

Why the Empty Cross?

Meditations On the Cross #4 - Pastor Gary Combs - Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024 - Romans 6:4-11

INTRO: Good morning church! Happy Easter! He is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Today we are continuing our sermon series today entitled, "Meditations On the Cross." In today's sermon we're asking the question: "Why the Empty Cross?" Of all the symbols that Christians might have chosen as an emblem of the faith, why the cross? The answer is that the cross points to Christ's death as payment for our sins and the fact that the cross is empty points to Christ's resurrection as the power that gives us new life in Him. The empty cross points to the empty tomb! It points to the reality that Jesus defeated sin, death and the grave, so that we might have new life in Him. In the gospel of John, Jesus said:

John 14:19 (ESV) ... Because I live, you also will live.

John 10:10 (NLT) ... My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

Need: Are you living a "rich and satisfying life?" Everyone wants to live the good life. Isn't that the American dream? To live the good life?

ILL: Webster's Definition for "The Good Life:" ¹ the kind of life that people with a lot of money are able to have, ie "She grew up poor, but now she's living the good life." ² a happy and enjoyable life, ie "She gave up a good job in the city to move to the country in search of the good life."

The Pew Research Center did a study asking Americans what they makes a life a good life. The top three results? 1) 69% said family, 2) Career 34%, and 3) Money 23%.

Need: There's only one problem. Once people achieve the so-called "good life," they find it isn't good enough. Because there are three dirty little secrets about the good life that nobody likes to talk about:

One, people feel exhausted. They're worn out. They say, "I'm tired all the time. I can't keep up the pace. I'm overloaded. When I get home in the evening, I crash. I'm worn out. I'm out of energy. I'm exhausted." Exhaustion always leads to the second thing...

... Emptiness. You say, "I don't think I've got another thing in me. I couldn't sign up for another thing, I couldn't take on another assignment or project or commitment. I'm stretched to the limit. And I'm empty inside." In those quiet moments we're thinking, "If this good life is so good how come I'm still unsatisfied? Why don't I feel more meaning in my life? And, by the way, what is the meaning of all this? Getting more and having more and accomplishing more. What's the meaning behind it? If it's so good, why don't I feel more satisfied?" Then Emptiness leads to...

... Enslavement. People say, "I feel trapped. I feel trapped by my debt. I feel trapped in a relationship, either with a girlfriend or boyfriend or in a marriage. I feel trapped by the expectations of other people around me. I feel trapped by guilt. I feel trapped by fear. I feel trapped by my own anger. I feel trapped by bitterness with somebody who's hurt me. I'm even a slave to my schedule."

Trans: Do you ever feel emptiness, exhaustion, or enslavement? Then, I've got good news for you today. There's something better than the good life. There's a better life, a new life found only in Jesus Christ! Because the empty cross points to both Christ's death as payment for our sins and Christ's resurrection as power for a new life.

BODY: In the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, he told them that it was being united with Christ in His death and resurrection that made it possible for them to live a new life. We can experience this new life in union with Christ's death and resurrection. How can we experience this new life? The text gives two ways we can experience new life in union with Christ's death and resurrection.

Today's text: Romans 6:4-11 (ESV) ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 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. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

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HOW TO EXPERIENCE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST:

1. Consider yourself dead to sin in Christ.

EXP: (4-7, 11a) Look at v.11. This is Paul's summary with two applications. The first is to consider yourselves dead to sin. As it regards your former life, which was controlled by sin, count yourself dead in Christ. Why? So that we "might walk in newness of life" (4).

"Consider" (11) (λογίζεσθε, *logizesthe* - Pres/Mid/Imp) - reckon, count, reason. Lit., "reason to a logical conclusion." In the Greek middle voice, "consider yourselves." An internal combo of knowledge and will.

"Dead to sin" (11) (νεκρούς μὲν τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ) Lit., "dead indeed to sin." Also, dead to the **"old self"** (6) which was "crucified" with Christ. **"Brought to nothing"** (6) (καταργηθῆ, *katargēthē*) - to be entirely idle, literally or figuratively; rendered powerless, annulled, destroyed.

"With him" (4,5,6,8) - 5x "with him" or "with Christ" (8). This speaks of the believers union or oneness with and in Christ. In v.5, twice it says we are "united with him."

"United" (5) (σὺμφυτος, *sumphutos*) - Lit., "planted together." Also, born together with, of joint origin. United. The New Testament uses two interchangeable expressions to describe union with Christ:

1) We are in Christ

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2) Christ is in us

Romans 8:10 (NLT) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.

"Baptism" (4) - Water baptism is a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection. "Burial certifies the reality of death" (Robert Mounce, *NAC: Romans*, p.151) Yet in this case, it speaks of our identification and union with Christ. The symbol of baptism points to its reality in the Spirit, namely we have "put on Christ."

Galatians 3:27(ESV) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

"Might walk" (4) (περιπατήσωμεν, *peripatesomen*) - "To walk" is a metaphor for "to live," or manner or quality of life. The subjunctive, "might," indicates that such life is possible, but with conditions.

"Newness of life" (4) (καινότητι ζωῆς, *zoē*) - newness, new state or condition. Of life, both of present and future life. Spiritual life. Quality: abundant; quantity: eternal.

"In order that" (4, 6) - Conditional result. Christ's death accomplished God's purpose to save us from our sin. This is why Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Mission accomplished. Paid in full.

What is the result of considering yourself dead to sin? (6-7)

- Old nature has been "brought to nothing" (6) - Literally, "made inoperative, inactive." Abolished, severed.

- No longer "enslaved to sin" (6) - Sin is no longer your master. Sin has lost its power over you.

- "Set free from sin" (7) - Sin's penalty has been paid. You are free of sin's penalty.

ARG: Our union with Christ is a life of faith in Christ, counting our flesh crucified with Him.

Galatians 2:20 (ESV) I have been crucified with Christ. 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.

ILL: I am in union with my wife. On June 2, 1979, we said "I do." Since then, the Bible says that we are "one flesh." When I became one with my wife, I died to all others. I died to my single life and to all other women.

APP: This is the hard part of following Christ for many. You have to admit that your former life isn't good enough. You're a sinner. But you have to admit it. How can we "consider" ourselves dead to sin? First, we must know something, and then as an act of the will we choose to believe it. Will you count your our old self as crucified with Christ and consider yourself dead to sin?

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2. Consider yourself alive to God in Christ.

EXP: (11b) Look at v.11 again. "...consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Consider yourself "alive to God in Christ Jesus." This implies that your previous condition was alive to sin and dead to God—a terrible and tragic reality! But if we are in union with Christ, then we are also raised with Him!

"Raised" (4,9) (ἠγέρθη) - Raised up, aroused, awakened.

"Resurrection" (5) (ἀνάστασις) - Lit., "To stand up again." Rise again. One must be down in order to be raised, they must first die in order to be resurrected.

"Live with Him" (8) - This is not only a promise of eternal life in heaven, but "a life to be lived out here and now" (Robert Mounce, *NAC: Romans*, p.152). To truly live, one first must die... die to sin to live to God.

"Never die again" (9) - Unlike Lazarus, Christ's resurrection is permanent. Sin and death are defeated. Christ is the Victor. Death no longer has dominion. "The cross was sin's final move; the resurrection was God's checkmate. The game is over" (Dr. Robert Mounce, *NAC: Romans*, p.152).

"Died to sin" (10) - Here, not "for" sin's payment, but "to" sin's power. He has disarmed both death and sin's dominion over those who are in union with Him.

"Once for all" (10) - Lit., "once for all time." Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all time. No need for repetition. (Heb. 10:10-12 - "...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...")

"Lives to God... alive to God" (10, 11) - Christ now lives "to" God, being united with Him, we can also count ourselves alive "to" God. The dative "to" describes our new relationship, first with sin (dead to its power/effect) and second with God (alive to His power/effect).

Benefits of being alive to God in Christ:

- Resurrection like His - With a resurrection, glorified body
- Live with Christ - In a place prepared for us
- Never die again, death has no power, dominion.
- Alive to God - Spiritually alive, born again in the Spirit.

ARG: Once, we were dead to God in our sins, but God has made us alive with Christ!

Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV) 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...

Set your mind on your union with the resurrected Christ.

Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV) If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

ILL: "Spiritual life flows out of union with Christ, not merely imitation of Christ." — Dr. Richard F. Lovelace

APP: Since we have been raised with Christ, let us consider ourselves alive to God in Christ!

CONCLUSION: Will you decide to do what you witnessed these who were baptized today doing? Will you consider the empty cross? Will you choose to live your best life now by receiving Christ as you Lord and Savior?

Romans 10:9 (ESV) ...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Will you...

- 1) Consider yourself dead to sin in Christ?
- 2) Consider yourself alive to God in Christ?

Let's pray.