

Why the Cross?

Meditations On The Cross #1 – Pastor Gary Combs – March 10, 2024 – 1 Corinthians 1:17-25

INTRO: Good morning church! We're beginning a new series today entitled, "Meditations On the Cross." This is a series that will lead us to answer several important questions about the cross of Christ. I suppose the first question, is "Why the Cross?" Because a lot of people today just don't understand the need for it.

In R. J. Neuhaus's, Death on a Friday Afternoon, a book that contemplates the Crucifixion. Dr. Neuhaus asks,

"Why is it that this One had to die, why is it that His dying is for us death's death, why is it that His open tomb opens for every last child of earth the door to tomorrows without end?" — R. J. Neuhaus, *Death On A Friday Afternoon*

Why indeed? Neuhaus writes of one young woman who had quit Christianity in favor of a New Age empowerment group. Her reason?

"I was sick and tired of all that talk about blood and suffering. I wanted a positive spirituality." Another business woman said, "My problem is with the cross, why Jesus had to die, this whole business about sacrifice and blood. I just don't get it."

A lot of people "just don't get it." Sometime ago a *Newsweek* cover story was entitled "Visions of Jesus: How Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists View Him." Kenneth Woodward, author of the article, found that people of every faith found something to admire about Jesus. The Jews find a good rabbi to debate the Torah with, the Muslims see the "Isa ibn Maryam— Jesus, the son of Mary, the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an." They even defend His virgin birth and believe in His future return to defeat the Antichrist. The Hindus admire His "god-consciousness." The Buddhists see Him as the spiritual brother of the Buddha, a perfectly enlightened being who vows to help others attain enlightenment."

But even though Woodward found much in Jesus that unifies people of every faith, he concludes that the message of the cross is what makes Christianity unique. He says,

"Clearly, the cross is what separates the Christ of Christianity from every other Jesus. In Judaism there is no precedent for a Messiah who dies, much less as a criminal as Jesus did. In Islam, the story of Jesus' death is rejected as an affront to Allah himself. Hindus can accept only a Jesus who passes into peaceful samadhi, a yogi who escapes the degradation of death. The figure of the crucified Christ, says Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, 'is a very painful image to me. It does not contain joy or peace, and this does not do justice to Jesus.' There is, in short, no room in other religions for a Christ who experiences the full burden of mortal existence." — Kenneth Woodard

For some, there is no room for the Christ of the Cross.

Need: How about you? Do you see the need for Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for your sins? Do you understand its significance? Do you believe that people are separated from God in this world, struggling with sin, addiction, and death without God's intervention? Do you believe that people who die separated from God will spend eternity without Him in a place called Hell?

BODY: In the apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, he explained why the message of the cross of Christ was crucial to their salvation. We can understand why the message of the cross is crucial to our salvation. Why is the message of the cross crucial to our salvation? The text gives **three reasons** why the message of the cross is crucial to our salvation.

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 (ESV) ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IS CRUCIAL TO OUR SALVATION...

1. Because it reveals the terrible nature of our sin.

EXP: (17-18) Notice the word "cross" in v. 17 and v. 18. Paul spoke of the "cross of Christ" (17) and the "word of the cross" (18), which is the gospel (17). It is this message of the cross that contained the power of God to save revealing the terrible nature of our sin, which clouds our foolish minds and is at work bringing death to our bodies. "Flee from sin and recognize its ugliness by looking at the cross of Christ." - Dr. Jack Graham

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“Preach the Gospel” (17) (εὐαγγελίζω, *euangelizō*) - to bring good news, to announce glad tidings

“Wisdom” (17, 9x) (σοφία, *sophia*) - wisdom, to be wise.

“Cross” (17) (σταυρός, *stauros*) - an instrument of cruel punishment and execution for criminals

“Emptied of its power” (17) (κενός, *kenō*) - to make empty, deprive of force, useless, of no effect.

“Word of the cross” (18) (λόγος, *logos*) - speech, doctrine, message of the cross, which is the gospel.

“Folly” (18, 4x) (μωρία, *mōria*) - silliness, absurdity, foolishness, where we get the word “moron.”

“Perishing” (18) (ἀπόλλυμι, *apollumi*) (PP, present participle) - to destroy, abolish, dying.

“Being saved” (18) (σώζω, *sōzō*) (PP, present participle) - to save, rescue, In the process of rescue.

“Power of God” (18) (δύναμις, *dunamis*) - strength, power, ability, inherent power.

ARG: Christ took our sin upon Himself on the cross. He put the ugly curse of our sin on display.

Galatians 3:13 (NLT) But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

1 Peter 2:24 (NIV) “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”

ILL: Look at the cross. Here God spent His wrath that was meant for us on Him who knew no sin. Here mankind executes an innocent man in the most barbaric way ever invented. Both Jew and Gentile conspire to murder the Son of God.

- The physical pain and suffering that sin brings.
- The separation from God that sin causes.
- The death that sin brings.

Look there! Do you see the betrayal of Judas that sold Him out? Do you see the injustice of the Roman governor Pilate, who washed his hands of Jesus’ blood? Do you see the foolishness of the rioting crowd that chose the criminal Barabas over Jesus? Do you see the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders who yelled, “Crucify him!” Do you see the sadistic bent of the Roman soldiers as they apply their trade of torture, humiliation, and execution? Look there! Do you see your sin that put Jesus on that cross? It wasn’t the nails that held Him there. It was my sin, your sin!

APP: The message of the cross is the only message that takes seriously our sin problem. Has your contemplation of the cross caused you to recognize your own part in Christ’s crucifixion? Have you confessed your sin and your need for His sacrificial death in your place? This is a matter of repentance.

2. Because it reveals the powerful love of our Savior.

EXP: (19-21) The message of the cross reveals the powerful love of Jesus in that He willingly died in our place. This is beyond worldly wisdom. Indeed, it “destroys the wisdom of the wise” (19; quoting Isa. 29:14). For instead of a conquering king as worldly wisdom seeks, Jesus came as a sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He came as the One who lays down His life for His friends. As Jesus said,

John 15:13 (ESV) Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

So Paul said his preaching seemed like folly to the world. For he preached the message of the cross of Christ, which is the message of God’s love.

“Destroy” (19) (ἀπόλλυμι, *apollumi*) - same word as verse 18 of those who are perishing, to destroy

“Discernment” (19) (σύνεσις, *sunesis*) - knowledge, understanding. (Quoting Isa. 29:14)

“Scribe” (20) (γραμματεὺς, *grammateus*) - a scribe, recorder, “a man learned in the Mosaic law and in the sacred writings, an interpreter, teacher.” (Strongs)

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“**Debater**” (20) (συζητητής, *suzētētēs*) - a disputer, i.e. a learned disputant, sophist

“**God made foolish**” (20) (μωραίνω, *mōrainō*) - to make foolish, to prove a person or a thing foolish

“**Did not know God through wisdom**” (21) - the knowledge of God is not something we discover but something that He reveals to us. The gospel is specific revelation.

“**Pleased God**” (21) (εὐδοκέω, *eudokeō*) - think it good, choose, determine, decide, to be well pleased

“**Folly of what we preach**” (21) (κήρυγμα, *kērugma*) - that which is proclaimed by a herald or public crier, a proclamation by herald; in the NT the message or proclamation of the heralds of God or Christ.

“**Save those who believe**” (21) (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) (PP) - to trust, to be persuaded of, believe, have faith

ARG: **It wasn't the nails, but our sin and Christ's love that held Him on the cross!**

Romans 5:8 (NIV) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:10 (NLT) This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

ILL: Look there and listen! Listen to the words of Jesus on the cross! “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” – He lovingly forgives those who torture, abuse, humiliate, mock, and murder him! – “Today you shall be with me in paradise.” – He lovingly attends to his fellow sufferer and gives him hope of eternal life. – “Woman, behold, your son! Behold, your mother!” – He lovingly cares for his mother, asking his disciple John to take of her for him. – “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” – He is separated from His Father, that we might be adopted into God's family.

APP: The message of the cross is the only message that reveals a loving God who so closely identifies Himself with us. Have you made the decision to receive Him as your savior? This is a matter of relationship.

3. Because it reveals the only way for our salvation.

EXP: (22-25) The message of the cross is the only message with the power to save. To those of us who have heard the Lord call to us through the gospel it is both the only power and only wisdom that can save us.

“**Jews demand signs**” (22) (σημεῖον, *sēmeion*) - “God had manifested himself to them by miracles and wonders in a remarkable manner in past times, and demanded it when any new messenger came.” (Barnes)

“**Greeks seek wisdom**” (22) (“Ἕλλην, *Hellēn*) - “Greeks seek wisdom—namely, a philosophic demonstration of Christianity. But Christianity begins not with solving intellectual difficulties, but with satisfying the heart that longs for forgiveness.” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown)

“**But we preach Christ crucified**” (23) (σταυρώω, *staurōō*) - “The gospel of Christ crucified made its way by those very qualities which they regarded as “weakness and folly,” vindicating itself as “the power of God,” more mighty than any “sign” a Jew might ask for; and “the wisdom of God” surpassing any merely intellectual “wisdom” which a Greek might desire.” (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers)

“**Stumbling block to Jews**” (23) (σκάνδαλον, *skandalon*) - any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall. Christ's crucifixion was “scandalous” to the Jews.

“**Folly to Gentiles**” (23) - Again folly or absurd to the wisdom of the Greeks.

“**Who are called**” (24) (κλητός, *klētos*) - called, invited (to a banquet), invited (by God in the proclamation of the Gospel) to obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom through Christ.

“**Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**” (24) - Here is the summary statement, to the called, the Gospel is true power and wisdom.

“**God is wiser...stronger**” (25) - The message of the cross is the “opposite” (Chrysostom) of what both the Greek and the Jew seek. Yet, the word of the cross is wiser and stronger to save.

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ARG: It pleased God to save us by the blood of Christ on the cross.

Colossians 1:19-21 (NLT) ¹⁹ For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, ²⁰ and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. ²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions.

There is only One mediator who offered himself to save us: Christ Jesus

1 Timothy 2:3-6 (ESV) ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

ILL: Look at the cross and listen. Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" What was finished? The payment for our salvation was "Paid-in-full!"

It was this message of the cross that Peter preached at Pentecost: (Acts 2:36-41 NIV) "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

APP: The message of the cross is the only message that offers the gift of eternal life to those that believe. Have you knelt at the foot of the cross of Christ? Have you made this cross your banner? Will you believe and bear witness to the One who bought your salvation with His own blood?

CONCLUSION: Look again at the cross of Christ. See the crowds, the soldiers, the thieves on either side, do you see anyone else? Were you there? Yes, you were and so was I. We were all there.

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? – Mahalia Jackson

Oh, were you there when they crucified my Lord? (2X)

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble

Were you there when they nailed him to the cross? (2X)

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? (2X)

Were you there when the stone was rolled away? (2X)

Will you respond to the message of the cross of Christ today?

1. Will you let the message of Christ's terrible suffering bring you to repentance and confession of sin?
2. Will you let the message of Christ's sacrificial love bring you to a commitment to follow Him as Lord?
3. Will you let the message of Christ's provision for your sin move you to trust Him as Savior?

Let's pray.