

Life in the Son: “The Cross-centered Life”, John 19:16-30, BCF 2012.7.1

Reading: John 19:16-30.

We are finishing our series on the Gospel of John, and our last passage – which we missed a couple of weeks ago due to the storm—is actually an appropriate passage to end on. It is John’s eye-witness account of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus. I would like to look at ...

- 1. The mystery of the cross**
- 2. The finality of the cross**
- 3. The centrality of the cross**

By “the cross” I mean not the wooden instrument itself, but the what our Savior accomplished there by his death. As in, “we preach Christ crucified...”

It is to his death that the gospel of John again and again anticipates... “behold the [*sacrificial*] Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29); “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19); “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up...” (3:14); “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11); “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (12:24); and “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends” (15:13).

1. The mystery of the cross

But when Jesus’ death comes, it comes with stunning brutality. “There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.” (John 19:18) The actual crucifixion expressed in four words, only three words in the Greek text. *There they crucified him*. The gospel writers are not interested to tell us all the details of this, lest we focus on the gore and probably because most of his hearers knew what was involved.

Crucifixion was a cruel form of execution perfected by the Romans to produce excruciating levels of pain and public abasement over hours, even days. The condemned person was usually stripped and whipped to a bloody pulp and then forced to carry the *patibulum* (cross beam) to the site. His hands would be tied or nailed with iron nails through the wrists to the cross-piece and then hoisted up and the feet tied or nailed to either side of the post below. For hours and even days the victim would hang there in excruciating pain, with bleeding wounds, muscle spasms, thirst, and exhaustion. In order to fill the lungs with air he would have to push up on his feet to get a full breath of air and then sink down. Death would come when the victim could push up no longer and the person died by asphyxiation. Breaking the legs would hasten this process.

All while the crowds and passers-by gawked. Jesus was probably crucified near the road by the city gates. Rome wanted to make full use of this public shame in order to deter any other wannabe kings.

The friends and followers of Jesus are totally traumatized. This is not what they expected-- to see their Rabbi and Lord scourged and spat upon and mocked and cruelly treated, nailed to a crossbeam and post to die. Raw power has the last word. The strong devour the weak, the state subjugates the individual, evil prevails over good, injustice over justice, envy over mercy, hate over love. Evil wins.

There are actually two stories here, both true. What we read, and what the disciples saw, actually happened. But that is only the human, or natural / physical view of the events. John is telling us there is another story, another perspective, one that is supernatural, namely an eternal plan of God, which God brings about not *in spite of* the evil, but actually *through* the evil.

The whole Bible is in this sense an unfolding mystery. There are many historical stories, along with genealogies, tribes, wars, laws, interesting people, prophecies and poetry. But all this is tied together with one Story: what God is doing by bringing his Son into the world to change everything. This is the history of redemption.

John, the gospel writer, is telling us there's another story going on here. How does he show this? He's like a detective, looking back at the clues, who says, "here's what really happened..."

First, there's a) **the irony of Pilate's inscription**, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (v. 19-21) He's certainly not intending to be a witness to Christ's Lordship, rather, he's sticking it to the Jews because they have irritated him. And they want a change, but he won't correct it. Pilate, like Caiaphas' unwitting prophecy in John 11, gives a testimony that is actually true. And interestingly, this is written in three languages: Aramaic (which the Jews spoke), Latin (which the Roman soldiers spoke), and Greek (which was the common language of the empire). Upon the cross of Jesus is the first written testimony about Jesus, not only to Jews but also to Greeks and Romans. John is saying, look at this: God is sovereign even over the ironic details of this story. Even Pilate, who was not a believer, is telling the truth about Jesus.

Secondly, there's b) **the fulfillment of prophecy** (v. 23-24), how a thousand years before, King David spoke of an event that he himself never experienced but would happen to his descendant, the King who was to come. There in Psalm 22 is a remarkable description of these events, even to the detail of dividing and gambling for the clothing. And this is one of many clues given throughout the Old Testament that God's Son would die as a Substitute for our sins. He the righteous One would suffer judgment for we the unrighteous...

Isaiah 53:3-5 ³ He was despised and rejected¹ by men; a man of sorrows,² and acquainted with³ grief;⁴ and as one from whom men hide their faces⁵ he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our

iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

Zechariah 12:10 ¹⁰ "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Thirdly, there's **c) the beauty of Jesus' humanity** (v. 26-27) that is revealed even in the most dehumanizing of circumstances. The scourging and crucifixion seemed designed to humiliate and dehumanize the victim. The prophet Isaiah wrote, *his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind* (Isaiah 52:14). Jesus' body was torn and disfigured. And this was really Jesus of Nazareth -- not a clone, not a twin, not a phantasm, not a hologram, but human, the Son of Man -- who suffered and thirsted, and yet, when he sees his mother, he takes concern for her protection. His half-brothers may not have been there in Jerusalem -- and they were not believers at that point -- and so Jesus commits his mother to John's care. So, far from crushing and removing Jesus' humanity, far from bringing out the worst of Jesus, only love and pity are brought forth. The evil powers could not erase the image of God upon the man Jesus.

At the earliest preaching of the gospel, the apostles were adamant that these things were both true, that evil men, both Jewish and Gentile, freely perpetrated this nightmare of injustice upon Jesus who is the only one truly not deserving of such treatment, AND that this was the plan of God.

Acts 2:23 *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (See also Acts 4:26-28)*

Some modern critics would say, "this is divine child abuse." That it is perverted to think that God should treat his Son in this way. Well, Jesus, God's eternal and glorious Son is not a four-year-old in the Wal-Mart parking lot. In the eternal counsel of the Triune God, the Father ordained our salvation, the Son freely came to accomplish our redemption, and the Holy Spirit came to apply it to us. If there were any other way to redeem us, I'm sure that would have been the plan. But the Son freely came to accomplish the Father's will. He was not coerced, manipulated, or abused by the Father. The abuse came from his creation. Jesus freely, as an adult, bore the judgment.

If God can bring something *so good* (our redemption) *through* (not in spite of) something *so evil* (his crucifixion), then what application does this truth have regarding how we view a) history in general, and b) our own life? If God was working his sovereign plan during that weekend two thousand years ago, then surely his plan covers all the rest of history. We live in a world filled with much evil, cruelty, violence, injustice. Can anything good come through such a world? Is God working? Are there clues? Paul writes later this remarkable passage:

Romans 8:28-32 ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn

among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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?

This tells us something about faith, about believing. Here's the purpose of John's gospel: "...written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (20:31) Alister McGrath in his book entitled *The Mystery of the Cross* wrote, "Faith is not something that goes against the evidence, it goes beyond it. The evidence is saying to us, 'There is another country. There is something beyond mere reason'." He went on to say (and I'm paraphrasing), "The Cross teaches us that faith means believing in advance that which will only make sense in retrospect."

So when you and I look at history, or when we read or hear the news, or when we look over last week's horrible events, or yesterday you had the worst day of your life, we see there's another story than the purely human, purely physical. There's a supernatural story, there's an unseen plan of God, though there are clues and promises. And that's the story we believe. We don't deny the reality of the physical and natural, but neither do we deny the supernatural plan of God.

2. The Finality of the Cross. (19:29-30)

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture)[Psalm 69:21], "I thirst." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus utters "It is finished" (τετέλεσται), not meaning "it's finally over", or all the bad stuff stopped, or that his suffering had come to an end. The word Jesus uses here means finished in the sense of "It is accomplished." It is to finish by completing a work (See John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:28).

Everything in the OT points toward this day, and everything in the NT looks back to this day. The rest of the NT looks back on this event, this one weekend, and proclaims it, and explains how it applies to us. In fact the gospel which is to be proclaimed to all the world is called "the word (or, message) of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18). It is the work of redemption, of salvation. Whereby Jesus, the righteous One bore the sins of the unrighteous ones and satisfied God's justice.

"...he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself... by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 9:26; 10:10, 14)

Jesus was not merely a good man who died as a holy martyr. His death is more than just a demonstration of God's love. He did not come primarily to be a good teacher, or be a good example. He came to reveal God's righteousness and goodness in himself, and then to die

sacrificially that we might be able to partake of that. His death is a cosmic act that eternally saves a multitudes of people. We call this, atonement. "It is accomplished." This is followed by Christ's physical and glorious resurrection, which is the beginning of the new creation.

Application: when I don't feel saved. My salvation rests upon this work of Jesus not my feelings. I don't need to ask Jesus to come into my heart again and again, and to check my level of sincerity, or have my thumb on my spiritual pulse. It's really not about me. This is an accomplished work for all sinners to be received by faith alone. Not big faith, not little faith, not really, really sincere faith, but faith. I believe this is true and that it is true for me. It is not my goodness in view here, but his. Not my sincerity, but his. Not my anything, but my sin. As a sinner I have only one thing to offer Jesus, and that's my sin. Faith is believing what he said, what he did, and that this and this alone is what is sufficient for my salvation. Not even how much, how little, how pure my faith is. Faith is a receiving hand. It can be little, it can be weak, it can be dirty. It just needs to reach out and receive.

Like many of you I have been watching the Olympics. It is amazing to watch seemingly perfect gymnastics routines penalized by the judges (one-tenth of a point off because her toe was pointing the wrong way). Nadia Comăneci, however, in the 1976 Olympics received a perfect 10. You and I could never do this. We cannot criticize it. We cannot buy it. It is perfection. Perfection cannot be added to, or changed, it can only be received and admired. This is faith, to stand in awe of the work that Christ did. Perfection. We cannot add to without diminishing it (like trying to add anything to the paintings in the NY Met, for which you would get arrested). Such perfection can only be received, admired, and loved. Or we do not see it and turn away.

Jesus died for Christians too. He died for you as a complete person, in view of all you would need to enter the new heavens and new earth. He did not just die for your non-Christian life; he died for all of you, for your sins, and for your feeble works as his child. God sees us through the atonement of his Son. For this reason we must live Cross-centered lives.

3. The centrality of the Cross. (application)

Jesus' death and resurrection are the center point of the history of redemption. The Old Testament looks forward to it; the New Testament proclaim and explains it. It is the beginning of Scripture, Genesis 3, the Promised Offspring who crushes the serpent's head while receiving the poisonous wound. To Revelation and the conquering Lamb who had been slain and purchased for God multitudes by his blood: "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev 7:14)

The Gospel, the proclamation of the "word of the Cross," is to be central to my life and yours too. This gospel proclamation is "of first importance..."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

It is this message which we received, upon which we stand, and by which we are being saved. It is "of first importance". It's not just an introduction to salvation, a Christianity 101 prerequisite that we pass and move along from. It's the heart of all the Scriptures and the heart of the Christian's life.

How should an abiding awareness of Christ's death affect our life? What does the Cross-centered life look like? How does every aspect of the Christian life track back to the Cross?

I took some time to track down how the NT writers apply or appeal to Christ's death in application to the believers life. I came up with 30 passages!

Let me just mention a few**

****The Cross** helps me understand God. At the cross all of God's attributes converge, to be seen like the facets of a diamond: his righteousness, mercy, justice, power, wisdom, holiness, love, omnipresence, immutability, etc. **1 Corinthians 1:24** ...*Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* **Romans 3:25** *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*

Through the cross I am justified (declared righteous) by his blood: **Romans 5:9** *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

****By the cross** I have confidence of entering God's presence. Here is motivation to pray and to stop avoiding God! I enter by Jesus' merit, not mine. **Hebrews 10:19-20** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,*

I have redemption in his blood: **Ephesians 1:7** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*

Through his death I have been brought near to God: **Ephesians 2:13** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

I am part of the New Covenant by his blood: **1 Corinthians 11:25** *In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

It is his blood that cleanses my conscience so that I might be free to serve him: **Hebrews 9:14** *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

****The cross** shows me how far God would go to rescue me. I see here the clearest demonstration of the love of God. (Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20) **Revelation 1:5** *Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood*

When I am unsure, I see a completed salvation there because of his **once-for-all (forever valid) offering for sin**. **Hebrews 10:12** *But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at*

the right hand of God, **Hebrews 10:14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

****At the cross** I see that Satan was also defeated there and disarmed. Herein is the basis of victory in spiritual warfare in the believer's life. **Colossians 2:14-15** by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities¹ and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

****In giving his Son**, I see God's giving heart there. If he would give his Son for me, then there is nothing, nothing, nothing that I need that he will withhold. And much more given besides! **Romans 8:32** "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

It is the hearing of faith in **Christ crucified** which brings the power of the Spirit: **Galatians 3:1-3** It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

The Cross is where I go to realize that I too have died with him and the secret to my life now is him living in me: **Galatians 2:20** It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. This is the secret to victory over sin, knowing that I've died with him: **Romans 6:6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

I see that **I have a cross** to take up in following Christ. That there is at the cross an invitation to come out and share in Christ's reproach. **Mark 8:34** And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (That being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, means I too take up a cross, that is I die to myself and openly identify with Jesus, and gladly bear any hardship that comes from following him, including the rejection and scorn of the world.) **Hebrews 13:12-13** So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

I look **to the cross** when I get tired of fighting the fight: Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Hebrews 12:2-3)

****That it is the power of the Cross** that frees me from the tyranny of the world and brings me into the new creation. There is wonderful liberty when I consciously serve the crucified Lord who accomplished all things for me: **Galatians 6:14** But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Preaching Christ crucified manifests the wisdom and power of God. **1 Corinthians 1:17-18** For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The Cross means I have a simple message: **1 Corinthians 2:2** *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

****The cross** means I have a new way to look at weakness. So it is really true that when I am weak I am strong, because this was true of my Lord. **2 Corinthians 13:4** *For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.*

****The Cross** means I have a new way of relating to all others, at the level ground of the Cross. The cross has a humbling effect, killing self-righteousness and the desire to press our supposed rights. The cross breaks our pride, and I have the freedom to stop being a jerk. I can truly say that it is the cross that has saved (preserved) our marriage these many years. **Ephesians 2:16** *and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.* **Colossians 1:20** *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Our communion together is in his blood: **1 Corinthians 10:16** *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*

It is not my offering myself to God that makes my life holy, it is **his offering himself** for me, once for all, that makes me holy. **Hebrews 10:10** *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

Christ crucified means I have a new way to walk in love before God: **Ephesians 5:2** *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

The Cross reminds me that there is no other offering, no other thing I can do to pay for my sin that he hasn't already done. **Hebrews 10:18** *Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The worst thing to happen in life is if I reject **that sacrifice**, or spurn it, or turn away from it, how serious that is and worthy of eternal judgment: **Hebrews 10:26-27** *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

The blood of Christ brings me true cleansing. **1 John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.* **Revelation 7:14** *They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

The precious blood of Christ exceeds all perishable things, and anything I've ever inherited. **1 Peter 1:18-19** *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

Christ's death means I have been healed so that I might live for righteousness. **1 Peter 2:24** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

By the blood of the Lamb I will overcome. **Revelation 12:11** *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

I know how things will end, and how **the slain Lamb** is actually the conquering Lion of Judah:

Revelation 5:9-10 *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,"¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

Is the Christ crucified and risen at the center of your heart and thoughts and affections? Are you living a Cross-centered life? Can you see how every one of your blessings tracks back to what Jesus accomplished upon the cross?