

The Offense and the Glory of the Cross

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[0:00] I want you to begin by turning in your Bible to Philippians chapter 3, verse 3.

Just turn in your Bible and then look at me. Showing up is not good enough. Do you understand that?

Showing up is not good enough. Now, I'm glad you're here, but I want to make an appeal to you that this morning you think carefully about what we're really here to do.

And so when I say to you that showing up is not good enough, I want you to understand that we are here to worship the Lord of glory, and we're here to do that with the enabling of the Spirit of God to please Him, to strengthen, to encourage, to grow in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I have to tell you, if you are sitting here this morning with kind of a blah spirit, or you're one of those people who spends most of your life with a highly critical mindset, or you're really distracted because you're thinking about the race, or whatever, right?

[2:08] Hey, listen, because I'm talking to you. Being here is not enough. For we're the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God.

Is that true of you? How many of you know that it's fairly easy to show up and not worship by the Spirit of God? We've done it countless times.

We're the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

And you can say in your heart, Amen.

So that's my appeal at the outset that you here this morning who know Christ would recognize that unless the Holy Spirit enables you this morning to worship through the power of the Spirit of God, the glory of Christ, that you will walk out of here relatively unchanged, probably indifferent, probably a little, actually, more sour and less affected.

[4:01] And so my plea would be that with due humility you go ahead and say the words that are true, Holy Spirit, I need your help this morning to worship, to grow in my affection for Christ.

Amen? Now, we're not turning to 1 Corinthians 11. Please make a note in your church calendar that this was a week when pastor preached from a different text for communion.

I actually have done that more than once in 28 years, but here we go. Galatians chapter 6, verse 14. Several weeks ago as I was praying and thinking about the blessing of this day, I don't know why, but the prompting of God brought my heart to think carefully about the cross.

And as we take the bread and we take the cup, really what we are celebrating and what we are reflecting, what we're remembering is what Jesus did for us.

And we are here to be obedient to Him in the matter that He instructed us regarding that. And so, we know that later this morning, we will actually engage in doing more than putting a morsel of bread in our mouth and taking a rather small cup of grape juice.

[5 : 48] We're really here to remind ourselves that the Lord Jesus died in our place. He died for our sins. He died that we might not have to die eternally.

And so, I'm going to ask you this morning to think in broader terms about what we do here than just to ponder the physical death of our Savior.

And to do so, I want us to focus on the cross not merely as an instrument of extreme suffering, but really as a symbol of God's great work in salvation.

Let me read a portion. It's lengthy. I'll try to go slowly. But it really has significance to what we're doing this morning.

It is a portion from Robert Raymond's book on systematic theology. The cross work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God's Alpha and Omega, stands at the beginning, the center, and the end of God's eternal will and all His ways and works.

[7 : 04] Christ's work is sacred ground. It is the church's holy of holies. John Murray describes our Lord's cross work as the most solemn spectacle in all of human history.

It is a spectacle of unparalleled, unique, unrepeated, and unrepeatable events. And it is the site of the most mysterious utterance that ever ascended from earth to heaven.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Beholding it, we are spectators of a wonder of praise and glory that eternity itself will not exhaust.

It is the Lord of glory, the Son of God, incarnate, the God-man, drinking the cup given to Him by the Eternal Father, the cup of woe and indescribable agony over sin.

we almost hesitate to say it, but it must be said, it is God in this creation forsaken of God.

[8 : 43] The cry from the accursed tree evinces nothing less than the abandonment that is the wages of sin.

there is no reproduction, no parallel in the experience of the archangels or of the greatest saints.

The faintest parallel would crush the holiest of men and the mightiest of the angelic host. I want us to think this morning about, first of all, the offense of the cross and I want you to consider that unless we take the time to really ponder the significance of what we do here, we really go about this in a far more casual way than Christ intends for us to be involved in.

And listen to me, it's very easy for us in doing something that is repetitious to go through the motions and really not invest the energy, the thought, the emotion to ponder seriously what has happened and what we are celebrating and its significance to us.

And that's not fitting. Let me have you think of the extreme offense of the cross by recognizing that in sum, what the cross really speaks to, first of all, is the extreme attitude that God has towards sin.

[10 : 24] I think it was several weeks ago, it came out in the internet and came out in the papers, etc., that Kim Jong-un, how many of you know who Kim, I love the name, don't call your kids that, but you know, Kim Jong-un, you know, he is the dictator supreme of North Korea and a couple weeks ago, he executed his defense minister with anti-aircraft cannon fire.

Can you imagine that? He had a hundred of his senior officers troop out to the, that's a little disgusting, isn't it? Cannon fire, anti-aircraft at that, and he had a hundred of his officers lined up watching one guy way down the range there who had nodded off at one of his just scintillating and encouraging speeches.

The guy probably stayed up late watching some dumb show, and as a result, he was executed by cannon fire. You got that? Now, do you know why he did that?

He wanted everybody to know that nodding off in one of his messages was far more dangerous than nodding off in one of mine. Over history, there have been different ways in which government and those in authority have expressed their deep abiding objection to certain kinds of behavior.

During the Sepoy Rebellion in British India, eventually when the rebellion was suppressed, they took the principal rebels of that rebellion and they tied them to the front of cannons and lit the match and blew them into oblivion.

[12:21] Another favorite execution, here, I grew up in India, so bear with me. We'll just deal with the things I know. But another favorite of Mughal, this is in my way.

Sorry. Okay. Should have done this ahead of time. But in the Red Fort, there's a small chamber through a rock wall that is about three or four feet thick and in the small chamber there in the center of it there's a little aperture that's about that big.

A little aperture about that big. Those who received the extreme dislike of the Mughal king had a rope tied around their center, passed through the aperture, and tied off to an elephant or two out in the front.

And then when the Mahut would say, agay, agay, you know what would happen? The man would be pulled through the aperture. Aperture means hole in the wall.

Now, how many of you would like to be pulled through a hole as an adult about that big? Here's how it actually, you don't need the details, right? You understand the point? Actually, being executed by anti-aircraft cannon fire or being blown apart by a cannon is probably a little more bearable because it's instantaneous, even though it's pretty spectacular, than being dragged through a knot hole by an elephant.

[13:54] None of those methods of execution come anywhere close to what crucifixion was. Crucifixion was something that was reserved for those that had supremely offended the government, and they were designed to be a public spectacle to say, whatever you do, do not do this.

The every other instance of execution that I've spoken of actually, in every case, is relatively brief in its suffering. That was not the case with execution.

Execution was something that was preceded by brutal beating, and the whip that was used by the Roman lictors was something that was so harsh upon a person that actually the skin would be flayed off.

And then the person was placed upon a cross, nails driven through both hands and feet, and hung there to die.

From exhaustion, dehydration, and the extreme suffering of that physical affliction, it in many cases took individuals days to die.

[15:28] And it was such a brutal method of execution that Roman law prohibited a Roman citizen from suffering from crucifixion, except in extreme cases such as causing problems for the emperor or whatever.

It was not normal. Seneca, who was a Roman statesman philosopher, he said this, that no Roman citizen should ever use the word cross, should have to think about the cross, should ever think that someone else should suffer on the cross.

Do you understand what he's saying? It was something that was so brutal and so ugly that he thought Roman citizens should not even have to think about it ever.

And so here we are this morning listening to what Paul says in Galatians chapter six, and I want you to look at that and put your finger on it. He says, far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The extreme offense of the cross really rests in the reality that the cross of Christ gives us a graphic picture of how supremely offensive our sin is to God.

[17:13] We're pretty comfortable with our sin, aren't we? Truthfully. We tend not to take our sins seriously, or we really don't tend to take them as being things that are all that troublesome to God, but understand this, that the cross tells us that God hates sin.

He hates it. He hates it. He hates it. He hates it more than Caesar ever hated it, or the Roman government ever hated it.

We're great at offering excuses for our sin, are we not? It goes back actually to the garden, and remember after Adam and Eve had sinned and God came and addressed Adam, He immediately blamed it on somebody else.

We are specialists in our contemporary culture at attaching labels to sin that kind of diminish its significance or its offense. sin.

What the cross announces is that sin deserves the most extreme punishment. There's something else that I want you to think about with me.

[18:22] The cross tells us also just how far sin separates us from God. God. given our sinful hearts and the flawed grasp we have at intimate communion, we really don't appreciate just how close Christ was to His Father, how God the Father and God the Son were so intimately communing with one another.

and we tend not to understand just how close their relationship was. It's very interesting when you stop and think about it that Jesus through all the physical suffering that He endured, if you go to Isaiah chapter 53 and I don't encourage you to do it now, but it says that He opened not His mouth.

As Jesus endured all the physical hardship that He went through, it wasn't that He was crying out incessantly in pain. He endured the physical hardship without complaint, but there is one thing that elicited or that brought out from Him a ragged cry.

We find it in all three of the synoptic gospels. As Jesus hung on the cross, as God the Father turned His face away from His Son, He cried out this, My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

We cannot read those words without getting a small sampling of just how deep that separation was and how much it affected Christ.

[20:17] That incredible sweetness of communion that Jesus had enjoyed with His Father had never known a single moment of separation. But when Jesus bore our sins upon the cross, our Father turned away, and that separation was greater than the physical suffering that Jesus went through.

Now, I want you to understand that while we cannot fully appreciate that separation, we can be sure, and I want you to ponder this with me just for a moment, that while the suffering of hell will have physical components to it.

I'm fully persuaded of that. Another piece of that suffering, however, is going to be the complete, unrelenting anguish of complete separation and abandonment by God.

And so this morning, as you think about the offense of the cross, I want you to understand that what the cross says is, listen, my sin deserved the extreme penalty of the wrath of God against sin for all my sins.

I remember last week as we had Rich and Christy Brown here visiting, and I asked him to pray for our fellowship, and one of the things that Rich prayed was just, he expressed thanksgiving just for the unbelievable privilege of salvation.

[21:59] And let me tell you something, if you sit here this morning and you are not overwhelmed with the reality of the gift and the blessing that you have in salvation, the problem's not on God's side of the equation, it is the hardness and the indifference of your heart to what Jesus has done for you.

And there would be nothing wrong with stopping and saying, Lord, here I sit in absolute putts, just kind of stone cold to who you are, and I would appeal that you prompt your spirit to work in me to rekindle all and affection for what you've done.

Let's look at another piece this morning, and that is the magnificence of the cross. Here in the text that I've referenced in Galatians chapter 6, verse 14, Paul says this, but far be it from me to boast except in the cross.

Now, think of all the things that have happened. of all the things that you could stop and think about in human history, the greatest of all wars, the miracle of creation, all the things, the giving of the law, the separating of the Red Sea, the falling down of the walls of Jericho, do you follow me?

One thing after another, none of them hold a candle to the cross. It stands as supreme.

[23 : 38] Now, by the way, remind yourself that during creation, kind of imagine all the angels up in heaven and kind of watching God. And by the way, how did He create things? I saw an interesting little Facebook.

It had a beautiful sandcastle built up on the beach. And it said, this is a perfect illustration of evolution. Countless millions of waves washing up upon this beach have to be the thing that built this beautiful sandcastle.

I mean, it was unbelievably ornate. And it's like, duh, you made my point. And so, here we are. Creation, we know, was an event that was observed by angels.

And guess what they were doing as they watched God create the world out of nothing? What were they doing? You know?

Is that what, hurrah! God had thrown another thing. Whoa! How did He do that? They were amazed. And they couldn't contain themselves, you know?

[24 : 53] I don't know about personalities, but I'm just imagining that angels in heaven are not like this. How many of you know what I'm talking about? There's some of you that are kind of, I'm reserving my appreciation for something really spectacular.

Okay. So, angels during creation, what were they doing? Hello? They were whooping it up. Now, and during the incarnation, when Christ came down, what did the angels do?

What happened? They were singing, right? And in 2 Peter, it tells us that angels kind of, as they think about this cross business, they're just, they're not sure.

They're pondering it. They want to kind of understand it, but they can't get their hands around it completely. It just kind of, oh, whoa. How much I understand this morning that the glory of the cross is profound beyond our comprehension in some sense, but worthy of our attention at the same time.

And so, let me put three things together before we come to the elements. The cross is where Jesus was my substitute.

[26 : 20] That makes me feel good. Jesus was my substitute. What that means is that He took my place and died my death.

One of the things that has been a blessing in being a shepherd and a pastor here is that as over the years I've grown to know God's people, as sad as the moment is, when I bury friends that know the Lord Jesus, I can say without reservation that Jesus died their death.

Unless Jesus comes back, we're going to die. Do you follow that? But we will not die the kind of death we would have died apart from Christ.

Absent in the body, present with the Lord. That's the reason that one of the things I love saying, and you don't know me, I'm a little perverse on the margins here, but I love saying things like this.

It's like, last trip is up. I was in the hospital last week visiting somebody and getting on the elevator and there was a little bit of conversation and, you know, are we going up or are we going down? And I said, hey, listen, for me, the last trip is up.

[27 : 47] They look at me like, how does that work? You know, it's like, it's kind of drive-by shooting thing. You know, and the other one that I really like, this is the one I really like, it's saying, oh, for me, you know, how are you doing today?

Any better than I'd be dead? And it always makes people go, okay. Well, here's the truth. Jesus died my death. And my death will only be a doorway into the joys of heaven.

And I don't have any problem with anticipating that day. Jesus was my substitute. Number two, Jesus satisfied my debt.

Not only did he take my place, but he completely satisfied the debt of my sin. Turn in your Bible. You're there in Galatians. You don't have to go very far. Go over to Colossians chapter 2.

Colossians chapter 2, verse 13 and 14. Here's what it says. It says, and you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven all our trespasses.

[28 : 54] By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. Very interesting imagery that Paul is taking from the ancient world and helping us understand the significance of what Christ did on the cross for us.

In the old days, when you owed a debt, I mean, hey, today debt is just kind of no big deal. Everybody's got it. You know, it's like I owe, I owe, and that's the reason I go to work, you know?

Off to work I go. And so debt, debt, debt, debt, debt, it's all out there. But in the old days, debt was something that really put the hurt on you. Oh, he's a debtor. If he doesn't pay by such and such a day, he's going to prison, and he'll stay in there, and the one who owns his paper is going to sell his wife and his children off to try.

It was bad business. It was bad business at being in debt. And when you had your debt canceled, one of the things that they did with it was they took it up and nailed it in a public place.

Boom! So people knew you paid off. And here's the imagery. Jesus took the debt of my sin, and he nailed it to the cross.

[30 : 14] There is now, therefore, no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Do you understand that? I love my brothers in Christ who are uncertain about their salvation.

But I want you to understand that as I read the Scriptures, I do not see the Scriptures giving to us the idea that salvation is I don't know. I'm hoping so. No.

Salvation is a settled matter because it is the work of God in saving broken sinners and granting to them everlasting life. And why?

Because he paid my debt. Third, and this is a tricky word, Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. Now, that is a 50-cent word, and I am working to make my vocabulary simpler, but propitiation is it.

And here is the reason. I am going to explain that one word, propitiation, and bear with me. The word means to cover a debt by taking your place and paying your debt.

[31 : 23] Now, choice. Remember the long statement or stick with propitiation. Do you got it? Propitiation means to cover my debt by taking my place and paying the cost.

And Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. So let me close with a couple thoughts that have struck me this week.

For one, I really am affected by the truth of the cross in my Christian life.

Yesterday, I was in conversation with a situation, and I made the point that because of Jesus and what He's done for me, I mean, the truth of the matter is, is that my entire life belongs to Him, and I ought to live every piece of it in the shadow of the cross.

In other words, is what I'm doing reflecting favorably on Jesus? Jesus. Amen? I hear people going on about their Christian liberties, and I hear people talking about their personal agendas and schedules and preferences and comforts, and I'm thinking to myself, what happened?

[32:44] Jesus said this. He said, take up your cross and what? Follow me. We got a problem.

When the substance of our thinking is focused on our retirement home, or how comfortable we're going to be, or whether we're going to take a third vacation or whatever, what happened to being poured out as a drink offering for the sake of other people because Jesus died in your place and hung upon the tree for your sins and lived and died.

To deliver you from the curse. So a question would be this.

Am I really affected much by the cross if it doesn't occupy my conversation? If it doesn't govern my attitudes, hey, everybody up here, I'm an attitude junkie.

How many of you understand what I just said? I don't have to stretch in the morning to have stinky attitudes. It's almost like before you brush your teeth. Yeah. Yes. Not good.

[34:06] Okay. I understand. But here's the deal. Because Jesus, come on. Some of you are out there going, okay, I'm talking to you.

Am I really caught up by the cross if I'm kind of comfortable with my rotten attitude? Am I really caught up by the cross when I find myself growing distant from the cost of serving and being a blessing to other people?

Am I caught up by the cross if I am not growing in my affection for Christ? How many of you know what affection looks like?

Everybody? Okay. Pay attention. No matter who you are and how your personality plays out publicly, I can tell when you're fired up about something.

Do you follow that? So when was the last time that thinking about Jesus actually put a smile on your face?

[35:26] When was the last time when you were talking to somebody else, your conversations about Jesus made them stop and say, well, you really believe this, don't you?

Right? Right? I mean, we talk about Little League. We talk about sports. We talk about, you know, whatever it is that we talk about. And people know that we're into that, but where's the cross?

Where's the cross? And so this morning, as the men come, and I'm going to ask them to do that now. As the men come, I want you to stop and ask yourself the question.

Do you need the Holy Spirit's help to worship the Lord Jesus?

Because He endured the offense of the cross to bring you the glory of the cross. And so this morning, as the men come, and I'm going to ask you to