

The Journey Christ Took

Sunday, October 24, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Galatians 3:10-14

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.')" Verse 13

Introduction

One of the highlights of my childhood and early teen years were travelogues by Al Bell, who gave presentations of his journeys so vividly that I felt like I had gone on the trip with him. They were terrific, and I gained much from his travels. His journey benefitted my journey, and many others we well. I bring this up to compare with the journey of our Lord Jesus, in that during our journey through these days and the process we undertake we do well to ponder His journey, taken on our behalf, and the benefits He has afforded us by it.

Set the stage

The basic outline of the life of Jesus is well known to us all. Setting aside the trappings of divinity He was born to Mary, lived in Israel and spent the last three years of His life preaching and teaching until His betrayal, subsequent resurrection, ascension, and return to the right hand of God the Father in heaven. From this point I would like to ponder the benefit this journey had for us.

How Gordon MacDonald imagined it.

Christ's journey led Him through all this to redeem us, to pay our deliverance at great cost and sacrifice. A famous pastor and teacher, Gordon MacDonald, envisioned it this way. He imagined that if he was present when John the Baptist was in ministry, he would try to get things organized by registering everyone who came. He would ask the baptismal candidates to identify the sins they had committed and then write those sins on a post-it note to wear on their tunic so John wouldn't have to ask over and again. He could just read the note and the continue with the baptism. Then MacDonald imagined what Jesus would do when He arrived. He would go to all the baptismal candidates and ask for their post-it notes. Then He places all of them on His tunic so that no one would have any post-it notes but Jesus. He becomes guilty of everything. The innocent is condemned while we, the guilty are justified as if we had never sinned. That was the benefit Christ's journey has for us. Martin Luther, however, gives us a little more insight into the gravity of Christ taking this journey to become a curse for us.

Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians 3:13

Concerning Galatians 3:13, he wrote, "Surely the words of Paul are not without purpose: 'Christ became a curse for us' and 'For our sake God made Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Corinthians 5:21) In the same way John the Baptist called Christ 'the Lamb of God' (John 1:29). He is, of course, innocent, because He is the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. But because He bears the sins of the world, His innocence is pressed down with the sins and the guilt of the entire world. Whatever sins I, you, and all of us have committed or may commit in the future, they are as much Christ's own as if He Himself had committed them. In short, our sin must be Christ's own sin, or we shall perish eternally."*

Now look at what being a curse meant in Deuteronomy

To help us understand why Luther took the gravity of this statement about Christ being a curse for us, let's look back to Deuteronomy 28, in which Moses gives a long list of blessings on the obedient. Those who are diligent will be set high above the nations of the earth. Blessings shall overtake them in the city and in the country. Their children will be blessed, their endeavors will be blessed, and God will make them "the head and not the tail". Then Moses speaks of disobedience.

Of the disobedient he said that they will be cursed. Curses will overtake them, in the city and in the country. In all their endeavors they would be cursed. Everything they "set their hand to do" would be rebuked and perish. Ill health would be theirs and the heavens would be like bronze. Their enemies would prosper. Others will benefit from their labors, and they will worship other gods, and everyone would prosper but them. They would be subjected to siege warfare, and they will be filled with anxiety, and then the final humiliation: "And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, 'You shall never see it again.' And there you will be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you." They are back to Egypt, from which their parents were delivered as slaves, but this time they won't even be useful as slaves. The image drips of destitution and rejection. So, when Jesus became a curse for us, all the wrath for all the sin and disobedience of the world fell upon Him, it was an event the gravity of which we will probably never comprehend. And so, when He cried out on the cross, "my God My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" it was more than quoting a Psalm, He was utterly sinful and completely rejected.

Application

For our application, let's turn again to the writings of Martin Luther. He confirmed the Scriptural validity of the priesthood of all believers, that everyone has access to God through Christ and can take advantage of that access by prayer, but Luther did not believe in a priesthood in which we are the priests of a congregation of one, namely ourselves. Luther's priesthood of all believers was that we were to be priests to each other, not each one priest to their own singular communion with God. Going forward in our journey, we need to remember that we do this to better serve each other and the community, not just for our own individual benefit.

Conclusion

When I was preparing this sermon, I found several newspaper articles and a Facebook page remembering the wonderful travelogues of Al Bell. His journeys enriched me, and many other people as well. This serves as a poor analogy for the journey of Christ, in which we are enriched and benefit more than we can imagine. If that be true, then we must look to our own journey through these days with any eye toward enriching each other and those in need in our community.

*Martin Luther Galatians 3:13 p. 129 *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology.* Millard J. Erickson, Editor