

The Cross

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Date: 23 February 2003

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of February 2003. The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled The Cross and is based on 2 Corinthians 5.10-6.2.

The cross is the most cruel and degrading form of capital punishment.

It exposes the victim to public view and scorn. Because of the effect of the crucifixion upon the body and the length of time that it takes to die upon the cross, it is represented as one of the most painful, cruel, barbaric forms of execution.

After the pronouncement of the victim, of the sentence that they have been given, the condemned in the Roman Empire were told that they had to carry the horizontal bar of the cross to a place outside the city.

Once there, the victim would be laid down and his hands attached to the horizontal piece, either by nails or ropes.

[1 : 31] That horizontal bar would be attached to the vertical bar and the person would be raised up there and secured. If they really wanted to be really cruel, they may even give the victim a seat or a peg to sit upon.

Because that would just make the whole process so much longer. Their feet would be secured with the knees bent.

The reason why the knees would be bent is that that way, as the victim was being held there, it would be difficult to stretch out and hold himself to lock his knees in.

For one of the ways that you would die on the cross is by suffocation. Hanging by your arms, outstretched like that, you cannot breathe properly. So they attach you with your knees slightly bent. Death came slowly. It was not unusual for the person to survive days. Then over with exposure, disease, hunger, shock and exhaustion, a person would die.

[2 : 48] Of course, mercy might be given to that person that they might break their legs. It seems like a crazy way of giving them mercy. But it would be mercy because they would not be able to hold themselves up because their legs are broken.

And so they would die much quicker through not being able to hold themselves up to breathe. The social stigma and disgrace associated with crucifixion in the ancient world was only reserved for slaves and criminals of the worst sort.

Those from the lowest levels of society. Military deserters. Traitors. It was very rare, very, very rare for a Roman citizen to die upon a cross.

For the Jews, there was an added stigma. In Deuteronomy chapter 21, it says something along the lines of, A man hanged is accursed by God.

It was understood by Jews that if you died upon a cross, you would incur a divine curse from God. This is the death of Jesus Christ described in the Gospels.

[4 : 11] Answer me this. If it is such a barbaric death, why is it that we wear little crosses on our necks? Why is it that we have earrings with little crosses on?

Why is it that churches have crosses out the front of the churches? We have one here in the middle. If you turn around, you can just see it there in the centre. If it is such a barbaric form of death, why do we have crosses all around?

I don't know if you watch Buffy or anything like that, but have you ever noticed that whenever evil comes around, they pull out their crosses? Why? What's so significant about the cross if it is such a barbaric form of death?

Well, tonight we're going to look at why the cross is so significant for Christians. And we're going to be looking at that at 2 Corinthians. It'd be good for you to have your Bibles open. Let me just remind you where we're up to in two ways to live.

The first week we looked at, briefly, that God is the creator of the world. He sustains everything. And you can see there, He has put man underneath His rule, which is the crown there, to rule the world.

[5 : 19] Then the second week, we saw that man rebelled against God. We didn't want to be under His rule. We want to have our own crowns and be gods ourselves. So we reject God. Last week, we saw what God was going to do about that.

The punishment. The judgment from God. And it was a very bleak picture. At the end of it, we're asked the question, is that it then? Are we all destined for death and everlasting ruin?

It was a very sad picture. A very harsh picture. Well, tonight we're going to see that the cross is God's solution to our great problem. So why don't you pray with me as we look at God's word tonight.

Father, we do pray for each one of us tonight that as we look at the cross and we look at the significance of what happened there with your Son, may we learn to see your great love, to see your great message of salvation and may impact on our lives, we pray.

Amen. Paul, he knew the significance of the cross. Paul the Apostle, that is. He knew all about the cross. It impacted on every area of his life.

[6 : 36] In fact, he knew the centrality of the cross for the life of the believer. And we can see that really clearly in tonight's passage. So tonight's passage is 2 Corinthians 5, verses 10 through to 6.2.

So that's on page 940. As we're going through, you might like to have that open. Now, Paul is writing to the Corinthians. It's a church that was set up at Corinth. Now, Corinth, just like Thessalonians, the church at Thessalonica last week, the city itself was a very important city. It had a good harbour, good trade routes. It was very important for the Roman Empire. In fact, it was in 44 BC that Julius Caesar set up this city. And as such, as a new city, it was a city for those who were the entrepreneurs, the freemen, the slaves.

People swelled in there because it was the place to make your fortune. It was a place to win power and gain honour because it was a new city. Everyone was sort of starting on the same foot.

So what was really significant for Corinth was whether you had possessions, whether you had status. It was all about self-promotion.

[7 : 52] It was all about having the latest camel with two mums. It was a great city. It was a bustling city. And Paul realised that this was a key city to evangelise, to set up a church.

And so he has. But after he's left, another group come in, false teachers. And they come in and they hear, they speak what the Corinthians want to hear.

They want to hear about how they can build themselves up. They want to hear a message that satisfies them. And so they come in and they split the church.

Now I've never been involved in a church where there's been a split. But I think it must be a terrible thing to have two factions within a church tearing the church apart. But here in the church of Corinth there is this group tearing the church apart.

And Paul is writing this second letter to try and fix this schism. To try and help those that are there understand what the truth is. To help them to stand firm on Paul's message.

[9 : 00] You see these false teachers came in and they were telling them that they could promise deliverance from suffering. They could promise a steady diet of spiritual experiences.

Really weigh out things. They promised these things instead of calling for a life of faithful endurance. So instead of coming and showing their lives full of the Spirit they came with letters of recommendations from other churches.

They came trumpeting their own ethnic heritage as Jews. They displayed their professional rhetorical flash and they boasted in their spiritual experiences and science.

Well this minority thought that Paul was weak and they doubted his legitimacy as apostle. So in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 to chapter 7 Paul gives his defence of being an apostle.

And he talks about the danger of moving away from his message. The message that was given to him by Christ. a message that was endorsed by Christ.

[10 : 10] He was helping them to see that they were not to trust in this other message. So Paul starts in our passage in chapter 5 verse 9 through to 15.

Paul there talks about his motivation for ministry. What motivates him for being a Christian? For speaking the way that he does? For the reason for the letter? What motivates him in his ministry?

And after speaking in verse 10 about that judgment day which Christ would come he says in verse 11 therefore knowing the fear of the Lord he persuades others.

What motivates him? It's the fear of the Lord. It's knowing that one day he is going to have to stand before God and give an account of everything that he has to do that he has done. It is the fear of the Lord.

He's not there to try and self-seeking purposes that motivates him. He's not up there for prestige or power trying to win everyone over by human eloquence or persuasive techniques or as verse 12 says boasting outward appearances.

[11:18] What he's interested is what is in the heart. What's at the heart of Paul is he is motivated by the fear of the Lord knowing of that judgment day. We see also that he's not persuaded by the speaking in tongues and all these other things all these ecstatic experiences.

That's not what motivates him. He wants to speak plainly in verse 13. He wants them to know what motivates him and part of that is the fear of God.

But we see there in verses 14 and 15 the other thing that motivates him. The second reason why Paul is motivated to win these people over the reason why he urges them to go on in his message is because of the love of Christ.

Let's have a look at verses 14 and 15. The love of Christ urges us on because we are convinced that one has died for all therefore all have died.

And he died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them. What is the second motivation for Paul in his ministry?

[12:37] It's the love of Christ. Christ's love seen where? Seen in him dying dying on a cross. This is the reason why the second reason what motivates him.

Here we see here we saw Christ dying on a cross. There we saw him considering the needs of others over himself.

Christ thought it was more important than his own glory or position with the father. What was more important that he should come down to earth and die on a cross?

Such love Paul realised was for him but not just for him for us also. Well Paul realised that Christ had died for him.

Not only had he died for him it meant that he had died also. Look there at the second part of verse 14. Therefore all have died because Christ died therefore Paul's sinful nature it died also.

[13:45] the power of sin it was broken. The old way of life the trap of sin that entangled him so much it was broken.

He was enabled to live for God. This is what motivated him because Christ had died on the cross for him he had seen God's love there Christ's love for him because of that he was now able to be set free from that and to live to please Christ.

How was he to live to please Christ? To follow Christ's example and love others. So we see in verse 15 Paul's second motivation is because of the love of Christ he loves the Corinthians because Christ loved him he loves the Corinthians.

This is the first thing I want to point out about the cross. The cross puts to death our old self but the question is how does the cross do this?

How does it put our old self to death? Well let's keep on going and we'll see in a little while. The second part of the passage from verse 16 right through to 6.2 talks about the consequences of Paul's ministry.

[15:21] So in light of his motivation that being the fear of judgment day but also the love of Christ in light of those two motivations there are consequences that come out of Paul's ministry.

The first we see in verses 16 and 17. The first is that those who Christ has died for are a new creation.

From now on therefore we regard no one from a human point of view even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view we know him no longer in that way.

So if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See everything has become new. Paul no longer saw things from a human point of view.

Before Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus before Paul came to understand the Christian message and met the risen Lord Paul looked at the cross and Christ dying upon it and thought that it was just ridiculous.

[16:27] He saw it from a human point of view as something that is in great weakness but Paul came to realise that it wasn't great weakness. great power. He no longer saw things from a human point of view.

The false teachers did. They kept on seeing everything from a human point of view. Everything was all the standards and values were those of the world and they preached accordingly.

But Paul he looked from a different point of view and he saw a new creation. For as the old self has been put off the new self has been put on.

It is a new creation. As we look back in the Old Testament and we look at Isaiah in particular, Isaiah looked forward to a day when creation would be restored, when things would be put back to that garden of Eden, when things would be put back the way that they should be.

And Isaiah looked forward to that day. Paul is saying here because of the cross that new creation has broken in. We are a new creation because of the cross.

[17:38] But how? How does the cross achieve this? Well let me put up my second point here. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The cross enables us to be a new creation. Well let's keep on going on and see if we can find out how the cross achieves this. We look in verses 18 and 19, we see there the second thing that Paul, the consequence of Paul's ministry.

His ministry ends up being a ministry of reconciliation, which is a big word which we unpack in a little while. Let me read verses 18 through to 19.

All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us a ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Well the first thing that I want to pull out from these passages is to notice that all of this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

[18:50] notice first of all that this reconciling, this idea of bringing peace is something that is started by God.

Its origin comes from God. It is his creative power. Recreation comes through reconciliation from God to man through Christ. It is nothing of ourselves.

ourselves. This is a very important point. It is nothing of ourselves. God is the one who has achieved it.

Therefore it is nothing that I am particularly attractive, I am not particularly beautiful, it is not because I am particularly loving, that I am very humorous. All these characteristics, they don't mind, they are not what God is interested in.

It is all God's work through Christ. Well what does this reconciliation work? Reconciliation is where you have two parties who are enemies.

[19:52] They are hostile towards one another and reconciliation is where you bring peace between them, where there is harmony brought between them. Last week we saw the hostility between man and God.

God with his wrath towards us and us in our rebellion of God. An incredible hostility towards one another.

But this hostility has been brought together. There has been reconciliation between man and God. This message of reconciliation comes through Christ.

It comes through the cross. But how? How has God done this? Well verse 19 gives us a bit of a clue.

That is Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. Not counting their trespasses, not counting their sins. Last week we saw that our rebellion, our sin against God, God takes that very seriously against us.

[20:57] But Paul says this reconciliation process of Christ means that this sin that causes God such wrath. This sin is no longer counted against us.

It's like it's been whited out. Psalms describe it as though it's been moved as far as the east is from the west. That's how far our sin has been removed from us.

God no longer sees us as sinful. But how does God do this? Well before we look at that. Look at the other thing, the consequence of, all this is from God who reconciled to himself, therefore, the second point here is, we are agents of reconciliation.

The other point that Paul is trying to make here is, is that he has a ministry of reconciliation. That means that in this process of God bringing himself to people, he uses people in the process. Look there in verse 18, he has given us a ministry of reconciliation at the end of verse 19 and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

[22 : 12] God in his wisdom uses Paul, uses Paul to take this message out, to bring reconciliation. It's like making Paul this diplomat, this person who comes along between the two parties and says, okay, then let's try and work this out.

I've got a treaty here, now God if you don't send your wrath and you guys don't, it's like this, Paul has stepped in the middle here as this diplomat to try and bring this treaty of peace between the two parties.

But this message of reconciliation, this ministry that he has also comes from the Old Testament. It comes from the idea of, like Moses being a prophet, bringing a message of good news as seen in the book of Isaiah.

God uses individuals to bring reconciliation to himself. Think of the people that were impacting on your life, that God spoke through to bring peace with him.

But how does God do that? How does God use us to bring people to himself? Well, verse 20, Paul talks about the fact that he is an ambassador.

[23 : 44] Let me read it. So, we are ambassadors for Christ. Since God is making his appeal through us, we entreat you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God. Picking up this idea again that he is the ambassador, the one who is bringing reconciliation, he encourages everyone to be reconciled with God.

He wants them to be reconciled. Well, how does that happen? Verse 21 is where we bring these things together. Let me read verse 21.

As we've been speaking about, we see the righteousness of God in his holiness and we see the rebelliousness of humanity and there's this great wall in between, dividing them, not being able to get through to each other.

There is no reconciliation, reconciliation, as we see in this picture here. Our sin does not draw us to God and God's wrath is towards us. So what is God's solution?

He sends Christ into the world. But notice the two sides to Christ. He is truly human but he's also truly man.

[25 : 05] It's represented by the two sides there. He is truly human and truly divine, truly God. This is really important. Many people get this balance wrong.

Jehovah's witnesses get it wrong. We need to understand that Christ is both truly human and truly God. Well, because he is both truly human and truly God, he dies upon the cross.

So Christ takes upon himself our sin and therefore because of that he takes upon himself God's wrath.

That's what it says here in verse 21. For our sake he made it to be sin who knew no sin. Christ knew no sin. He was perfect yet he took sin upon himself, our sin, so that we might become righteous.

So when we look at the third picture here, here we see that humanity is made righteous in Christ. So that when God looks at us, he looks at Christ's perfection.

[26 : 26] He looks at the righteousness of Christ. We've been brought, brought into God's family through Christ. But those who do not accept Christ, that rebellious humanity still under sin, well they're still to face God's wrath.

Here is how these things work. Here is how the reconciliation happens. Here is how we take off the old and put on the new. It is through Christ taking the punishment for us.

The Old Testament spoke about the sacrificial system, the way that a sheep or some other animal would be used and it would be sacrificed, that it would represent, it would take the place of the life of the one who had to die.

But this is Christ. Christ for us made the perfect sacrifice, he paid the perfect price enabling us to have peace with God.

We look forward to the day when we will be perfect. At the moment when God looks at us, he looks at us in Christ.

[27 : 49] But when Christ comes again, we will be made perfect and sin will no longer be a part of our lives. Paul finishes off this last part in chapter 6 verses 1 and 2 by talking about that the day of

salvation is here and now.

He does that by looking at a quote from Isaiah, Paul points out that that day of salvation has come in Christ.

See now, now is the acceptable time. See now is the day of salvation. Christ has come and brought salvation. Therefore he says before that, just in verse 1, that as we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.

He gives his final appeal not to give up on his message, not to go chasing after false teachers and their message, not to be led astray from the truth, for the day of salvation has arrived.

What does that mean for us? for those who do not know Christ and are not Christians tonight, the day of salvation has come.

[29 : 23] With Christ dying on the cross for us and taking the punishment that we deserve, salvation can be had now. You might want to say, oh, I might just put it off tomorrow.

Tomorrow may never come. Today is the day of salvation. salvation. For those of you who are, perhaps without even knowing it, slowly drifting away from Christianity, falling away, being tempted to listen to the messages of the world, the message here is beware.

Beware not to move away from the message of salvation. And those of us who are in Christ, let us be agents of reconciliation.

reconciliation. Just like Paul went out to the Gentiles, we are also to go out and tell others of Christ and the salvation found in the cross.

Let us be agents of reconciliation in this church to one another. It is a message of peace. May there be peace between us, but also may there be peace between us and God.

[30 : 40] We need to be going out into the world and being agents of reconciliation. Two ways to live represents the picture like I have on the screen.

Jesus came and he obeyed God's rule perfectly and that he died on a cross and took the punishment that we deserve.

As you stop and think about the cross, let me show you another little animation. For Paul, the cross was the motivation for his ministry.

For Paul, the cross was the means by which he had reconciliation with God. For Paul, the cross made him a new creation enabling him to put aside the things of the old self.

The cross made him an ambassador for Christ to bring about a message of reconciliation. May the cross be the centre of our lives.

[32 : 12] May we understand the full impact of what Christ came to do. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.