

The Cross

April 5, 2009 - Skip MacMillan

What are Lent and Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday – “A day of penitence (repentance, sorrow for sin) signified by the dabbing of ashes on the forehead and traditionally marking the beginning of Lent. The day was originally part of the discipline of public penitence and came to be used generally from the 10th century. The ash recalls Gen. 3:19’s reminder that humans are of dust” -D.H. Wheaton.

Lent – “40 day period of penitence (repentance) and prayer that begins on Ash Wednesday and is preparatory for the feast of Easter. It is a form of retreat for Christians preparing to celebrate the paschal mystery. It became a 40-day retreat during the 7th century to reflect the 40 days spent by Christ in the desert; before this Lent usually lasted only a week.”

What do we know of the Cross? Why is it important, or is it? What do you believe about the Cross?

“All heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, all hell is terribly afraid of it, while men are the only beings who more or less ignore its meaning” -Oswald Chambers.

“The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it” -A.W. Tozer.

“Christ’s cross is such a burden as sails are to a ship or wings to a bird” -Samuel Rutherford.

“Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there . . . Christ, I repeat, is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand his cross” -P.T. Forsyth.

The Story of the Cross

A Bottle of Perfume, Matthew 26:6-13

1. “She has done a beautiful thing to me” (26:10).
2. “She did it to prepare me for burial” (26:12).
 - Expensive perfume, one year’s wages
 - Mark says she broke the jar
 - John says it filled the room
 - She has anointed **Jesus’ body** for His burial
 - Jesus only received this perfume and water (John 4) according to the Scriptures

Lord’s Supper, Matthew 26:17, 20-30

1. Jesus with the 12 Disciples; He explains that **His Body** is the Passover Lamb, “My body” and “My blood.”
2. He explains that through **His body** and **His blood** there is a New Covenant with God and forgiveness of sins.
 - Explains the purpose of the Cross and His death, the forgiveness of your sins

Gethsemane, Matthew 26:36-46

1. Jesus and the 12 go to Gethsemane, then Jesus with Peter, James and John and then all alone with the Father.
2. The pressure of the Cross is beginning to be realized.

To the Disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (26:38).

First, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will but as you will" (26:39).

Second, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (26:42).

- This is the last sunset Jesus will see, the last time he will be with all His disciples
- Thursday night, the night of betrayal with a kiss, Maundy Thursday
- Here drops of blood will appear. Why? Why such anguish?
 - He sees what is coming: betrayal, denial, forsaken, wrath, payment, and the weight of sin for all those who would believe
 - The darkness is coming: "The prince of this world is coming" (John 14:30).

The Arrest and Trial, Matthew 26:47-27:66

1. Judas' betrayal

- For nationalism, moral failure (greed), or something else?
- Judas asks, "What are you willing to give me and I will hand him over to you?"
- 30 pieces of silver, the ransom price of a common slave
- It was impossible for Judas to serve both God and money; Judas chose money.
- All this with a kiss, the signal.

2. The Priests

- They come to Jesus in the night, cowards that they were, with thugs, with swords, clubs and lanterns
- Never get their hands dirty, use Judas, politically force the hand of Pilate, excite the crowds
- Ultimate manipulators
- "Envy" is what drove them, jealousy, losing control, losing their religion
- John 18:22 - "struck him (Jesus) in the face." Is this their religion?
- They could not accept His claim to be the Temple, to be the Son of God, Messiah

3. Pilate

- "able administrator, hated by Jews for misappropriating Temple money for infrastructure projects; he was hot tempered, violent and cruel. He is described by one of his contemporaries as 'a man of very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate' " -Stott, 50.
- Yet, Pilate was intrigued by Jesus, dialogued and questioned (Herod/Baptist)
- Attempts to free Jesus three times but fails and concedes
- Ultimately thwarted by a political maneuver by the Priest
 - "Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12)
 - " 'We have no king but Caesar', the chief priest answered" (John 19:16)

1 Samuel 8:6-9 "But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.' " (Destroy them in AD 70).

4. The Crowds

- Manipulated, fickle, confused, cry out "Let his blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 26:25)

5. Soldiers

- "They stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns, put a staff in his hand, knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again" (Matthew 26: 28-31)

The Cross

- Forced to carry his own cross, until Simon, a man from Cyrene was forced to
- **"The place of The Skull"** – Golgotha in Aramaic
- **The pain of the Cross** - "The prisoner would first be publically humiliated by being stripped naked. He was then laid on his back on the ground, while his hands were either nailed or roped to the horizontal wooden beam and his feet to the vertical pole. The cross was then hoisted to an upright position and dropped into a socket which had been dug for it in the ground. Usually a peg or rudimentary seat was provided to take some of the weight of the victim's body and prevent it from being torn loose. But there he would hang, helplessly exposed to intense physical pain, public ridicule, day-time heat and night-time cold" -Stott, 48.
- **Friday**, while Jesus is being placed on the cross, the lambs are being slaughtered for Passover near by.
 - Jesus is the Passover Lamb
- **Jesus' words**
 - "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23: 34)
 - "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22: 1)
 - Real pain, real forsakenness, real abandonment by the Father
 - Suffering physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually
 - Condemned to death, receiving the curse
 - Psalm 22: 1 describes it perfectly "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me."
 - "Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, He bowed his head and gave up His spirit" (John 19: 30)
- **"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" - Pilate's sign**

Man has positioned himself over God.

Finally we have conquered God, bound Him, betrayed Him with a kiss; we have gotten our own way.

Our own way is to hang God up on a tree, chanting "Crucify Him, crucify Him."
Now everything will be better, we have gotten rid of God.

Now we can continue unencumbered with our rules and regulations, creating God in our image, fulfilling our desires, thinking we are the most powerful creatures.

We have overcome God, tamed Him, beaten Him and hung Him on a tree.

But God used our most dark and evil thoughts and actions to conquer evil, sin and all that separated Him and Man.

At the Cross we see God in His purity and man at his worst!

While man was betraying, hitting, nailing, mocking, lying, and murdering Jesus:

He submitted Himself to the perceived powers of man and his intentions.

Went through with a plan which showed how unworthy the human race really is.

Determined, Jesus overcame with LOVE!

Love conquered evil.

Love conquered death.

Love conquered the authorities and powers.

Love conquered sin.

The love of God is the most powerful force in all the world.

His love was ultimately demonstrated on the Cross.

The Centrality of the Cross to followers of Jesus Christ

- ¼ to ½ of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- Early Church chose the Cross over many other potential symbols
 - Peacock (immortality), dove, athlete's victory palm, fish (ichthys – Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior) all found in the walls and ceiling of underground burial places outside of Rome where persecuted Christians probably hid. (Stott, 20)
 - Other possibilities: manger – born in, boat – preached from, towel – washed feet, stone – over the tomb, throne – divine sovereignty, dove – symbol of the Holy Spirit
 - They chose the Cross, from the second century onward; 6th cent. had Jesus on the Cross
 - Tertullian, the North African lawyer-theologian, around AD 200
 - "At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign (the cross)" -Stott, 21.
- The church has 2 Sacraments, both built around the Cross of Christ
 - Lord's Supper, remembering the body and blood of Christ on the Cross
 - Baptism, representing the new life of those who have believed in Christ's work on the Cross
- Why is it so central? Jesus Christ's mission, His time, His hour was the Cross
 - Not teaching, healing, feeding, but the Cross
 - "It was for this very reason (the Cross) I came to this hour" (John 12:27)
 - "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) (see also Mark 8:31-32; 9:31; Matt. 16:21ff)
 - Why Paul said "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14)

Why? Acts 2:23 - This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

God's Plan for the Cross

Genesis 3:15 - "he will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

Genesis 22 - "The LORD will provide" the sacrifice.

Deuteronomy 21:23 - "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."

Jesus took our curse and hung on the tree, our death, fall (disobedience to the Law).

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 hung on a tree."

Isaiah 53:6 - We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

God's plan was to substitute Himself in our place of death.

To crush the head of satan.

To take on the curse on a tree.

To have laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

"Deliberately, freely and in perfect love he has endured the judgment in our place. He has procured salvation for us, established a new covenant between God and human kind, and made available the chief covenant blessing, the forgiveness of sins. At once the curtain of the Temple, which for centuries had symbolized the alienation of sinners from God, was torn in two from top to bottom, in order to demonstrate that the sin-barrier had been thrown down by God, and the way to his presence opened (through Jesus Christ on the Cross)" -Stott, 82.

God wants to heal man, God wants to free man, God wants to bring hope to man.
The man who rebelled in the garden, who rebels today, who tramples his name, who writes Him off as absurd – God wants this man!

Our Sin called for the Cross

Where did sin go? What do you believe about sin?

Sin = defiance, arrogance, the desire to be equal with God, to never be wrong, not be accountable, everyone needs to adjust to me; to believe my ways of doing things are right and if everyone was like me the world would be a better place – God says the same thing.

Sins have become "sicknesses," "genetic," "hormonal imbalances," "inherited temper," "our parent's failures," "our upbringing" or "our social environment" -Stott, 91.

But it was our sins that sent Christ to the Cross.

"For ultimately what sent Christ there was neither the greed of Judas, nor the envy of the priest, nor the vacillating cowardice of Pilate, but our own greed, envy, cowardice and other sins, and Christ's resolve in love and mercy to bear their judgment and so put them away" -Stott, 83.

The Cross reveals the gravity of our sin, the weight, darkness and power of sin.

"our sin must be extremely horrible. Nothing reveals the gravity of sin like the cross. . . .

For if there was no way by which the righteous God could righteously forgive our unrighteousness, except that he should bear it himself in Christ, it must be serious indeed. It is only when we see this that, stripped of our self-righteousness and self-satisfaction, we are ready to put our trust in Jesus Christ as the Savior we urgently need" -Stott, 83.

Whatever I may believe about sin, God defined it on the Cross.

Your sin is more grievous than you can imagine.

Christ's death is more merciful, loving and powerful than you can imagine.

Don't deny your sin and try to wash your hands of it like Pilate: "I have nothing to do with the death of Jesus."

The Cross forces us to see the gravity of our sin.

We must see our sin on the cross to deal with it.

You will never be at rest until you face and admit your sin and see Christ's Cross.

God's Love

God's love for you drove Him to the Cross, to plan it, to do it.

The Cross forces us to consider the most complete picture of love ever demonstrated.

No one loves you as much as your heavenly Father loves you.

God did not have to rescue us.

He could have abandoned us instead of His Son.

He could have allowed us to suffer for our sins instead of His Son.

He could have allowed us to die and remain eternally separated from Him instead of His Son.

But God so loved the world He gave His one and only Son.

"He came after us in Christ. . . He pursued us even to the desolate anguish on the cross, where He bore our sin, guilt, judgment and death. . . This is love, this is grace – love to the undeserving" -Stott, 83.

What must He think of you?

Ephesians 3:17-19- His love is what is to drive us.

Slow down and look at the Cross! Dwell on it, see it for what it is!

Leave with:

You have a choice to make today and each day: am I right or is Jesus right?

Jesus said, "It is finished."

Do you believe that?

Is it finished, has he atoned for all your sins? What about that one . . . ?

You have a choice, who will you believe; yourself or Jesus on the Cross?

Jesus said, "It is Finished."

His mission is complete.

I have atoned and paid for the forgiveness of all those who will believe in Me!

I have conquered what was insurmountable, done the impossible.

It is finished and we are free!

Free to embrace God.

Free from guilt and shame.

Free to begin living.

Am I going to believe in Jesus that it is finished?

What more are you going to add to what Jesus has already accomplished?

The Call is to receive what Christ has done and do something with your life!

Mount up on wings of eagles,

Be compelled by His love,

Believe what He said and what he accomplished.

The cross of Christ calls for our deep devotion, our unceasing love, a yielding over of our lives in repentance of the old ways of behaving and thinking and calls for us to embrace a new life in Christ Jesus.

"Let your pride be broken, guilt removed, love kindled, hope restored and your character transformed" -Stott, 45.

Hebrews 12:2 - "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."