

Why the Cross is So Wondrous

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[0 : 00] Good evening, everyone. Thank you for coming to this time of a sober understanding of pondering upon Good Friday.

This morning, I heard this morning here, I'm already caught in a bad habit. This evening, the sermon is entitled, Why the Cross is So Wondrous.

Why the cross is so wondrous. It was in 1707 that a man, a pastor, an English preacher by the name of Isaac Watts, perhaps one of the greatest hymn writers of all time, is credited in writing probably one of the best and greatest hymns when I survey the wondrous cross.

The hymn, which is not a lament or some sort of Irish dirge, it's actually a hymn that celebrates the cross.

If I were to ask you one word to describe the cross, how many of you would use the word wondrous? The first stanza reads as this, When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but lost, and pour contempt on all my pride.

[1 : 35] The hymn is based on the Apostle Paul's writing, found in Galatians 6.14, which reads, But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

When one considers the different elements of the ministry of Jesus Christ, why of all things does Paul choose to boast in the cross?

For instance, Paul could have boasted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Let's be honest, the teachings of Jesus Christ are known the world over.

He was known as one of the greatest teachers. In fact, even those who chose not to believe in him as the Son of God marveled at his teaching.

His teaching was unquestionable. Most people have heard the Sermon on the Mount, which many recognize today as possibly the greatest teaching put to paper.

[2 : 51] There's so much great wisdom there that it appeals to just about everyone in society. If you're the downtrodden, the sermon reminds you that blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, and blessed are the peacemakers. It includes relational wisdom.

Love your enemies. Do not judge. Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. The Sermon on the Mount provides financial wisdom.

Do not store up for yourself storehouses of treasures in this world. And do not build your house upon the sand.

It also includes spiritual wisdom to communicate with God. It is in the Sermon on the Mount where we read the Lord's Prayer. We hear Jesus simply say, Ask, and it will be giving.

[4 : 01] Jesus' teaching was great, and it was marvelous. But Paul did not boast in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Paul could have boasted in the power and the miracles of Jesus. Jesus stopped storms with but a word. Jesus fed and healed thousands. Jesus gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf.

Gave hands to those that were without. He gave motion to those that were paralyzed. And even gave life to those that were dead. Even the demons feared and obeyed this power.

But Paul did not boast in the power of power and miracles of Jesus. Paul could have boasted in the love and kindness of Jesus.

Jesus loved the destitute, the poor in spirit, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the outsiders of society, the unclean. Jesus demonstrated love, kindness, and compassion beyond that of anyone who has ever walked the face of the earth before him or after him.

[5 : 18] Yet Paul did not boast in the love and kindness of Jesus. Paul's boast was in the cross of Christ.

Why the cross? Well, what helps us understand why the cross is an understanding, if I may, give you a short context of this letter to Galatians.

It's a church and it's one of the, it's a series of churches in a part of the world called Galatia. Paul had ministered there, he had planted church there, and years later he is writing them an impassioned emotional letter.

In fact, this letter carries so much passion and has such a sense of urgency, he just says, Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

You see, the people of Galatia, the church there, were struggling with a very specific question.

[6 : 25] It is a question that every man and woman here today struggles with at some point in their life. That question is, How do I make myself right with God?

How do I make myself right with God? Every person who has walked the face of the earth asks this question at one point or another.

How do I know this? Well, Galatians 6, 7 and 8 reads, Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

It is a truism of life that we all know. Whether you've read the Bible or not, or whether you've heard of the name of Jesus, it makes no matter.

Every person who walks the face of this earth understands what we reap is what we sow.

[7 : 35] Not only in this world, but in the next life to come. The implication is clear for everyone who is here this morning.

You and I are responsible for how we live this life. Fact is, we all live.

We all will die. And even in the deepest part of our being, whether you claim to believe in God or not, you are in fear because at one point you have thought, I have to answer for my life.

Fact the matter is, the Bible readily teaches us in Romans 1 that God has made himself so clear and so understandable.

There is not a single person who walks the face of the earth who is without excuse. We all know that we will all have to give an account for our lives before the day of judgment.

[9 : 00] My eternal destiny, your eternal destiny, depends on how you have lived this life.

The fact of the matter is, we all know that life matters and life is not easy. Some, life is harder than others. But in the end, it does not matter which home you come from, whether you're rich or poor, educated or not educated, you ask yourself the question, how am I made right with God?

See, the recipients of the letter of Paul writes that they were dealing with this question and they concluded that to make themselves right with God, they needed to add something to the cross.

They chose religious rituals. They deduced that they needed more laws, more legalism, more religious customs.

Now, when we think of it, why would any person want to burden themselves with any more rules, any more legalism or laws in their life? But it comes down to a simple thing that every person struggles with is that man wants to boast.

[10 : 24] And the thing that man wants to boast in most of all is him or her self. Do you understand the richest industries that exist today are created for you to boast about yourself?

Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. Those are all apparatus, apparatus, that are centered around allowing someone to say their piece and let it be heard around the world.

Outside of Jesus Christ, who really has said something that much of value that it needs to be heard everywhere in the four corners of this world.

You see, at the heart of our hearts, we want to boast we want something to be proud of. You see, there's something that you and I, at the core of our being, we want to take credit for something.

So even these saints that lived in Galatia knew the wonders of the cross, still wanted to take credit for something.

[11 : 47] So they created more a system of religious and rules so they could give themselves more credit for. What's amazing about Paul and every other apostle is that they always, and I mean always, preached the cross.

They always boasted in the cross and they never boasted in anything else. time holds me back from sharing the many passages, but I want you to turn with me to Matthew 16, Matthew 16.

In it includes an incredible exchange that exists between Jesus Christ and his disciples. It is Matthew 16, verse 14.

14. Now, the events of this ministry, this time that Jesus Christ, he's about halfway through his earthly ministry, and he's about to segue to the final third of his ministry, so to speak, or the final half of his ministry.

And he has to ask his disciples a simple question. And the question he's going to ask them is, are they ready ready to come with him in the last stages of his ministry?

[13:13] Not only that, he wants to prepare them for what's to happen next. So, he gives them a sort of test. The question that he asks begins in verse 13, sorry, it says, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

That Son of Man is a term which derived from Daniel, which means that Jesus is the one who represents us. He is the Messiah, the promised one. Who do people say that I am?

And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah, one of the prophets. And then he said to them, but who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

It's like, wow, you nailed it, Peter. Well, done. He encourages Peter in verse 18.

[14:33] He says, I tell you, you are Peter. And on this rock, this rock that he's talking about, the Catholics have mistakenly understood the rock to be Peter. The rock is Jesus Christ, the one he has just identified as the Son of God.

On this rock, this truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We're winning. We got it. They're with me. If you skip down to verse 21, Jesus lets them know what comes next.

From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

You see, this is Jesus communicating to them that this is the central point of my ministry. This is the part of my ministry that you will go on to boast about.

[15:53] Notice their first reaction, 22. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke. Just think of the impassion.

He's just declared that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. God has thanked him for it. He's made the statement, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

And he simply responds, far be it from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you. See, the reality is Peter loved the teachings of Jesus.

Peter loved the power and miracles of Jesus. Peter loved the character of Jesus. The thought of dying did not appeal to Peter.

Peter. The response was simply get behind me, Satan. In one breath, he's speaking the words of God.

[17:03] The next breath, he echoes the words of Satan. See, even the apostles at first did not see this way.

My friends, do not let someone say to you that the cross was a mistake, that it was an accident, that it was because the Jews tricked him or the Romans overpowered him.

The fact of the matter is, as Jesus revealed in Matthew 16, the cross was always a part of God's plan. The cross is never to be regretted.

the cross is never to be ignored, and the cross is never to be hidden. It is why from there, Jesus, the apostles always preached the cross.

If Jesus had not died upon the cross, nobody could be saved. to answer the question, what might man do to make himself right with God?

[18:21] Nothing. There is nothing. Why do we need salvation? Why do we need this cross?

Because the reality is we need forgiveness. It is the deepest longing of our hearts and our soul. people. We know we have done wrong. We have lived wrong.

We understand that in our entire life, we have not given all glory to God. Romans 3 11 simply states, none is righteous, no, not one.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. died. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

Paul simply states in Romans 3 23, for all have sinned, for all have done wrong, for all have not given glory to God and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

[19 : 37] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

That word propitiation means to exchange. God kills his son in our place and he exchanged his righteousness for our righteousness.

righteousness. The cross itself saves. It makes us right with God. Why the cross?

Because it represents the ultimate act of love and sacrifice. Jesus, the sinless son of God, took upon himself every sin of the world before he existed and every sin after, and he died the criminal's death to offer you and I life.

in this act, we see God's perfect love, we see God's perfect justice, God's perfect mercy, God's perfect grace, and God's perfect holiness.

[20 : 48] holiness. You see, the cross dismantles our pride, our self-reliance, our merit. The cross points us to something greater than ourselves.

The cross points us to a grace so overwhelming that there is no room for any personal glory in it. My friends, today, on Good Friday, today, we come together to be reminded of the reality of the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us.

This cross, a torturous device that was considered so cruel and so wicked that it was only reserved for the most vile members of Roman society.

In fact, if you were a Roman citizen, you could not be placed on the cross. This cross, this brutal instrument of execution became the source of our salvation.

It is on the cross that God saves us from his wrath. It is on the cross that we see the depth of our sin and the height of God's love for us.

[22 : 08] The cry of Jesus, it is finished, echoes through history as the greatest declaration of sin's defeat and death's demise.

The cross is to be boasted in. The cross is to be called wondrous because it is the only instrument that brings us harmony with God.

Through the cross, we are forgiven. forgiven. We are reconciled. We are adopted as children of God. And we receive the blessings of God.

Because of this, the cross also invites you and me into a new way of living. The cross has in it the power to transform.

It has in it the power to redeem us. It has the power to resurrect us. Isaac Watts continues in his song, The Wondrous Cross.

[23 : 19] He says, Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God. All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them through his blood.

see from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did air such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich?

The crown. When we truly grasp what happened on that place called Golgoth outside of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, we can't help but be changed.

See, the cross also calls us to live for ourselves, not for ourselves, but for him who died and rose again.

See, boasting in the cross means more than just acknowledging his power. It means letting that power work through us to shape every aspect of our lives.

[24 : 33] It means humility instead of pride. It means service instead of selfishness and love instead of indifference. One author I read on the subject says, living in the shadow of the cross affects how we view ourselves, how we interact with others, and how we face the challenges of life.

The shadow of the cross calls us to a life of sacrificial love, following the example of Christ, who though he was God, humbled himself even to the point of death on the cross.

My friends, this Good Friday as we reflect on this cross, let us consider what it means to truly boast in it. How does it change the way we live, the way we think, the way we act, the way we relate to one another?

How does it affect how we see this world? Let us pray that God would give us the grace to understand more deeply the magnitude of God's Christ's great sacrifice.

I pray that God would truly create in us clean and thankful hearts. grace. I pray that our lives would be marked by the cross, shaped by its love and driven by its ministry.

[26 : 05] Isaac Watts concludes, we're the whole realm of nature mine, that we're a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, demands my life, demands my all.

Oh, the wondrous cross. Pray with me, please. O heavenly father, I pray that just in this Friday, this evening which we have come to call Good Friday, may we meditate upon the truth of your great love for us.

Great love not because we were so extra special that you had to love us, but your love was so great it compelled you to love us. That there was no way for us to make ourselves right with you.

That you created this way for us to be made right with you. On a cross. You changed how the world views the cross instead of a hated torture symbol.

It is a tool of being brought in perfect harmony with you. It is an instrument of love. It is an instrument of redemption. freedom for a lost, broken, perverted soul such as ours.

[28 : 09] You cleaned us in your sacrifice. You made us right with you. Father, my prayer, if there is anyone here who does not know you or does not know what you have indeed done for them, I pray that you would lead it on their hearts, their souls, and their mind that they cannot get away from the simple fact that Jesus Christ died for them.

It is not simple that they have salvation, but it is to have a relationship with you. a relationship that demands soul, life, and all.

It is a love that is so amazing and so divine that there is nothing that this world can offer that even pales in comparison to the righteousness and the blessings that you grant us through the cross.

Father, this world is an illusion, it's a trap. But at some point, every soul needs to answer for what they have sown.

How are they going to be able to respond to this, that, Lord God, I did not live for you. My life isn't worthy of you.

[29 : 42] and to know that Jesus comes forth and simply says, my child, I lived the life that you could not live, and I died on the cross, the death you could not die, also thou that you could live in righteousness with me.

Father, may you prepare us for the resurrection this coming Sunday. May you create in us a worshipful time that we can have with you, even preparing our hearts and souls with our family and friends, or even on our own in the meditation of your word.

Lord, your good news is universal and it is life changing, and we thank you for this, in your most wonderful and incredible name.