

How the Boy Jesus Discovered the Cross

The truth of the cross is beautifully illustrated in the experience of Jesus when He came to earth. Although He was fully man, “in all points tempted like as we are,” yet His heart was without sin, and therefore pure. It thus remained—wonder of wonders!—the reservoir of love (*agape*). In that respect He differed from all other human beings who have been born into the world. He alone knew no sin, no *surrender* to egoism in any form, although the temptation to self-indulgence was as real for Him as for us.

Yet we cannot suppose that any conscious memory of His preexistence remained with Him in His earthly childhood. As a babe in His mother’s arms in the stable at Bethlehem, He had no conscious intelligence beyond that of other human babies at birth. He could not acknowledge the adoration of the shepherds or the wise men from the East. As a child in Nazareth, did He entertain Joseph and Mary with tales of the glories of heaven which He knew in His preexistence there? Like a fortunate child who has been to the “big city,” did He tell his playmates in the rustic mountain village of His exploits as the Commander of the heavenly angels?

No; as a child, Jesus learned wisdom as we must learn. “The Child grew” and “increased in wisdom and stature.” Luke 2:40, 52. The wonder of Christ is the wonder of His birth, God in human flesh, subject to the laws of mental and physical growth as we are all subject to them, yet “without sin.” Certainly He was not born with any miraculous memory of His divine preexistence. All these divine advantages He laid aside.

The Importance of the Age of Twelve

By the time a child reaches that age, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife.

Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. The latter mouthed phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp. For four thousand years God’s servants had offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth’s inquiring “Why?” no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is it possible, wondered Jesus, for the “blood of bulls and goats” to take away sin?

A Prayer Offered in Heaven Is Offered Again on Earth

Even as a child, Jesus must walk alone. He turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as He came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs, could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed the same heart commitment He had made in heaven:

“For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: ‘You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but You have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said, “Here I am, to *do Your* will, O God.’”” Hebrews 10:5-7, TEV.

It was as if He prayed: Father, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts' blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! I have blood that I can shed. Here I am, Father—let *Me* be the Lamb of God! I will die for the sins of the world. *My* blood will be the atonement! I will be that “suffering servant” of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let *Me* be wounded for man's transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with *My* stripes he may be healed. Lo, I come—to do Your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Himself:

“So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all.” Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV.

A Boy's Love (Agape) Becomes Profound

No memory of His preexistence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when “the counsel of peace” was “between Them both” (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices “cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9), and that “the law having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approached perfect.” Hebrews 10:1.

This is all a *type*, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice.

This was a conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times “not discerning the Lord's body,” this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the unresisted power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. *He will sacrifice Himself*. The Boy of twelve “saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.” Isaiah 59:15, 16. “Christ ... through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.” Hebrews 9:14.

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of ten