

Aspects of the cross (1)

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[0 : 00] Fifty-one years ago, this logo, which has now become a bit of an icon in this country, was doodled on the back of an envelope on a London Underground train.

! How many of you know what this actually signifies? Some put their hand up and then put them down. It's not a trick question, it's just...

Right, if I see that on a pole somewhere, it tells me there's probably a railway station somewhere near. It's a really understandable and accessible logo.

Here's another picture. Now what does this mean? What does this mean?

It's a massive symbol. It's been around for thousands of years. It is universal. But what does it mean?

[1 : 11] This symbol has been crafted into a million necklaces.

You may be wearing one today. But I put at the top of this a symbol of what? What does it mean when a person wears this clean, shiny cross?

It's open to many interpretations. Is it fashion? Does it give you comfort?

Is it superstitious? Is it for protection? Why do people wear the cross? At the other end of the spectrum, the cross is seen as a sign of suffering.

I've chosen the least gruesome poster from the film *The Passion of the Christ*, which came out in 2004.

[2 : 30] How many actually saw this film? Can you see it? Extraordinary film. I wouldn't actually recommend you should go and see it particularly.

But it represents a strand of thought, especially in Roman Catholicism, which is that the cross is a sign of pain and suffering.

One might say an instrument of torture. What a contrast between the shiny symbol and this violent death-like emblem.

In Roman Catholicism, and I can speak from experience on this subject, at the time of Good Friday, it will be common practice for Catholic people to walk quietly around the building, observing the stations of the cross.

The Via Dolorosa. The Via Dolorosa. The way of sorrow. Step by step, walking in the footsteps of Jesus in his final hours, and reflecting upon that deep sorrow that overwhelmed the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 02] the stations of the cross. There are a myriad of different symbols that we could have put up there.

If I had a red cross and put it on a white piece of cloth, I could either be an England football supporter, or I might be a member of the National Front.

If I put a red cross and put it on a military shield, I could be regarded as an imperialist crusader.

So what does the cross mean for you? It's because of these myriad of cultural accompaniments that you'll find it very hard to look around this building and actually see the symbol of the cross.

And although we haven't necessarily talked about this in recent years or thought about it in great detail, there is a very good reason for not having such a symbol present.

[5 : 17] Because if you see that symbol, that symbol will bring back to your memory a thousand different ideas, which are very personal to you, but they may not be the ideas of the Bible.

And it's our intention over the next two Sundays to actually look very carefully at what the Scriptures have to say about the cross.

What the Bible itself has to say about the cross. Because it has a great deal to say. The first question that you might wish to have answered is this one.

What does the cross mean for us? What does it mean for this congregation? What does it mean for you? It is clearly so important.

It is something which is hugely remembered as we come into Easter time. And so that's a very good question. But it's not the question we're going to be addressing today.

[6 : 33] And I do so for a deliberate sense because the cross is such a human thing. The scene of Calvary is so earthly!

That it can be very difficult for us to recognise another reality, which the Scripture, I would suggest, exalts to an even greater measure than the personal.

And it is what does the cross mean for God? What does the cross mean for God? What does the cross mean for God? We're going to think about this this morning.

And we're going to look at that through means of specific Scriptures. And specific ideas that the Bible speaks about.

It's a vast subject. It actually and truly fills the entire Bible. And next week, we're going to look at what the cross means for us.

[7 : 49] Firstly, that the cross reveals the heart of God's purposes. I want to take you back to the very beginning. The beginning of our Bibles. And if ever there's a Scripture, you'll find it there on the screen.

But you may also find it helpful to check it out. Opening up your Bibles as well. So Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 is on page 5 of the Church Bible.

Now here is the scene. We're going back to the very beginning of time. There are two human beings, Adam and Eve. And something disastrous has happened. Adam and Eve have disobeyed God.

The one command that he gave to them has been disobeyed. And at that moment, something terrible has happened that hasn't just affected them very badly, but has affected, as it turns out, the whole of the human race.

Something drastic and awful has happened. Their relationship with God has been broken. And at this point, the whole of the human race has been brought into a place of utter judgment.

[8 : 57] What a disastrous thing. After those seven days when God looked at all that he had made and declared that it was very good. This disastrous event has happened.

And these strange words are recorded for us in our Bibles. These are the words of the Lord God. And it's spoken to Satan, God's adversary, God's opposer.

And he says to Satan in the form of the serpent, I will put enmity or opposition between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. Many of us begin to understand what this means because we have the rest of our Bibles.

But at the time when this was said, this was an extraordinary statement. The offspring of the woman, a man, a single person, will crush the head of the serpent.

[10 : 17] But there will be a cost. The serpent will strike his heel. It's an extraordinary statement as well because God is not in confusion at this point.

God is not overwhelmed. He hasn't had to revert to another plan and an idea. But he is ready at this precise moment of disaster to say, I have a plan.

There is going to be a solution. But I want to take you to an even more extraordinary verse. It's actually found in the New Testament. And it takes us back from before that time, the time of the statement of Genesis 3.15, to another period.

You'll find this in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 and 4, where Paul, writing to the Christians, says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in him with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. Have you ever stopped your reading of the Bible at that point and just thought about what is being said at that moment?

[11 : 49] Paul is writing to these Christian believers and he's saying to them, just as I might say to you good people, brothers and sisters of Calvary Church today, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed you in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

Paul uses and chooses his words extremely carefully because it's inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. And this is the word he uses.

We have been chosen in Christ. We have been chosen in the Son of God, but that is not an adequate expression of the choosing of God.

We have been chosen in Christ. Christ means Messiah. Messiah means a particular kind of role. I will put it this way.

Before the Son of God came upon earth, he was not a Christ in the sense of his role. He was the Son of God in the blessed Trinity.

[13 : 04] But he became Christ when he became incarnate, when he became man and was able to fulfil the Christ purposes.

And so here's a verse that looks back, back, back, back, back, back, way beyond creation.

Before time. And it said, before the fall, before Adam and Eve, before all that happened, God had a plan. And that plan was that a people should be chosen to belong to him who would one day be regarded and actually be holy and blameless in his sight.

And so when you look upon that disastrous scene in the garden where Adam and Eve, ashamed in their nakedness, conscious of their sin, are trembling as it were before the angered God.

God has already got a plan. That plan is that there should be a people who have already been chosen by him, thought about, considered, known about, sitting here today.

[14 : 23] Praise God. That they should be not sinful, not judged, but holy and blameless in his sight.

It's the heart of God's purposes. And over the thousands of years that took place between that first disobedience of our forefather, Adam, and the coming of Jesus into the world, God was not silent nor inactive.

And it wasn't a great pause, as it were, in the process. But God spoke to people and gave them his laws, those ten commandments in the ark, much else beside.

He gave promises. He gave warnings. And he gave prophecies. And constantly God was making provision for this people.

The Jewish people. By altar, by tabernacle, by temple, by cleansing, by sacrifice, by the giving of priests, by the giving of prophets, by the giving of kings.

[15 : 54] So that provision should be made for them. And how mightily he showed himself as a God who delivers.

And how mightily he showed himself a God who judges. And separates. And casts his people to one side.

And really this is the Old Testament story. And it's a fair question to ask, well, what is all this about?

Why do we have two-thirds of our Bible full of this kind of a story? And the first thing we can say about it is that those thousands of years have given ample and overwhelming evidence to all who care to ponder these matters.

That we are a people who cannot save ourselves. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot find our own forgiveness for sin.

[17 : 05] It doesn't matter what generation we live in. It is the same. And of course, generation, past generation, past generation. So that eventually it was clear that enough of God's law had been broken.

Enough priests and prophets and kings had lived and failed and died. Enough national disobedience had occurred. Enough sacrifices had been offered. Enough blood had been spilt and hands had been washed.

Enough and washed to prove conclusively that our sin is so deep set, so habitual, so ingrained, that nothing that we can do can get rid of it. I do hope you're not sitting here today and you're thinking in yourself, this isn't a big matter.

This issue of sin, which Christians keep talking about, it isn't a big thing. I can sort myself out. That way lies disaster.

Many people have thought it. Many people think it's still. But here's the mournful message of Romans chapter 3, verse 19.

[18 : 30] Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so every mouth may be silenced. And the whole world held accountable to God. That verse tells me at least two things.

Firstly, if you read your Bible properly, if you understand what this message is about, if you follow the footsteps of our forefathers and the lives they lived and so forth, you have to say, well, you can't

say anything.

This is a picture of a person. This is a picture of a person who's saying, but, but, but, but. And God says, you read my word properly. You won't say but. You won't come with an excuse.

You won't come with another idea. You will be silenced. That every mouth should be stopped. And the whole world, Jew and Gentile, which includes all of us, should be held accountable to God. And there's that sort of fearsome scene of judgment. The idea that from everything we've read, what could we expect apart from the judgment of God?

[19 : 53] What could we expect apart from that? But there's another thread running alongside all the time, which is that there is a hope, an expectation of deliverance.

We read in Hebrews about those sacrifices that took place day after day after day. And the writer of the Hebrews says, they couldn't ever take away sin.

That's why they had to keep on being offered. If they were really effective, why do they have to keep on being offered? Those priests, great guys, some of them, but they all lived, they all died. And the kings. It was a catalogue of good intentions, but failing people. But always in the midst of that failure and lack, there is a hope.

Because everything points to another time and it makes the people dissatisfied. It makes the people think, what has God got in mind? I bring my lamb, I kill the lamb, I put my hand on the lamb.

[21 : 21] But a lamb can't deal with my sin. I go to the priest and ask him to pray for me. But he's a sinner like me.

I trust in a king. But he fouls up in some way, even the best of them. What has God got in mind? He's got in mind one who will keep God's laws perfectly. Of a priest who would be sinless. A prophet who would speak perfectly. A king who would rule righteously.

Of a sacrifice that would result in real forgiveness. These were just shadows and pictures. But speaking of a coming reality. And the people of the time, some of them, they saw it.

They saw it. They said, I've put my hand on the lamb. But I'm not really trusting the lamb there. I'm trusting one whom God is going to provide.

[22 : 22] So there's this great verse in the book of Galatians, chapter 4, verse 4. But when the time had fully come.

When the time had fully come. When there was plenty of evidence that could be laid before the world. And to say, what a mess. You can't save yourself. But when the time had fully come. God sent his son. Born of a woman. Born under law. To redeem those under law. To redeem those under law.

We're all like sheep who've gone astray. We need redemption. God's son, Jesus Christ, knew exactly why he had come into the world.

To give his life as a ransom for many. That is why Christmas, as wonderful as it is. Is not at the heart of God's purposes.

[23 : 26] It is not the most important thing in God's eyes. The little baby squalling in the manger. Is born to die.

Jesus had the death sentence. Jesus had the death sentence in his psyche. As he grew up. Do you know why he'd come to this world?

Not to die as other men. But to die in a very special way. To give his life as a ransom for many. He'd come for death.

A sacrificial death. A sacrificial death upon the cross. So that we might be reconciled with God. No one else properly understood what was going on. But Jesus knew.

Jesus knew. That this was his mission. And so he says to those bewildered disciples. On the road to Emmaus.

[24 : 23] Shortly after. Those terrible scenes in Jerusalem. When they are plunged in sorrow and despair. And he says. You're foolish. Haven't you read your Bibles?

Did not the Christ. Have to suffer. These things. And then to enter his glory. It had to be. It was God's purpose.

Before the foundation of the world. That Christ. Should have a people. Who belong to him. And he should purchase those people. By a death.

Upon a cross. In about 8030. The day before the Passover. The whole of God's purposes. Are focused.

As it were. A giant lens. Bringing the rays of the sun. To a sudden point. A sudden burning point. This is the heart of God's purpose. And this is.

[25 : 27] This has been the theme. Of Bible believing Christians. And churches. In every generation. Since then. And will be until the end of time. Because the cross of Jesus Christ. Will never lose. Its significance and power.

It's the reason why we gather. Twice a month. And have. Broken bread. And juice. To remember his broken body. In his spilt blood. We don't meet regularly.

To celebrate. His incarnation. We don't. I might say. Even meet regularly. To celebrate his resurrection. As glorious as that is. But all these things.

Either point forward. Or point back to. The great reality. Which is at the heart. Of God's purposes. That God has sent his son. To die upon a cross.

Because only by the dying. Upon a cross. Are God's purposes. Going to be achieved. And it's extraordinary thing.

[26 : 32] To read in the final book of the Bible. The book of Revelation. This statement. As John. Is privileged. See. The curtains of heaven. Drawn away. And he says.

Well what does he say? What would you expect? He says. I saw a lamb. Looking as if it had been slain. Standing.

In the center of the throne. What an extraordinary thing. In the pure and glorious light of heaven. What would you expect upon a throne?

What would you expect? Here is the most unexpected. It's a lamb. And it's a lamb that's been slain. It's wounded. It's bloodied. And it's upon a throne. As if God were to say.

[27 : 38] I don't want anyone. Ever. To forget. What. My son. Has done. I don't want.

Any of you. Ever. Throughout eternity. To forget. What Jesus Christ. Has done. He died upon a cross.

And that is such a wonderful and glorious thing. That I've raised. My son. Again to life. But he's still the lamb. It's the name by which he would be known.

He wants to be known. Amen. Behold. Behold. The lamb of God. Who takes away the sin of the world.

For you. Behold. The lamb of God. Who takes away your sin. So none of the angels.

[28 : 40] And the other creatures. And especially. And especially. Those who have known. The touch of Jesus Christ. Upon their lives. Who have looked to the cross.

None of those who stand. In that throne room. Where by grace. We shall all be. We shall all be. Will ever be. Bored.

Or felt. Undernourished. By this.

Sight. The lamb. Upon the throne. It's the praise of heaven. The glory of heaven. For all eternity. The cross lies at the heart of God's. Eternal purposes. Now secondly. The cross reveals.

[29 : 39] A God who is Trinity. What is happening. At the cross of Jesus Christ. You and I have seen a thousand images.

You've seen films. You've seen productions. Pictures. Medieval artists. Passion plays. Out in Brighton.

The characters. Are the same. The story is the same. There are soldiers. There are onlookers. There are priests. There are mockers. There are the sorrowful.

There are three crosses. Two criminals. One in the middle. And the sign. This is the king of the Jews. The cross. But what is happening.

At the cross of Jesus Christ. Far more wonderful. Than human imagination. Could conceive. Is this maybe a man dying as a martyr.

[30 : 45] A good man brought to a terrible end. Even a man offering himself sacrificially to God. God. If so.

And indeed. If that is what you think. Is what is happening there. It's extremely poignant. But pointless. It offers nothing but a noble example.

We are. We are as hopeless. And condemned. After this death. As we were before. Or perhaps God really has come in the flesh.

And lived as a man. And then so empathised with his creatures. As to experience death like them. It's a thought.

But heaven is empty. This too is amazing. But it's pointless. Is a grand display.

[31 : 52] That one cannot save us. Neither of these pictures. Do justice. To what the Bible says actually happened. Heaven. Isn't empty. And neither is the cross.

God the father. Is transacting. With his incarnate son. As he has done. From the moment the baby was born in Bethlehem. As he did throughout his earthly life.

As he did at the point of his baptism. When he said. This is my beloved son. In whom I am well pleased. As he did on the Mount of Transfiguration. As he did in those intense interludes of prayer. As he did when Jesus cast his eyes up to heaven. And said I thank thee father. As he did in the garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus bowed his head. And pleaded with his father.

That this cup of suffering and death. Should be taken far from him. And as he does. At the moment of his dying upon Calvary. When he cries out.

[32 : 59] To a real person. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? The father is transacting with the son.

Or one might say at that particular moment in time. As the earth went dark. That the father had stopped transacting with the son. And an awful dark gulf of separation had occurred.

As the weight of sin. Fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And the father seeing that sin. Poured out nothing upon him. But judgment.

And there is another. The third person of the Trinity. Is actively present. There's just one verse in the whole Bible. That actually speaks about the presence of the Holy Spirit.

At the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And it's this verse. It's Hebrews chapter 9 verse 14. And what a rich verse. It says here that.

[34 : 10] Christ. Who through the eternal spirit. Offered himself. Unblemished to God. And we have here. A picture of the relationship.

Of the God. Who is one. Yet three. The Holy Spirit. Who so strengthened Jesus Christ. Throughout his earthly ministry.

That at this. Terrifying moment. Gave him sufficient strength. The son of God made man.

To be able to go through. The death of Calvary. And to offer himself. Unblemished. To his father. In that very intense moment.

All the. Prophecies. Pictures. Types. And shadows. Of the Old Testament. Come crashing together. In one. Enormous.

[35 : 12] And sort of cataclysmic moment. Perfect sacrifice is made. And the father sees it.

And is satisfied. The cross is the supreme. And mysterious work of God.

Who is father, son. And Holy Spirit. God. You'll be hard pressed. To find in the Bible. A more intense.

Declaration. Of the God. Who is Trinity. Led in the cross. Of Jesus Christ. And because this is such a mysterious. And a marvelous. And a deeply awe inspiring truth.

God brings it before us. So that we should be. Brought to. All struck.

[36 : 13] Worship. Thirdly. The cross. Reveals something to us. A great deal to us.

Of the character. Of God. God. Is wise. The cross. Is a supreme example. Of God's wisdom. That he has revealed.

A way. In which he can be. Both. Just. And the justifier. Of the ungodly. That God is love.

Romans 5 verse 8. God. Demonstrates. His own love for us. In this. How much does God love us? What's the question? How much does God love us?

I will tell you how much God loves us. God demonstrates his love in this. That while we were still sinners. Christ died for us. God is just.

[37 : 17] The cross is a scene of God's love. But is also a scene of God's justice. Sin is being punished at the cross. God's anger is being poured out.

The penalty of death is being exacted. A body is being broken. A lifeblood spilt. Galatians 3.13 says. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.

By becoming a curse for us. God is grace. Ephesians 2.4 and 5 says this.

But because of his great love for us. God who is rich in mercy. Made us alive with Christ. Even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace.

You've been saved. I've got three applications this morning. And the first is this.

[38 : 17] Is your God the God of the cross? The cross I've been describing. Not the necklace around your neck.

Not the multitudes of cinema blockbusting kind of images there. But the God who has revealed himself in his Bible. And the cross which is shown there.

Is your God the God of the cross? What kind of God do you know? If your God is only a God of love.

And has no other aspects to his character. I want to suggest to you. That you have missed the God of the Bible. And probably fatally missed the God of the Bible.

Because that is not a sufficient explanation of God. To say God is love. It may comfort you. To know that that is true.

[39 : 24] And it is true. But it's not enough. God is also just. And punishes sin. Sin must be punished.

Sin must be paid for. Your sin must be paid for. Who is going to take the punishment of your sin?

Sin must be paid for. this is how much God cares that he does find a way of punishing sin whilst loving the sinner what kind of God do you know how would you describe the God you worship what sort of prayers do you pray what songs will you sing secondly is your Christianity based upon the cross if you want to have any dealings with God you must come by way of the cross of Jesus Christ I have a sat now that gives opportunities to go to a destination by a multitude of different options avoiding the motorway avoiding big bridges avoiding the fastest way the slowest way the easiest way the country route brothers and sisters there's only one way to God and it's by way of the cross and every single one of us has to take the same journey we have to find ourselves at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ we have to find ourselves alongside those who are gazing at the crucified saviour you have to come that way there is no other way every single one of us has to come and we have to go onto our knees because something most awesome and wonderful is taking place there there is no other route this is the only place where we can find peace with God thirdly there is nothing like the cross of Jesus Christ to refresh our worship if you come here today and you just feel your Christian life is just tired and limp

I encourage you to look again at the cross of Jesus Christ we are going to sing our company when I survey the wondrous cross after we have sung these four verses perhaps two or three people would just like to raise their voices in prayer and then we will have a closing song please thank you