

The Message of the Cross

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References: **John 19**, John 19:25-27; Exodus 20:12; Galatians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; Isaiah 6:8; Luke 2:49; Philippians 2:5-8; Matthew 27:46; John 14:6; John 3:16; Acts 2:23; Ephesians 2:3; Ephesians 2:13; Galatians 2:20; John 19:34

Good morning. This brings back quite a few memories to me this morning. For about 40 years, I guess, something like that, I had the privilege of being a traveling preacher. And quite often, what would happen is you'd have your opening, and then you would have the announcement that the visiting preacher was coming. And then they would say, "And the Sunday school can be dismissed." And it seemed like more people left than stayed. And I thought, maybe we shouldn't say it exactly like that. But there was a good number going out, and we thank God for that this morning.

Two little girls—two little girls were talking, and one said to the other, "Do you know the story of how God created Adam and Eve?" This little girl said, "Yes, I remember that story very well." She said, "God created Adam, and he looked at him and said, 'I can do better than that,' and he created Eve." So there you go.

The Importance of Mothers

Happy Mother's Day to all of you today. Did you know that mothers are mentioned 327 times in the Bible? It's amazing. They're very important. Matter of fact, there's not too many things that everybody in the world—I don't forget how many now, excuse me, if there's 7 billion, 8 billion, I'm not sure—but we all have one thing in common. All of us. Like, everybody. Like, you might say, "Well, I don't have anything in common with you and another culture, another people, another language." Yes, you do! One thing we all have in common—are you ready for this? This is not rocket science—we all have a **mother**. You got it! Yes, everybody has a mother.

Now, my dad was my hero and my best friend. I'm so sad for all the times I disappointed my dad, but one day I had the privilege of leading my dad to the Lord because I was the first one saved in my family, and I took the good news home, and my dad trusted the Lord. And like I said, he's my best friend, my hero before, but even more so after, he was my brother in Christ. And my mother was the second one in our family to get saved.

And, you know, as much of a friend as my dad was, and a good friend, there's something about mothers. I know. You just can't deny it. It's just like, I guess, we are bound. Bound inside. Bound because she is the one that brought us into the world. And there's just something special about mothers. God bless all the mothers. The sacrifice that they make. Long nights, early mornings, nobody there. Nobody to see them, nobody to recognize them, nobody to applaud them. They march on and do the work that only mothers can do. And we certainly celebrate mothers.

Now, I want to show you a verse in the Bible. Got your Bible? Let's go to John's Gospel, chapter 19. John's Gospel and chapter 19. And I'm going to read in verse 25. Now, in the context, the Lord Jesus is on the cross. He has made his way to the cross. They led him away, and they have crucified him there. Look at verse 25, John chapter 19:

[John 19:25 NKJV]

²⁵ Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

You can only imagine what she's thinking. This is Mary, the mother. This is the virgin who conceived. This is his mother who saw him take his first step, who led him down to Joseph's carpenter shop, who watched him grow up as a child, who stood beside him in every event in life. She's there. And now he's dying on a cross. Guess who's there? His mother's there. It's undeniable. Let's read it a little closer.

[John 19:25-27 NKJV]

²⁵ Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" ²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it or not, but there were **three Marys** there. Kind of interesting. There's just something special about mothers. And one thing I want to say about Mary was that she stood with him as long as she could. And John, the beloved disciple, took Mary, the mother of Jesus, to his own home. Jesus taking care of his mother. Jesus appointing John, the disciple, to take care of her.

I don't know if you ever thought about it. Jesus says to John, "Would you substitute for me?" Now, Jesus is the Substitute. He's on the cross dying for man's sins. He says to John, "Would you take my place?" Not on the cross—nobody could go to the cross but Jesus. "Would you take my place as a son of Mary?" And John took her to his own home that day, and Jesus fulfilling the commandment to honor your father and mother:

[Exodus 20:12 NKJV]

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

He couldn't go home with Mary that day. He couldn't go back to the carpenter's shop. He couldn't just go back and lead an ordinary life. Jesus, our Substitute, is on the cross, bleeding, suffering, dying, and in three days would raise from the dead because he is the only Savior. But Mary was there.

The Reality of the Cross

Now let's talk for a minute about the cross. The cross is an interesting symbol of Christianity. Most people think, "Well, there's a cross," and some crosses have jewels or precious stones on them; some are engraved on Bibles, in the leather of the cover of your Bible; some are etched into people's clothes; some hang from our necks or from our ears; some are affixed to the top of a church or of buildings; some are on bumper stickers.

But the cross that I want to talk about this morning is not that kind of a cross. When referring to a cross, it is not a good luck charm. It's not as some people would think of the four-leaf clover or a horseshoe—keeps me from evil or having accidents. It's not any of those things. When the scriptures refer to the cross, I want to remind you that we're not talking just about two beams that make a cross; we're talking about the **person on the cross**. Okay? Paul would write and say:

[Galatians 6:14 NKJV]

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

I suspect it would be possible that that cross on which the Lord Jesus was nailed had been used before. It was the Romans' way of dealing with criminals. This was their means of

execution. And I can't imagine that they'd build a new cross every time they used it. So it's possible other people were nailed to that same cross. It's possible that others were nailed to that cross after Jesus was taken off of that cross.

You know, sometimes we sing a hymn, but I challenge you with this. It goes like this: "I will cherish the old rugged cross." No, I got the thought. I see the emotion. I got that. But we don't cherish timber or boards made out of a tree. We cherish the **Person** that was nailed to that cross. It's actually the Person himself that makes that cross significant and nobody else. So the scriptures have a lot to say about the cross. About the Lord Jesus on the cross.

I want you to think with me for a moment. How do you think about that? Maybe I could ask it this way: What is your response to the cross? Now, I'd like for you to take your Bibles and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. If you're in John, you just keep going toward the end of your Bible and get to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and I'm going to read verse 18:

[1 Corinthians 1:18 NKJV]

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Now there are two responses in that verse to the cross. If you have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Savior, it makes perfect sense to you. You go, "Okay, I got it. I'm the sinner, and he's the Savior, and he took my place. I deserve to die, but I didn't die. Jesus died for me, took my sins in his own body on the tree, and I got it." And the preaching of the cross is not foolishness to me.

I remember on one occasion, I was trying to share the message of the cross with a total stranger. You know what he said to me? "That's foolishness," he said. I said, "That's just what the Bible says." And I showed him this verse. The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. He didn't say any more. I didn't say any more. He want his way, I want my way. Two years passed, and then a Sunday night meeting, this man walks in to the chapel and he said, "Do you remember me?" And I said, "No, I don't remember you." And he told me about that conversation that we had had, and he said two years passed, and he said, "I couldn't get that out of my head: 'The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.'" But he said, "I got saved! I trusted Christ as my Savior, and it's not foolish to me anymore."

God's Response to the Cross

So there are different responses to the cross. And this morning, for a few moments, I want to think about this: What was God's response to the cross? Bye. God the Father, God Almighty, God in heaven—what did he think about the cross? Well, first of all, let's realize the problem, the dilemma that we are in. God is holy. The scriptures are full of references. In Isaiah chapter 6 and in Revelation chapter 4, you have these winged creatures. And these winged creatures with eyes and wings and voices, they go night and day and day and night over and over and over. You know what their song is?

[Isaiah 6:3 NKJV]

And one cried to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!"

[Revelation 4:8 NKJV]

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

That is repeated again and again and again and again. God is **holy**. Wonderful! Without sin, without fault, without blemish, God in any way and every way is completely righteous, completely pure, completely holy, and so is heaven. Now we've got a problem. What's the problem? Man is sinful. That's the problem. Mm-hmm. And you cannot let sin into a perfect place because it will pollute it. It will mar it. Now man is sinful and God is holy. We've got a problem.

God says, "I have a solution for that problem. It's called the cross." And so God has a plan. And that plan is to send his Son to earth, born of a virgin, to be without sin in any way—no, no sin, did no sin, in him was no sin, nothing to be judged, nothing to be condemned—and God sent his Son to become sin for us. He's the Substitute. Man is sinful; Jesus is not.

The Old Testament is full of sacrifices. In the Old Testament, the animal represents the innocent party, and the animal must die, must shed its blood as a substitute for sinners. Then the wrath of God could be stayed. The sinner could be forgiven. The payment was made. And in the New Testament, the Lamb of God would come, and God's response to the cross was—are you listening?—it's **absolutely necessary**.

[Ephesians 2:13 NKJV]

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

So God says, "Yes, the cross is absolutely necessary." You say, "Well, I'm not sure I'm a sinner." You're not being truthful now. Okay? You just, just, just hold on. I can prove to you that we're all sinners. Now, but by nature—you take two little babies. They can't walk yet. Okay. And you put them on the floor beside one another and you give one of them a toy to play with. Just leave them alone. Don't bother them. In a few minutes, one of them crawls over with the one that's got the toy, bobs him on the head and takes his toy away from him.

Do you ever realize you don't have to teach a child to be selfish? By nature, they're selfish. You don't have to teach a child to steal things. They say, "I want that." They don't care. All of these things that are wrong against others in the human race and wrong against the moral laws of God are by nature.

[Ephesians 2:3 NKJV]

among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

And that nature is passed on. There are a bunch of good-looking people in the auditorium this morning. I'm so glad I can see you when I look out there. But you all have something similar. All of you had a mother. I know that. But all of you had a mother and a father who were sinners because Adam brought sin into the world, and death by sin, and it has permeated the world. I know you—you're a good-looking sinner this morning, but you are a sinner, and we all are sinners. And that's the problem. God is holy and we are sinners. And God says, "I got a plan for that. A plan to forgive your sins, to wipe your sins out, to cleanse you from all sin, to make you right with me. My Son's going to take your place. The Substitute is yours."

Jesus' Response to the Cross

Well, it's one thing if God has a plan; what about Jesus? What would Jesus' response be to the cross? Well, the Bible is very clear that in eternity past, the Godhead had a meeting—that's

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and God lays the plan out, and prophetically speaking, we hear these words from the Old Testament:

[Isaiah 6:8 NKJV]

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

"Whom shall I send,

And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Jesus agrees with the plan. The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world, and Jesus said, "I'm ready to go. I'm willing to go."

Now, if you still have your Bible, let's go to the book of Philippians, just for reference. You're in Corinthians; go to Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians. Book of Philippians. You see, the Lord Jesus, at 12 years old, said, "I must be about my Father's business." That's Luke chapter 2.

[Luke 2:49 NKJV]

And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

For all of his life, he was about his Father's business, and the cross was part of that business. Every step he would take growing up led him closer to the day when he would be nailed to the cross and be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. I'm in Philippians chapter 2, and speaking about the Lord Jesus, notice it, verse 5:

[Philippians 2:5-8 NKJV]

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

The cross was an appointment. The cross was the place where God dealt with sin. The cross was the place when he unloaded the sin of the world and put it on the shoulders of his Son,

the Lord Jesus Christ, and then judged his Son as though he were the sinner. Why do you think he said, "Father, why have you forsaken me?"

[Matthew 27:46 NKJV]

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

He became sin. Sin separates us from God. Jesus was separated from God because he's paying the punishment, the penalty of our sin. Jesus' response to the cross was, "I'm willing to go." It didn't take him by surprise. He knew what was going to happen. The plan was in eternity past. He came into time; he's fulfilling that plan. Every step's taking him, taking him step by step by step. Read the gospels; they all go to one place, the place called the cross.

We had a friend, an old Irishman, you know what he said? "You got to get to the cross before you can get to heaven. You got to get to the cross before you can get to God."

[John 14:6 NKJV]

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The cross is the place you have to go. Not a wooden cross; the work that Jesus is doing on the cross. Jesus said he was willing to go. Other places in the scripture said he endured the cross. They're begging him to come down—you know that, right? He's on the cross, the mockers, the critics, all there. "Oh, you said destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it again! Come down from the cross and we'll believe!" They tempted him, they taunted him, they mocked him, they abused him, but he endured. He could have come down, of course; he's God. He's God in the flesh. He's Creator. He's orchestrating the affairs of the universe from the cockpit of the cross. He's in control, not out of control. No man would take his life; he gave himself the sacrifice for you.

The Christian's Response to the Cross

What's the Christian's response to the cross? Many of you—maybe all of you here this morning—profess that you've trusted Christ as your Savior. You say, "I've been born again." Okay. You're in Philippians; just back up to Galatians. Just two books. Go backwards now. Galatians chapter 6. And I'm asking the question: what was God's response? He said, "It's

absolutely necessary." What's Jesus' response? He said, "I'm willing to go." He was obedient unto death.

What's the Christian's response? You say you're a Christian. Say you've trusted Christ as your Savior. What's your response? Let me read verse 14. You're in Galatians chapter 6. Paul's writing, verse 14:

[Galatians 6:14 NKJV]

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Now remember, not the sticks, not the wood, not the timber—the **work of Jesus** on the cross. This is what we're talking about. What's the Christian's response? What do you brag about? What do you boast about? What do you glory in? What do you default to? You get in a conversation and the next thing you know, you come up with your favorite topic. What is that?

Paul says, "God forbid." It's strong language. Now look, let's be real. Every conversation in our life is not about the cross. I understand that. But are we ashamed? Do we despise? Or are we willing and eager to share the message of the cross? In this verse, the sinfulness of man is seen in the cross. And in the book of Acts—we won't turn there—it says:

[Acts 2:23 NKJV]

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

When you see a cross, it ought to remind you of something: Man is sinful. Man put him there. Even Pilate says, "I can't find any fault in him. Nothing wrong with him." Even the two thieves on the cross—you remember that—one of them said, "Don't you know this man's done nothing? We're here because we're guilty. He hasn't done anything." The sinfulness of man put him on that cross. When you see a cross, you ought to remember that.

The cross also should remind you of something: **the love of God**. And you see a cross, you ought to say, "There's the love of God right there." Our youngest son, Mark, was trying to memorize John 3:16. Now, some of you remember John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have

everlasting life." Some of you know that. You've committed that to memory. Here's just a little boy trying to learn that. And this is what he said. He said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only forgotten son that whoever should perish should believe on him and have everlasting life." That's not bad, you know. That's a good commentary. Excuse me. Actually, on that verse, let me say it one more time:

[John 3:16 NKJV]

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

What's a Christian's response? The cross says man did it—they're sinners. God's love steps in. God so loved, he gave, he gave, he gave his Son. That cross also reminds me it's the **only way of salvation**. Can't get there any other way. Jesus is the only name under heaven; Jesus is the only way to the Father; Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man; Jesus is the only Foundation. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! When I see a cross, I say, "That's the only way you're going to ever get your sins forgiven. You've got to get to the cross." Not of wood, not the beam, but to Jesus and the work. And it is the means of salvation.

And then this, one more in this verse: It is **separation**. It shows us separation. It said at the end of that verse about the cross, "that the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." If something is crucified, guess what? It's dead. You got it, right? That's what the cross means: death. And our verse says the world has been crucified to me. The world is dead. And I to the world. If you walk up to a casket and there's a dead man in that casket, it says he owes you five million dollars; he never paid it. You might want to talk to him about that, but he can't respond. I'm sorry. He died.

And that's the way the world needs to be to us, and we need to be to the world. Don't respond. I got a new life, a new goal in life. I got new ambitions in life. I've been born again. I belong to the Lord. I don't belong to Satan anymore. I'm not going to hell anymore; I'm going to heaven. I've got a new life to live.

[Galatians 2:20 NKJV]

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

What's your response to the cross, Christian? Listen to the words: "I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place. I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face. Content to let the world go by, to know no gain or loss. My sinful self, my only shame, my glory, O the cross."

Just You and Jesus

Let's close by thinking of one more area. Not God's response, not Jesus' response, not the Christian's response, but the crowd. Now, there stood by the cross—remember that verse? There were lots of people by the cross. Yes, his mother was there. His disciples were there. There were others there. They just wondered. They knew there was another crucifixion; they joined the crowd. Jewish leaders, religious leaders, soldiers, two thieves—they were there. Joseph and Nicodemus—remember them? They were secret disciples. They were there.

Now, in your mind, I want you to visualize this. I want you to see the cross. I want you to visualize all these people standing around the cross. The mockers shooting out accusations with their mouths. Jeers. Friends and relatives weeping. Soldiers gambling under the cross. Disciples standing in silence; they can't believe that it's all happened. The two thieves, their comments, the words of Christ—seven times he would speak from the cross.

There's a crowd. Put yourself in the crowd. Put yourself in there. Where are you standing in your mind? Are you going to join the disciples? You going to join the ladies? You going to just fade away into the back somewhere where you can't be seen? Where would you stand that day?

And now I want you to do something. We can only do this in our minds. Just take out your eraser, okay? And just erase. Start erasing. Two thieves on either side—get them out of the picture. Soldiers that are gambling, soldiers that are guarding—get them out. Erase them. Disciples—get rid of them. Mockers—get rid of them. Okay. Just a matter of fact, erase **everybody** in the scene except two people. Jesus is on the cross and you're in front. Just you and Jesus. You look at him and he looks at you. And he said, "I love you. I'm doing this for you."

What's your response? What do you say? How do you feel? What would you do? That's the way it's going to be, you know—just you and Jesus one day. And you will answer that question: What was your response to the cross?

[John 19:34 NKJV]

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

Awesome. He pulled that spear out; blood and water came. Okay. And as far as we know, he turned around and walked off. The blood of Jesus Christ dripping off the head of that spear—he stepped on it. He walked away. You're going to go out of that door as soon as I close in prayer and you're going to walk away. What's your response? Was he the Son of God? Do you believe? Are you going to tread on the blood of the Son of God as you walk out this morning?

Let's pray. Father, these things man cannot do. Only the Spirit of God in the heart of someone who has not yet trusted Christ can convince that person of their need. So we commend that individual to you this morning. And for the dear ones who know the Lord, oh Father, may we not be ashamed of the Lord Jesus. May we exalt him in our life. May we honor him and live for him, for his own namesake. Amen.