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THE CROSS WAS NECESSARY

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions and left them with some final instructions before ascending to His Father in heaven. His directives were mostly forward-looking and vision-casting regarding the Great Commission that lay before them. But the cross was such a huge event that Jesus took time in His visits with the disciples to look back and debrief with them about it.

The first time He reflected on His cross was on the afternoon of His resurrection as He walked the Emmaus road with two disciples. He said to them:

Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? (Luke 24:26).

With the words *ought not*, His message to them was simply this: The Christ's sufferings were *necessary*.

The second time He debriefed on His cross was just a few hours later. It was the Sunday evening of His resurrection, and the eleven disciples were huddled in a Jerusalem house with some of their friends. Jesus

suddenly appeared in the room and had this to say about His cross:

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day (Luke 24:46).

He reiterated the same message: His sufferings were *necessary*.

Our English translation veils the fact that He used the same word, in both instances, to characterize His cross. To see the linguistic repetition, we must look at the original Greek text.

When Jesus said, “Ought not” in verse 26 and “it was necessary” in verse 46, He used the same word. In the original text, it’s the Greek word *dei*. In verse 26, *dei* is translated *ought*, and in verse 46, it’s translated *necessary*. The meaning of *dei* in both verses is identical.

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance defines *dei* as *it is necessary*.¹ Zodhiates describes it as *necessary by the nature of things; must; intrinsic necessity; an unavoidable, urgent, compulsory necessity*.²

Both times that Jesus looked back at the cross, He

1 G1163 – *dei*. James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).

2 Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete WordStudy New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International; 1992).

spoke of it as *necessary*. That was just about the only thing He had to say about it. In fact, He said the same thing about the cross even before it happened. During His three-year teaching ministry, Jesus used *dei* a number of times, but He used it especially when speaking of His upcoming sufferings.³ For example, *dei* is translated *must* in this verse: “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

Both before and after His sufferings, Jesus made it very clear: *The cross was necessary*.

What Jesus Didn't Say

Consider for a moment what He *didn't* say about the cross. He didn't say, “That was the greatest injustice of human history—it should have never happened!” True, it was the greatest injustice of human history, but yet it *had* to happen. If we really understood that, it would probably change how we view some of today's injustices. Instead of demanding a tribunal of accountability for all the injustices we observe sinners committing, we might come to perceive the injustices of our world as sometimes being necessary vehicles for God's purposes to be fulfilled.

Jesus *didn't* say, “Pilate really blew that one! His

3 See Matt 16:21; 26:54; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:37; John 3:14; 12:34.

wife warned him, but the man wouldn't listen. And the chief priests? They're going to regret that one big time! Just wait till Judgment Day and see how they fare." He didn't talk about the way the leaders sinned against Him.

Jesus *didn't* say, "The devil really came after Me. He raged against Me and tried to take Me out. And just when his attack was the most fierce, all you guys abandoned Me. Where were you at crunch time? You said you were willing to die with Me, but then, when I needed you most, you disappeared."

Your trial is your certification

peared." No, Jesus didn't talk about Satan's agenda at the cross—even though Satan clearly had one. Nor did He speak of His disciples' failures. He

wasn't mindful of Satan's agency or man's agency, but only of God's agency at the cross.

Here's what Jesus *was* saying:

"I *had* to do the cross—to fulfill Scripture."

"I *had* to do the cross—to complete all righteousness."

"I *had* to do the cross—to destroy the devil."

"I *had* to do the cross—to overcome sin, hell, and the grave."

"I *had* to do the cross—to purchase your redemption."

"I *had* to do the cross—to heal your infirmities."

"I *had* to do the cross—to become a faithful High Priest."

"I *had* to do the cross—to earn My stripes as the Captain of your salvation."

In light of God's eternal plan to redeem humanity, Jesus was saying that *the cross was necessary*.

Peter Used the Same Word

When Peter wrote about fiery trials in his first epistle, he also used the Greek word *dei*. I've italicized its occurrence so you can see it:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:6–7).

The Greek word *dei* is present in the phrase *if need be*. A literal rendering would read *if being necessary*. Peter was literally saying, "Sometimes trials are necessary."

By using *dei*—the same word Jesus used to describe His sufferings—Peter was drawing a straight line between the cross and our fiery trials. He was indicating that our sufferings in our fiery trials are directly connected to Jesus' sufferings on the cross. Peter was inferring, *just as it was necessary for Jesus to*

suffer on the cross, sometimes it's also necessary for us to suffer fiery trials.

This connecting line Peter drew between the cross and our trials is the same line Paul drew when he wrote, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (Col 1:24). For years I've wondered, *What does it mean to fill up in our flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ?* The answer is coming into focus: *It means to endure fiery trials that test our faith.*

Just as the cross was a fiery trial that tested Jesus' faith, your point of suffering is a fiery trial that is testing your faith.

Some people will likely look at your difficulty and say to you, "This isn't right. This should have never happened to you." But from God's perspective, it's the trial that's making you who you are. It's producing in you more fruit to God than ever. It's revealing God's redemption in your family. It's giving God room to write a great story with your life.

Your trial is your certification (1 Pet 1:6-7). The way you walk through it demonstrates to heaven and earth that your faith is authentic.

On the final day, when we're standing before the throne, I imagine the question being asked, "Is this person's faith genuine?" And then I also imagine the answer. "Look at her faith! She had circumstances

against her, finances against her, Satan against her, hell against her, temptation against her, her flesh against her, the world against her, people against her, her health against her, even family and friends against her. And yet, look how she stood. She never backed down. She praised You when heaven was silent. She loved You when she couldn't see You or feel You. This is the real deal. This is true faith."

And I imagine heaven placing its official imprimatur—Seal of Authenticity—on the service of your faith. *Certified and approved!*

When your faith is certified authentic before the throne, it will "be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:7). The praise, however, won't be going to *you*. They won't be saying to you, "Way to go! You were awesome out there! You ran a great race!"

Instead, they'll be glorifying God's grace in your life. They'll say things like, "Look what His grace has accomplished in you! You were so feeble, so prone to wander, so vulnerable to temptation, so wavering in your faith. But His grace was up to the challenge! He perfected your faith in spite of your weakness! Look what God has done!"

The crowning glory of our story will be the fact that Christ alone will be praised and honored for our faith.

Peter said this kind of faith is *much more precious than gold that perishes* (1 Pet 1:7). It's *incorruptible*

(1 Pet 1:4). How can we gain a faith that's so much more valuable and priceless than gold? There's really only one way—through fiery trials.

To gain faith *this* precious, sometimes we *need* trials in our lives.