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4; child restored in Lk 5 and Lazarus comes back to life in John 11
  - Brings restoration for all who feel estranged, outcasts, all without identity e.g. Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10.

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**Ps. your responsibility is to nurture God's presence through: Reading the Bible, fervent prayer – prayer without ceasing, Fellowship with others, Service to others. It is dangerous to neglect God's presence.**

□ **Summary**

- ❖ We must no longer allow fear to terrorise us – we must not live under the bondage of fear
- ❖ God exhorts us to trust in him and him alone – the only true God. '*Be careful, keep calm and do not be afraid*' – v4 – God's constant appeal to trust in Him and not intrigue. Our God is faithful – dependable. The call to faith in v9b is the pitch of Isaiah's preaching, '**If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all**'
- ❖ He has given us a sign – His only son born of a virgin - Jesus Christ – also called Emmanuel – meaning God is with us. God's presence brings protection and guidance, blessings, salvation, victory in our battles and struggles, healing, reconciliation with God and others, restoration, is life itself now and in the life to come etc
- ❖ We nurture God's presence through: Reading the Bible, fervent prayer – prayer without ceasing, Fellowship with others, Service to others. It is dangerous to neglect God's presence.

**Appendix**

- ✓ V15 – *curds and honey* – *Curds* (a kind of yoghurt) and honey meant a return to the simple diet of those who lived off the land. The Assyrian invasion would devastate the countryside and make farming impossible.
- ✓ V16 – *Aram and Israel* will be plundered. This happened in 732 BC.
- ✓ V17 – *Ephraim* broke away from Judah – almost two centuries earlier (see 1 Kings 12:19-20). *King of Assyria* – Ahaz's appeal to Assyria would bring temporary relief (2 Ki 16:8-9) but eventually Assyria would attack Judah (see 8:7-8; 36:1).

**END**

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**Second Teaching on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018: Topic: The Implications of the Cross (Mark 14:1 – 15:47)**

In consideration of the implications of the Cross in Mark 14:1 – 15:47 we shall focus largely on consequence or significance of the cross (effect, result, outcome), and the benefits accruing therefrom for the believer. The passage under consideration also brings out the demands of the cross on us as believers – those who have chosen to carry the cross and follow Jesus Christ daily as his disciples (Lk 9:23; 14:27; Mk 8:34; Mt 10:38; 16:24).

1. **The anointing at Bethany as a model of sacrificial love (Mk 14:1-9).** Definition: Anointing = being endowed with power from above = being endowed with divine capability. It is being set apart for a particular task / responsibility or ministry.
  - In Ex 30:30 – Moses is told – he shall “anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, in order that they may serve me as priests”.
  - In 1 Sam 9:16 – God revealed to Samuel to anoint Saul to be the ruler over his people – Also 1 Sam 15:1.
  - In 1 Sam 16:13 – David is anointed by Samuel to be King instead of Saul.

**How was anointing done?** Anointing was done by smearing / rubbing of oil – but most commonly as in the case of the Kings of Israel – it was by pouring of oil on the head as in the case of Jehu (2 Kings 9:3-6); Saul (1 Sam 10:1-2); David (1 Sam 16:13). Anointing on the head was a symbol of royalty.

The Gospels have various versions of the anointing story. I think these differences are due to various oral traditions.

Mk 14:3-9	Mt 26:6-13	Lk 7:36-50	Jn 12:1-8
Bethany	Bethany	-	Bethany
Simon – leper	Simon-leper	Simon-Pharisee	-
A woman	A woman	A sinful woman	Mary
Head	Head	Feet	Feet
Anointing for burial	Anointing for burial	Gratitude for forgiveness	Anointing for burial

*What is the significance of Jesus’ anointing at Bethany according to Mk 14:3-9?*

- Jesus is worth the best that disciples can offer. The woman’s devotion and selfless love for Jesus is very evident in her act.
- This was an alabaster jar of very costly ointment / perfumes – In Mk 14:5 (also Jn 12:5) we are told, the ointment / perfume could have been sold for more 300 denarii (300 denarii would be nearly a year’s wages for a labourer) – a year’s savings!!!
- She did not pour some of it – she broke open the jar and poured the whole of it on Jesus’ head (v3) – what extravagance in the disciple’s love – outpouring of love that far exceeds the mere use of oil in the customary acts of hospitality (cf. Lk 7:46)
- Unlike Judas, who seeks only what he can get from Jesus (Mk 14:10-11; also Mt 26:14-16); this woman seeks what she can offer to Jesus. While Jesus’ love for his followers is incomparable (Mk 14:22-25), Jesus accepts and commends the action of this woman (vv6-9). She provides a model of sacrificial love.

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Ps. I must make a confession on behalf of all men. We fair badly in the passion narrative!! Just listen to this catalogue of failures:

- ✓ A man – Judas betrays Jesus
- ✓ When Jesus is arrested, all the apostles (men) desert him – Mk 14:50-52 – what cowards!!
- ✓ While Jesus’ eyes are focused on the impending cross – his disciples (men) are preoccupied with arguments about who among them was the greatest – Mk 9:32-37.
- ✓ Peter denies Jesus – not once- but three times.
- ✓ After Jesus’ burial, the disciples are so scared – they go and lock themselves in the house.
- ✓ After the resurrection – Thomas doubts.
- ✓ In Jn 21:3, Simon Peter backslides into fishing and the disciples pledge to backslide with him.

In contrast: women:

- ✓ This woman anoints Jesus
- ✓ Women follow Jesus to the cross – Yes, John was there with Mary
- ✓ Mourn Jesus
- ✓ Go to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body
- ✓ Are first witnesses of the resurrection

It is not surprising that in the passage vv 4-5 – the disciples (male – all male) are angry at the woman’s action – calling it a WASTE! – Hiding their selfish desires behind the poor – In Jn 12:6 we learn that Judas who complains was a thief – stealing from the treasury!!

It is important to note that nothing done in the service of the Lord is ever a WASTE! Jesus is worth our very BEST – best education, time, money etc. Some thought that by joining ministry after my first degree in Veterinary Medicine was a WASTE. But I can assure I could not have invested in a better service than serving the Lord and it has greatly been rewarding.

- a) Jesus gives the significance of the woman’s action (v8) – anointing for burial – This woman supplied something for Jesus shortly before his death that no one else can exactly repeat (hence v9). People used perfumes to suppress a stench, including for corpses and often anointing corpses (something that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus James, and Salome had gone to do after the Sabbath (Mk 16:1-3). When executed criminals were buried, they usually would have been denied anointing; thus the anointing takes place in advance, by anticipation, in Mt and Mk (Mt 26:12; Mk 14:8).
- b) Anointing Jesus on the head in Matthew symbolizes or signifies that Jesus is King. All royal anointings were usually on the head. But as you may have been told yesterday (Palm Sunday), Jesus’ Kingship is of a different type – he comes riding on a donkey – animals of a low status – and not horses / chariots. His Kingship is one of peace and humility. Jesus is enthroned as King of the Jews on the cross (Mk 15:26), this way, a royal anointing is inseparable from anointing for burial to which Jesus relates the woman’s act (Mk 14:8).

**2. Jesus the author and source of our Salvation (Mk 14:12-25).**

Jesus Christ on the cross deals with the sin of humanity and offers us the gift of salvation. The cross crosses out our sins, enables us to cross over to God, and to cross over to our brothers and sisters. All this is demonstrated in the last meal that Jesus had with his disciples

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i.e. the Last Supper that we re-enact in the church life whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

According to Mark (as is with other synoptic Gospels), Jesus celebrated his last meal as a Passover meal.

*Definition:* Passover meal was a celebration of the way in which God had brought the people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt and set them on the road to the Promised Land. It was an occasion for reminding themselves of what God had done in establishing the nation and hence for the praise and thanksgiving to him.

The continued offering of sacrifice year by year was an integral part of the feast, and its significance must not be overlooked. The Passover sacrifice was the only form of sacrifice in which the worshiper was personally involved in the slaying of the animal.

The original Passover sacrifice at the departure from Egypt was thought to have redemptive significance.

**Significance of subsequent Passover celebration**

- a) Was a sacrifice and a means of communication with God
- b) The Passover sacrifice like other sacrifices contained some element of atonement for sin
- c) In Jewish thought, the Passover sacrifice was one of the means through which God displayed his mercy to the people.

Summary In broad terms the Passover sacrifice had redemptive and expiatory associations and was seen as one of the ways in which the covenant between God and Israel was maintained in being. When the Jews gathered together to celebrate the Passover meal with the lamb on the table, they were reminded of the covenant with their God in a very personal way.

- d) Passover was also a family festival – which emphasized that God's act of redemption is concerned not merely with individuals but with creation of a people composed of families who will love and serve him.
- e) Finally, the Passover had become an occasion for looking forward to the future redemption of Israel from its sorry plight at the coming of the Messiah. There was a strong emphasis on the element of future expectation or rather certain hope in the sayings of Jesus.

Jesus, however, introduces a fresh element into the hope, by speaking of the New Passover in the context of the Kingdom of God (Mk 14:25) → heavenly banquet?

In Mk 14:22-25 – there is a sense in which the Last Supper (that we now celebrate as the Lord's Supper) replaces the Passover meal / and a sense in which Jesus replaces the Passover sacrifice to become the sacrifice (for our sins – Paul in 1 Cor 5:7) of redemption.

v22 – Bread – its significance – “Take” offer of a gift to the disciples – The significance of the gift is then that it is said to be the body of Jesus. The word “is” = “signify” or “be identical

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with”, - the former meaning correlates with the last supper – since Jesus was still in the flesh.<sup>1</sup> The breaking of bread → breaking of the body of Christ in death (violent nature of his death) → sacrificial sense.

vv23- 24 – Is littered with sacrificial language.

- In biblical usage – Blood = life given up in death as sacrifice
- Blood of the Covenant – sacrifice inaugurating Covenant – sprinkling of the blood of “Sinai Covenant” on people in Ex 24:5-8. Jesus replaces the old covenant of Sinai hence fulfilling Jer 31:31-34.
- Poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins – sacrifice could atone for sins.

### Summary

- a) Phrase “take and eat”, ‘drink” – coupled with subsequent distribution of bread and the cup by Jesus → he is offering them a gift. The sacrifice in the last supper is a gift symbolizing Jesus’ offer of salvation. Jesus offers and the disciples receive – which is very significant. They accept the offer.
- b) Mk 14:24 (cf. Lk 22:19-20) “blood of cov ... sins” → sacrifice of the last supper is representative or vicarious. Jesus’ sacrifice is on behalf of others – fits well the story of the suffering servant in Isa 53.
- c) Blood of the covenant (Mt 26:28 – cf. Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). Covenant blood was always understood as sacrificial blood. The last Supper is therefore Covenant sacrifice. It is a “New Covenant” replacing the old covenant of Sinai and fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jer 31:31-34).
- d) In the words of the institutions, Jesus is saying: This is myself: by sharing this meal with you I am bringing you into an intimate relationship with myself: therefore sharing the bread and wine unites us to Jesus as he is now, the risen Lord in glory”. There is a sense in which the Eucharist is a communion sacrifice. Read 1 Cor. 10:16-17. Clearly then when we share in the Lord’s Supper we get intimately united to Jesus Christ and his life bonds us into one.

### 3. The Agony and betrayal of Jesus Christ (Mk 14:10-11, 26-52)

Definition of Betrayal: According to Chambers’ English Dictionary, betrayal is the act of betraying. To betray is to give up treacherously (deceitfully, unfaithfully, falsely, dangerously); to disclose in breach of trust; to deceive (the innocent and trustful) etc.

**Question for open discussion:** When and under what circumstances did you ever feel betrayed? A time when you felt betrayed by friends, family, institution etc.

- ❖ Judas provides an example of those who follow Jesus for what they can get out of him rather than for how they can serve him (Mk 14:10-11, 26-52).
  - v14 – Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve – Jesus’ inner circle
    - ✓ He was among the twelve commissioned and given authority (Mk 3:13-19).

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<sup>1</sup> “Symbol” or “real” used in contradiction: Ps: To the Hebrew mind, symbols were realities in their own right, the prophetic word made visible. The symbolic action in some sense brought the event into existence.

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- ✓ Judas Iscariot together with the eleven after being commissioned went out and performed many miracles.
- Ps. You have to remember that not all of Christ's servants are good people – or born again. Some preachers – even miracle workers are not converted! Let me hasten to add that not all ordained men and women are necessarily converted people!
- Why did Judas betray Jesus?
  - ✓ Unmet expectations and aspirations. The background to this is that Judas' expectation of Jesus was that Jesus was to be a political messiah and all that came with it (e.g. overthrowing the Roman rule and sharing in the spoils and glamour of the political leadership of Jesus)
  - ✓ To Judas' horror or dismay, Jesus has continued to discuss his death (Mk 8:31-33) and perhaps Judas now realizes that Jesus' Kingdom will not profit him materially (and may even cost him his life). Judas chooses to get what he still can from his lengthy investment in Jesus (three years).
- v15 – According to Judas – Jesus' life is worth thirty pieces of silver – he sells Jesus for the price of a slave in the Mosaic legislation (Ex 21:32).
  - Judas' action contrasts greatly with the woman who displays extravagant love in Mk 14:3-9)
  - Judas' motivation for 'silver' links him with the deceitful guards (Mt 28:12) or
  - A disciple who worries about preserving ones own (Mt 6:19-24; 10:8-9).

#### **4. Peter's denial and ours (Mk 14:66-72).**

Personal testimony when traveling from Mbarara to Kasese – 1979 – I almost denied I was a saved young man!

- ❖ vv 31-32, 34, 41 **Jesus knows better than his disciples do what his disciples are made of.**
  - Mk 14:38 – Jesus tells the disciples what it will take for them to succeed in his mission
  - Mk 14:28 – General prediction that the twelve will fall away – they will become *deserters* (cf. Zechariah 13:7). He warns them that they will fall because of him
  - V29 – Of all people, impetuous, well-intentioned Peter becomes the focal point, and by his own hopeless choice.
  - v30 – Jesus' predictions of Peter's denial (*Jesus responds that Peter will deny him and three time to that*) – return of a familiar theme of how hard a way is discipleship of the Kingdom of God.
  - V28 – encouragement – should not be desolate, however, because after rising he will go ahead of them into Galilee, back home.
  - V29, 31 – This is too much for Peter, - he protests that even if all others desert him, he will not (does this relate to John 21:15?)
    - Peter's refusal goes further, should it require him to die with Jesus he will not deny him / desert him.



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- V31b - Not to appear as the cowards / or to be outdone by Peter – the others say the same thing. They also pledge their loyalty (cf. Acts 5)
- ❖ One's best **intentions (Mk 14:29, 31) cannot protect one in the time of severest testing unless one has learned how to seek God in prayer (Mk 14:38).**
  - Neither their *desire* to stand with him, nor their *sincerity*, are in doubt. The question is whether the quality of their commitment will see them through what was to come.
- ❖ Fulfillment of Jesus' predictions.
  - v50 – "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled"
  - Vv 66-72 Peter denies Jesus three times before the cock crows.

**Ps** In his denial of Jesus, we note that Peter cared more about his own life than about his Lord's honour – behaviour unacceptable for a disciple (Mt 10:32-33).

Note:

- ✓ Peter sought to be a disciple
- ✓ Peter followed from a distance (Mk 14:54)

**Ps** Denying that one knew another was shameful if the claim was false (official form PDR and workers that had been retrenched)

- v66-69 – Peter denies knowledge of the Lord before a servant-girl – as slave girl – slave girls did not wield any power!
- v71 – Peter denies with a curse
- Note that Peter's denials increase with intensity:
  - First denial may simply be an evasion designed to save his life (vv 66-68). Judaism considered such an evasion acceptable.
  - Peter's second denial involved a direct denial.
  - Peter's third denial involves much swearing and cursing (v71). Denials with cursing imply not profanity **but** invoking a curse upon himself if he were lying. This shamed his allegiance of Christ and God, and was wrong.
- ❖ Lesson: Human frailty and discipleship
  - Never be too confident in your ability to stand on your own when the battle becomes fiercest.
    - V38 Jesus tells them what it will take for them to succeed
    - vv 38 – For testing must come
    - The willing spirit in v38 – refers to the purpose of the human spirit versus the weakness of mortal humanity (see Paul's contrast of God's Spirit and human flesh – Rom 8:4-13 but cf. 2 Cor 7:1). Note Paul's frustrations with the civil war in his life in Rom 7:14-25 especially vv 14-20, 25.
    - Jesus never gave the disciples up – after his resurrection, Christ's message is for his disciples and Peter (Mt 28:16-20).

This story of Peter's denial of Jesus is not there to embarrass him but that we who are weak may identify and learn from the weaknesses of our predecessors and be encouraged that with Christ we shall make it.

**5. The Cross as a symbol of suffering – a symbol of pain**

The sufferings detailed in this passage are a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the Messiah (Isaiah 53:3-12). Jesus suffered both verbal and physical abuse for our salvation. Jesus was: falsely accused (14:56-64); spat on, blindfolded, stricken and beaten (14: 65 also 15:19); bound (15:1), crown of thorns (15:17); mocked (15:18, 20); offered wine mixed with myrrh (15:23); the excruciating pain of driving nails in his body and hanging on the cross (15:25-32); forsaken by the God the Father leading to a loud cry and eventual death(15:34-37). All this Jesus suffered for our salvation – forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Jesus was aware that he would suffer and die (Mk 8:31) and stated that suffering was to be part of the package of his disciples / followers (Mk 10:28-30 especially v30).

**6. The cross opens unlimited access to God for all who believe (15:38)**

**Background:** Hebrews builds on the architecture of the tabernacle with its two chambers (separated by a curtain/veil - 9:1-5) and the limited entry by the high priest into the second chamber - the Holy of Holies (only once a year on the Day of Atonement) to make his conclusion that:

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing (9:8).

To the writer of Hebrews, this is one way in which the levitical system was incomplete. It never allowed full access to God. Even for the high priest, his annual entry into the sanctuary was safeguarded by the blood of sacrifice (9:6-7).

But now through the sacrificial death of Christ the situation has changed. Christ has opened a new way to God:

Therefore, my friends... we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)... (10:19-20).

As Westcott puts it, “That which was under the Law a privilege of one only, once a year, is now the privilege of all Christians at all times”. The curtain according to the writer of Hebrews is the very body of Christ, ripped down on the cross hence creating a new and living way into the very presence of God - “access via the human Person who was put to death”.

Paul takes this theme of access to God further and adds that this access is not limited to Jews but open to Gentiles as well: (Eph 2:13-16).

The observance of the Law is no longer a requirement for access to God and it is this unlimited access to God through the death of Christ that has opened the way to God for the Gentile believer as well. For both Jews and Gentiles, the ground of approach is the same i.e. “in Christ Jesus”, they all have access to Divine Presence.

**END**

**Third Teaching on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018: Topic: The Cross as our hope (1 Cor 1:18 – 2:5).**

□ **Introduction**

- Generally speaking, hope is fundamental or central to all aspects of our lives (Christian or otherwise).
- Hope is what keeps us going or moving on in life
- *Hope*: Definitions – Hope is ‘confident expectation’ – expecting confidently that things will get better no matter what the present circumstance; hope is ‘the firm assurance regarding things that are unclear and unknown’ (Rom 8:24-25; Heb 11:1, 7). Jesus alone is our hope and basis of hope in this life.
- Without hope life loses its meaning (Lamentation 3:18; Job 7:16).
- People without hope are very dangerous people and we should be extremely careful with people who are hopeless – who have nothing to live for; who think they are worthless and have nothing to lose.
- True hope does not depend on circumstances – hope raises us up above circumstances – it does not depend on how bad circumstances are – consider Habakkuk 3:17-18 – even in the midst of unfavourable circumstances you remain confident and expecting that things will get better. Such solid hope is grounded in Christ Jesus – hence the song – ‘My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ ....’ This is the focus of our sharing today.

□ **1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:5**

The Cross as the wisdom and power of God is the main theme of 1 Cor 1:17 – 2:5 especially as contrasted with the wisdom and power of the world. Paul is challenged to unpack the content of the Gospel.

- V17 – The choice is between ‘words of human wisdom’ and ‘the cross of Christ’. To choose human wisdom is to ‘empty’ denude, and indeed destroy the cross.
- V18 – Paul chooses ‘the message of the cross’, which he knows to be foolishness to those who are perishing, but at the same time it is the power of God to those who are being saved. Powerless wisdom or foolish power: it was (and still is) a fateful choice. The one combination which is not an option is the wisdom of the world plus the power of God.
- V19 – Here is the reason that compels Paul to opt for power against wisdom, God’s power against worldly wisdom: God in the OT scriptures has already declared his intention to destroy the wisdom of the wise and frustrate the cleverness of the clever.
- V20 – So if God has already set Himself against them, where are they? Has God not already set himself against them by making their wisdom foolish?
- V21 – Through its wisdom the world cannot know God as decreed by God; God was pleased through the foolishness of the revealed and preached gospel to save believers. **Ps.** So it is again clear that power (saving power) is not in the world’s wisdom but in God’s foolishness, namely the Gospel of Christ crucified.
- V22 – ‘Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks for wisdom’ – in other words, they insist that the message must authenticate itself to them by power and wisdom respectively

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- V23 – But ‘we preach Christ crucified’ – this does not conform to their criteria. Jews find the cross ‘a stumbling block’ and Gentiles find the cross ‘foolishness’ because it offends rather than impress them.
  - V24 25 – Though crucified in weakness, Christ is God’s power, and though apparently foolish, Christ is God’s wisdom (v24). For what men regard as God’s foolishness is wiser than their wisdom and what they regard as God’s weakness is stronger than their strengths (v25). **Ps.** The point in all this is that divine and human values are completely at variance with one another. And the cross, which as a way of salvation seems the height of impotence and folly, is actually the greatest manifestation of God wisdom and power.
- Two illustrations to demonstrate Paul’s point
- 1) 1:26-31 – the Corinthians’ experience of their call and conversion  
As for the Corinthians, by human standards, not many of them were wise or powerful. God deliberately chose what the world regards as foolish and feeble people, in order to shame the wise and the strong; he chose even the lowly, the despised and the non-existent to nullify what exists. His goal in this was to exclude human boasting. Boasting was entirely out of place, because it was God who had united them to Christ, and Christ who had become their wisdom (revealing God to them) and their power (bringing them justification, holiness and the promise of final redemption). Hence as Scripture puts, if anybody boasts, he must boast neither in himself, nor in others, but in the Lord alone.
  - 2) 2:1-5 – Paul’s own experience of Evangelism – when he came to Corinth
    - He did not come with a message of human wisdom
    - He did not come in his own strength
    - But had brought the foolish revealed message of the cross
    - He had come in personal weakness, fear and trembling, relying on the Holy Spirit’s power to confirm the word.

**Ps.** His whole purpose in coming to them in such folly and feebleness was that their faith would rest firmly on God’s power, not men’s wisdom.

The Gospel of the cross will never be a popular message because it humbles the pride of our intellect and character. Yet Christ crucified is both God’s wisdom (1:24) and ours (1:30). For the cross is God’s way to satisfy his love and justice in the salvation of sinners. It therefore manifests his power too, ‘the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes’ (Rom 1:16).

**END**

**Fourth Teaching on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018: Topic: The Cross: A message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-21)**

□ **Introduction**

- Reconciliation is one of the four images of salvation that illustrate the achievement of the cross. The other three are propitiation (image from temple precincts), redemption (image from the salve-market) and justification (image from the law courts – legal standing before our judge in court).
- Reconciliation brings us to our own homes with family and friends. Imagine for a moment that there has been a quarrel, or even an enmity, - to **reconcile** means to restore a relationship, to renew a friendship. Reconciliation is our personal relationship with for example our father in a home. So an original relationship is presupposed which, having been broken, has been recovered by Christ.
- The opposite of ‘reconciliation’ is ‘alienation’. The majority of people are more comfortable with the image of reconciliation because nowadays people easily refer to themselves as alienated – workers can speak of economic alienation when they cannot even have access to the products of their labour; others speak of political alienation – a sense of powerlessness to change society. But for the majority of people, they do not feel at home in our modern western materialistic world that leaves them with immense emptiness – this leaves many feeling unfulfilled, and disoriented, unable to find themselves, their identity or their freedom. For them talk of ‘reconciliation’ sounds like the good news to them.
- The biblical gospel of reconciliation begins with reconciliation to God, and continues with a reconciled community in Christ. It should not be understood as ‘coming to terms’ with oneself per se.
- Reconciliation with God, then, is the beginning. This is the meaning of ‘atonement’ – an event through which God and human beings, previously alienated from one another, are made ‘**at one**’ again.
- Two other NT terms confirm this emphasis that reconciliation means peace with God, namely, ‘**adoption**’ and ‘**access**’. Jesus who intimately addressed God as ‘Abba’, ‘Father’, gave us permission to do the same, approaching him as ‘Our Father in Heaven’, and being the ‘children’ of God (Mt 6:9; John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-10 – the wonder of being God’s children). Paul speaks of us being adopted in God’s family through our new birth in Christ and emphasizes the privileges we have in being sons and daughters instead of slaves, and therefore God’s heirs as well (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-29; 4:1-7). ‘**Access**’ to God is another blessing of reconciliation and denotes the active communion with God, especially in prayer, which his reconciled children enjoy (Rom 5:1-2; Eph 2:17-18; 3:12; 1 Pet 3:18; Hebrews 10:19-22).
- But reconciliation has a horizontal as well as a vertical plane. For God has reconciled us to one another in his new community, as well as to himself (Eph 2:11-22 especially vv 12-13 – healing between Gentiles and Jews). The cross of Christ therefore helps us to cross to God and to cross to one another.
- In Col 1:15-20, to complete the picture of reconciliation, Paul adds a cosmic dimension. This time what is reconciled is called ‘all things’, which are further described as ‘things on earth or things in heaven’ (verse 20).

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- Summary: Until now we have investigated the objects of God’s reconciling work through Christ – the cross of Christ. God has reconciled sinners to himself, Jews and Gentiles to one another, and even the cosmic powers in the sense of disarming and pacifying them. We now need to consider how the reconciliation has taken place, and what in the great drama of reconciliation are the respective roles played by God, Christ and ourselves. This brings us to our passage, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.
- **Analysis of 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 – Read it again.** There are three truths that this passage brings out. These are:
- 1) *First, God is the author of reconciliation (v 18 a).* This is the emphasis through and through. All is from God. Reconciliation begins and ends in or with God. Reconciliation has a *divine origin*. From first to the last, this has been the work of God. The initiative is God’s and not ours. Sometimes in trying to emphasize or exaggerate our role in the salvation of people we are tempted to sound like we are the people who saved them! Nor is the primary initiative with Christ. No interpretation of atonement / reconciliation will do which attributes the initiative to Christ *in such away as to take it from the Father*. Christ Himself acknowledges that He had come to do the will of His Father (Heb 10:7). God is always the subject (God reconciles us to himself) of reconciliation and never the subject. It can never be said the Christ reconciled the Father to us – God is never the subject of reconciliation. There is no intervention on the part of Christ as a third party. Reconciliation was born and conceived in the love of God – ‘God so loved the world’ (John 3:16).
  - 2) Second, if God is the author, *Christ is the agent of reconciliation*. This is crystal clear in 2 Cor 5:18 and 19 (**Read**). The emphasis in vv 18-19 is that God took the initiative to reconcile, and that God did it in and through Christ. What is said in v18 is actually identical to what is said in v19 except that the beneficiaries change from ‘us’ to ‘the world’, to show the universal scope of the reconciliation, and the preposition changes from ‘through’ to ‘in’, to show that God was not working through Christ as his agent at a distance but was actually present in Him as he did the work. You should never understand the work of Christ in the sense of delegation. No, God did not delegate to Christ, God was present in Christ as he did the work.  
**Ps.** The work of reconciliation, in the sense of the NT, is work which is *finished*, and which we must conceive to be finished, *before the Gospel is preached.....* Reconciliation.... is not something which is being done; it is something which is done. No doubt there is a work of Christ which is in process, but it has as its basis a finished work of Christ. Jesus on the cross cried out ‘It is finished’ (John 19:28-30 especially verse 30).
  - 3) Third, if God is the author and Christ is the agent, *we are the ambassadors of reconciliation (v20)*. God has committed to us the ministry and the message of reconciliation which is itself in two stages namely: the proclamation that God was in Christ reconciling and that he made Christ to be sin for us. It continues with an appeal to people to ‘be reconciled to God’, that is avail yourselves of the offered terms of reconciliation with God. We must keep these things distinct. God finished the work of reconciliation at the cross, yet it is still necessary for sinners to repent and believe and so ‘be reconciled to God’. We must proclaim the Gospel to people and expound it properly but also beg them to come to faith in Christ. The two must go together in

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that order. It is not right for a sermon to consist of an immediate appeal which has not been preceded by an exposition of the Gospel. The rule should be 'no appeal without proclamation, and no proclamation without an appeal'. The apostles and Paul were the personal envoys and representatives of Jesus Christ. Yet in a secondary sense it is true of all Christian witness and preachers who are heralds of the Gospel: we speak in Christ name and on his behalf. Note that in verse 20, God is the one making this appeal through us, meaning, the same God who worked 'through Christ' to achieve the reconciliation now works 'through us' to announce it.

**END**