

Re-Evaluating the Cross

They paved John Knox, and put up a parking lot. Why?

- They weren't there when he started the revolution of grace
- They weren't there when he was captured in the castle
- They weren't there when he was sold into slavery with the French
- They weren't there when he jumped overboard and swam for freedom
- When he ran across Europe and lived as a refugee in Geneva
- When he came home and preached a reformation
- When he lived his life under constant threat of Bloody Mary

Why do we think so little of the cross? That we do is evident everywhere we look. It is an insignia, a piece of jewelry, a good luck charm, a glow in the dark pull chain so we can find the light.

Just like John Knox's grave is not the tragedy, but that Scotland is so secular with less than 5% of people going to church. The tragedy of the cross is not the use of the symbol, but the loss of the reality. Since the cross means so little, it accomplishes so little. Thus, even though we are Christians, we live our lives with little or no growth in Holiness, little or no compassion for the poor, just as much bitterness, just as much insecurity, just as much self-righteousness as those who never claim that the cross is more than a piece of jewelry. Therefore, I beg you, let us go back and survey the cross, meditate upon our stricken, smitten and afflicted Lord, and place ourselves under his grace.

1. Three Pictures of the Sacrifice

The focus of the scripture is on the relational and spiritual aspects of what is going on here, not on the physical sufferings. For instance, while Mel Gibson may have spent several minutes showing the brutality of the beatings, the scriptures only mention it in a word "he was flogged." We see the richness in three places.

A. Gethsemane – the prayer of Jesus

Mark 14:33-34 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."

Three times he asked for help, three times he found himself alone, three times he begged God to take this cup from him, and three times he failed to receive what he wanted.

Luke 22:44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

We must ask, why such fear from one who told us to rejoice when we were persecuted? Why such terror from one who told us not to worry? Was Jesus the ultimate failure to practice what he preached? If he is only afraid of the brutality of the crucifixion yes, but there is much more to it than that.

Jesus did not want to be a pig. If you ever see a pig, you think “gross” and you also think “you idiot”. First, they live and roll around in their own feces and look up at you like, “don’t you want to join me?” Second, pigs live their lives oblivious to the fact that they will end up being sausage. Nothing could be more cruel, than to give self awareness to a pig.

Jesus was about to become a self-aware pig.

He would take on our sin. He would be our sin bearer, and wear our sin with all its foulness, all its brokenness, all its pain.

He would take the punishment our sin deserved. There are two reasons not to fear death: ignorance and hope. There is the ignorance of the irreligious who think of it as sleep, or the false religions thinking they are going to their personal harem. And there is the true hope of the Christian, who can say as the Scottish martyrs said: I climb the steps of this scaffold with the feeling that every step brings me closer to my heavenly home.

Jesus had neither ignorance nor hope. He knew that at his death he would be paying the wages of sin, and he knew what waited for him. Not the God of the covenant, God shrouded in mercy and kindness that Moses and Isaiah saw, but God with his sword unsheathed. God as a holocaust waiting to punish a million sinners guilt upon Jesus soul. God as a consuming fire, waiting to consume all the sin he bore.

He saw it and shuddered.

B. Golgotha – the cry of dereliction

Jesus was then arrested; he bore the insult of being falsely accused. He bore the shame of being stripped naked and beaten. He carried the burden of being three times declared innocent, and yet sentenced to die. He knew the pain of being tortured to death, and being laughed at as he died. But that was not the worst of it:

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

At the worst hour of his life, when he was being the most obedient, he felt the agony of having his father abandon him.

From before all history, there has been one central fact: the father loved the son. The lived in perfect peace and love. But now, the father has turned his back upon his son, and left him, cursed.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

Yet, even then he remained faithful. For the first time he prays without calling God his father, but he still calls him “my God,” and even at the end, after all the suffering and abandonment, he commits his spirit into God’s hands.

C. Heaven – the sacrifice of the Father

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Lest you get the false idea that the cross is a nice Jesus reconciling us to a mean God, let me take a moment to remind you of the grace shown us by the Father. He gave us his son, his only son, whom he loved.

We feel the knife turning in Abraham's back when he was asked to give up Isaac, but Abraham never lost his hope in God. For the Heavenly father there was no hope, only sacrifice.

He knew the pain that David knew, when he lost his son in battle and refused to be comforted even though his throne had been restored: Absalom Absalom, my son my son, oh that it could have been me instead of you.

We know what Jesus cried, but how did the father cry? Do you see what is going on here? The very foundations of existence are being shaken: rocks split because the rock of salvation was struck, day became night because the light of the world had been extinguished, the dead came alive, as death reached out to grab someone so big he lost his grip on others and He who gave life to the world, died. And God, who had known nothing but eternal joy and blessedness in his son, cried: my son, my son oh that it could have been me instead of you.

2. The Cross and Sanctification

I know some of you are saying, okay, nice story but what has this to do with our series on the foundations of our church. You have already spent two whole weeks talking to us about Justification, our being made right with God, we wanted to hear a good practical sermon on how to live holy lives.

I resolved to know nothing else among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified. The cross is our justification, but just as much, the cross is the ground of our sanctification.

A. It reveals the Nature of Sin

1. View it's nature rightly

First see the true nature of sin. We want to see our sins as small failures, mistakes, moral miscues. But when we see the cross, when we hear Jesus crying out, don't do it father, where have you gone? We see it's nature rightly, we see that our sin is embracing death itself.

College student convinced he has the wrong accountability partner, when his girlfriend catches him he sees the betrayal, and the pain he is causing.

Mowrer slapping his son: I heard you in your office crying

2. View the sure end of sin

At the moment of his greatest obedience, God struck Jesus, the one innocent place in the universe.

Please do not hope that somehow God is going to let you off because more or less you are a good person. If he would not relent, but poured out wrath upon his own son when he stood before Him dressed in our sin, then be sure the soul that sins shall surely die.

B. It frees us from the Power of Sin

The ransom and debt theories of the atonement: God has rescued us from slavery and kidnapping.

Colossians 2:13-14 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

You may think, what's that got to do with the price of eggs, I'm no slave. Aren't you?

Let's just assume that your most nagging problems are not someone else's fault. If they are your fault, could you fix them?

- Wives why do your husbands stay so long at work?
- Husbands why aren't your wives more affectionate?
- Parents why do your children continually turn you the cold shoulder?
- Children why must your parents provoke you?

If these problems are your fault, could you change.

Terry Waite – had to rechain himself, because he knew he would be beaten if found unchained. Do you ever feel that way, do you feel like not trying again because you don't want the added pain of another failed effort?

Could you change? Yes, because Jesus has died, and you are a slave no longer.

Setting captives free

Jesus you didn't die for me to leave me this way.

C. It secures our relationship to our Father

The path of restoration has been cleared. The goodness of God leads us to repentance, and because of the cross we know we will be received with open arms. Many of us may not want to return to God because we fear we have a spanking waiting upon us at home. The cross assures us that God has given all his spankings away, now he only waits for us with a celebration.

Legally – propitiation – God is not angry with us anymore.

Ronald Reagan – My sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought.

But also personally – What more could he have done to show us that he loves us. There is no going back for him: How can you ever doubt love like that?

Bitterness – how could he withhold any good thing

Fear – does he not surely have your best interest in mind

Forgiveness – how dare we think he would not take us back

Shame – how dare we think the sacrifice of his son was not enough

Assurance of salvation – how dare we look to ourselves instead of to His son

Stepping heavenward – today is the day of salvation, trust upon him now.