WISDOM and POWER — in a CROSS?!? - 9 / 27 / 20

INTRODUCTION — She was a pretty young college student, a year younger than me— long blond hair, pretty blue eyes. THIS IS GREAT, I thought— SEATED NEXT TO THIS CUTE FRESHMAN in my PSYCHOLOGY CLASS! I thought I had a “GREAT OPPORTUNITY” to make a “FRIEND!” She wore a GOLD CROSS around her neck on a THIN, GOLD NECKLACE. MAYBE SHE’S EVEN a CHRISTIAN! THAT WOULD BE FANTASTIC!! I had committed my life to JESUS CHRIST as my LORD & SAVIOR only a few months before, & I WAS UTTERLY CONVINCED THAT TRUSTING JESUS AS SAVIOR & FOLLOWING HIM & KNOWING GOD through JESUS CHRIST was the MOST PROFOUND & EXCITING EXPERIENCE A PERSON CAN EVER HAVE!!

So I thought that since this pretty blond was WEARING a CROSS, SHE MAYBE was a DEDICATED CHRISTIAN. “WHO ELSE WOULD WEAR A CROSS?” I thought. I glanced at her, & she BATTED HER BIG BLUE EYES MY WAY! So I broke the ICE WITH HER by TALKING ABOUT HER NECKLACE— and HER CROSS. “That’s a LOVELY

CROSS you’re wearing— Are you a Christian?” I asked. She smiled weakly, and slowly said, “No, I'm not really religious. I just wear this CROSS because my FORMER BOYFRIEND gave it to me— CROSSES ARE VERY ‘IN THINGS’ to wear, you know.” AT THAT MOMENT, the BELL RANG, & the PROFESSOR BEGAN to LECTURE— class had begun. THAT WAS the ONLY TIME I EVER TRIED to TALK to THAT PRETTY BLOND— after what she had said about HER CROSS, I lost interest.

“CROSSES are just ‘IN THINGS’ to wear, you know.” IS THAT ALL THE CROSS MEANS IN THIS WORLD TODAY??

In some ways, I suppose that it is. IT IS IRONIC that the CROSS, a symbol in ANCIENT TIMES of DISHONORABLE DEATH, is TODAY a MEANINGLESS TRINKET to many Americans. AND IT IS THEREFORE ALL the MORE IMPORTANT THAT CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND the REAL SIGNIFICANCE of the CROSS— because it is only through the EYES of FAITH in JESUS CHRIST that the CROSS begins to make sense.

TO KNOW WHAT the CROSS can tell us, LET’S REMEMBER:

I. The VIEW of the CROSS in the ANCIENT WORLD

A. MEANING of the CROSS to JEWISH PEOPLE —

1. To the JEWISH people of Jesus’ day, it was a SCANDAL for anyone, esp. A GREAT RELIGIOUS LEADER to DIE on a CROSS. ( 1 )

2. Deut. 21:23 says: “...anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.”

3 BUT— the Jewish people of Jesus’ day DEMANDED GOD to ACT just as He had in the days of MOSES— when GOD led the PEOPLE of ISRAEL out of BONDAGE in EGYPT, and PARTED the RED SEA to RESCUE THEM, and DESTROY PHARAOH’S ARMY.

4. THAT’S WHAT the JEWISH PEOPLE WANTED from GOD!!! A GOD of POWER, and DESTRUCTION for the ENEMIES of GOD—who in this case were their ROMAN OPPRESSORS.

5. JEWISH PEOPLE of Jesus and PAUL’S day thought that, IF JESUS DIED ON A TREE (the EQUIVALENT of the CROSS, in their minds), THEN GOD HAD CURSED JESUS— HE WAS NO “SAVIOR” or MESSIAH ! ! ( 2 )

6. THEREFORE, the CROSS WAS “A STUMBLING BLOCK to the JEWS.” ( 1:23 NRSV )

B. MEANING of the CROSS to the GENTILES —

1. The GREEKS (and the Romans, who “borrowed” and adopted their PHILOSOPHY) were on a SEARCH for “the good, the true and the beautiful....” They were looking for a “God” who “made sense” to their LOGIC, and shared the SUPER-HUMAN, POWERFUL CHARACTERISTICS of their mythological gods. 2. To the Greek speaking people of the Mediterranean in Paul’s day, “. . . the crucified Christ and the veneration of him were . . . . an EMBARRASSMENT. CRUCIFIXION, as the PUNISHMENT of ESCAPED SLAVES or REBELS against the ROMAN empire, was regarded as ‘the most degrading kind of punishment.’ So Roman [popular thought] always felt the ‘religion of the Cross’ to be UNAESTHETIC, UNRESPECTABLE and PERVERSE.” ( 3 ) “It was regarded as an OFFENCE against GOOD MANNERS to speak of this hideous death for slaves in the presence of RESPECTABLE PEOPLE.” ( 3 ) \*\*\* THEREFORE, the CROSS WAS “ FOOLISHNESS to

GENTILES.” (1:23 NRSV)

II. WHAT DOES “The WORLD” EXPECT — of GOD??

A. WHAT PEOPLE WANT TODAY:

1. MANY PEOPLE TODAY are looking for a GOD, a RELIGION, that MAKES SENSE to them, & helps them along in life.

2. LIKE the ancient JEWS and GREEKS, their desire to find a “GOD” of their liking can be VERY SELF-CENTERED — “What can God do for me??”

3. THAT IS WHY some people turn to the “Health & Wealth Gospel” that PROMISES that “God wants you to be healthy & wealthy” — just SEND in MONEY with this PRAYER CLOTH, or buy this VIDEO-TAPE of Brother Smith that will tell you “10 PRINCIPLES

for SUCCESSFUL LIVING.”

4. THAT is why some PEOPLE turn to “EASTERN RELIGIONS” or the “CULTS” — they want “God” to MAKE THEM “FEEL GOOD.”

B. WHAT WE REALLY RECEIVE from GOD —

1. AS a PREACHER of the BIBLE, I tell you that a “SIDE-EFFECT” of the CHRISTIAN FAITH is to make us “FEEL GOOD” — BUT THAT IS NOT the MAIN AIM of BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY!! The FOCUS of BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY IS the problem of SIN, and how we are SEPARATED from GOD by SIN, and what God DID and DOES NOW to DEAL with THAT PROBLEM THAT we CANNOT SOLVE by OURSELVES— by entering this world in HIS SON, and SUFFERING in OUR PLACE, FOR US, to ONCE and FOR ALL PAY FOR SIN!!

2. AND THEN, the GOD of the Bible TELLS US HOW to LIVE!!

III. WHAT the CROSS TELLS US

A. The ABSOLUTE NECESSITY of the CROSS — 1: 24— 25

1. The apostle PAUL tells us that he did not want to try to convince people of the Gospel with “eloquence or superior wisdom” — that was NOT the FOUNDATION FOR FAITH THAT PEOPLE NEED!! PEOPLE NEED to BUILD THEIR LIVES UPON WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US — IN ENTERING THIS WORLD, and SOLVING the PROBLEM of SIN in JESUS CHRIST.

2. SO— The MESSAGE of the CROSS is for EVERY ONE of US ! ! !

B. The MESSAGE of the CROSS should speak to EVERY PERSON! The MESSAGE of the CROSS TELLS US FOUR THINGS:

1st — 1. “You are a sinner” — People NOWADAYS don’tlike to hear that! A fellow who was a member of another church once said: “Some days, I think I’m VERY GOOD!” PEOPLE LIKE TO HEAR HOW GOOD THEY ARE— they don’t like to face the KNOWLEDGE, that, as GOOD AS THEY MIGHT BE in HUMAN TERMS, their OWN SEPARATION from GOD— that is THEIR fault— it is MY fault. As Romans 3: 23 puts it — “All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of GOD.”

2nd, The CROSS TELLS US: 2. “You can’t save YOURSELF — Christ died for you.”We are tempted to think that SOMETHING WE DO CAN GET US INTO BETTER RAPPORT with GOD. But WE MUST RECOGNIZE that CHRIST DYING on the CROSS tells us that GOD WAS DOING WHAT WE CANNOT DO FOR OURSELVES — that ONLY JESUS “saves us from the DEEP ABYSS of sin…. Not Jesus plus our good works. Not Jesus plus church sacraments. ONLY JESUS.” Martin Luther was once reminded by the DEVIL of his many sins. The devil listed all of Martin Luther’s sins. Luther said, “Is that all you can think of?” “No,” answered the DEVIL, and he listed some more. Luther asked, “Is that all?” “Yes,” said the DEVIL: “Now what?” “NOW,” said LUTHER, “write beneath them all:

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.’” 7

3rd — in the CROSS: 3. “You are CALLED to a NEW WAY of life” —

“The life that we can live here— with joy and peace and satisfaction— is brought about because Christ died on the Cross and rose again.” 8 Jesus said, “If anyone will come after me, let him [or her] deny himself, take up his cross DAILY, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) “Christ demands that we live a life” of LEAVING STUFF BEHIND. “We CRUCIFY our selfish desires.

We CRUCIFY the lust and the greed and the hate and the jealousy. All these things, which are in all of our lives, we CRUCIFY; and God forgives us.” 9 BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO KNOW the FIRST THREE TRUTHS—

4th: 4. “You must repent and trust Christ” — Jesus said, “I am the WAY, and the TRUTH, and the LIFE. No one comes to the Father, except through ME.”

CONCLUSION— The CROSS of JESUS CHRIST ALSO tells us HOW to LIVE— if we ARE SAVED, BORN AGAIN, REDEEMED for ETERNITY — WHATEVER kind of LINGO you want to use to DESCRIBE our SALVATION in CHRIST — then we can and SHOULD be POSITIVE, UPLIFTING PEOPLE to be around ! ! ! FOR THIS FALL, let us RESOLVE to be “ENCOURAGERS” — Leaving behind the LUST for THINGS and the GREED and the HATE and the JEALOUSY ! ! LET US, INSTEAD, BUILD INTO our LIVES — KINDNESS, and PATIENCE with OTHERS, and GENEROSITY to ALL ---->>> BECAUSE, REALLY:

IS THERE WISDOM— IN THE CROSS???

I am holding a book here, about TWO BRILLIANT BRITISH SCIENTISTS— RICHARD DAWKINS, and ALISTER McGRATH. Both have their Ph.D.s in BIOLOGY or MICRO—BIOLOGY. McGRATH EARNED his Ph.D. in MICRO– BIOLOGY at OXFORD UNIVERSITY - DAWKINS EARNED his M.A. and Ph.D. in EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY at OXFORD.

ANYWAY — BRILLIANT SCIENTISTS. BOTH were ATHEISTS when they earned their Bachelors and Masters degrees, and started on their Ph.D.s. DAWKINS still is. He wrote a book a few years ago — The GOD Delusion, in which he attacked Christianity — every Christian, even the most brilliant Bible scholar, historian, or theologian, he said — is an IDIOT ! !

BUT ALISTER McGRATH, as he finished his DOCTORAL work, began to think VERY DIFFERENTLY. As he looked at the infinite complexity of the most microscopic organisms, he began to consider that LIFE was NO MERE ACCIDENT!! PERHAPS an INFINITE and ALL—WISE CREATOR had made— EVERYTHING ! ! ! He later studied the BIBLE, Christian thought and theology, and NOW LECTURES at OXFORD UNIVERSITY on HISTORIC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY. McGRATH wrote THIS BOOK, in fact, to POINT OUT all the ERRORS in Dr. DAWKINS ATTACK on CHRISTIANS.

ALISTER McGRATH learned — THERE IS WISDOM, GREATER THAN HUMAN WISDOM, IN THE CROSS of JESUS CHRIST. And you don’t need a Ph.D. or TWO, to BELIEVE in HIM. To KNOW Him, and WALK DAILY with Him — just takes FAITH.