

The Cross: Absolutely Essential (Part I)

1 Cor. 2:2

2-1-15

I want to take as our subject this morning, The Cross as absolutely Essential to:

- (1) God's plan of salvation,
- (2) The Church's message, and
- (3) The Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:2 "*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*"¹ That is a focus we must never, never lose. "There is power in the blood of Jesus; there is power in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus—and in the message of His death and resurrection. There is power in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The devil does not want that power unleashed against him. He does not want you and me proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He does not want churches that gather in the name of Jesus and He does not want people whose faith rests upon the finished work of Christ. And so—there is always the danger that we would get diverted onto some good thing that takes our attention off of Jesus and diverts us from the central message of Calvary. Therefore, today I remind you and I remind myself—with determination like Paul had—we will keep our focus on our Savior Jesus Christ and on His work of salvation in our behalf. The Cross is Central. Without the Cross there is no real Christianity. The Cross is essential.

(I) In God's Plan of Salvation.

Rev. 13:8 declares Jesus to be "*the Lamb Slain before the foundation of the world.*" Before the earth was ever formed, before the sun and moon ever shined, before there was ever one blade of grass or one drop of ocean water, before God ever made the first man or breathed the breath of life in him—the Lamb was in the heart of the Father as part of His plan for you and me. Redemption was not God's reaction to Adam's sin; it was not afterthought; it was God's plan before creation ever happened. Adam freely made his own choice, but Adam's choice was not a surprise to God. So you know the story of Adam's disobedience and the consequence of that disobedience. Adam not only brought himself into a state of sin and condemnation but he passed that fallen condition on to his seed² so that all of humanity was affected. And every one of us behaved according to that fallen nature so that Romans 1:23 declares "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*"

The bad news for every son of Adam is that you were born self-absorbed and bent on going your own way. "*All we like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6) we have turned, every one, to his own way.*" That is the condition of every human being without Christ. The one common condition is that each and every one has turned and gone his own way. For one person that might be extortion and murder and for another person it might be gluttony and gossip. It doesn't matter exactly how the independence from God is expressed—going our own way is rebellion against our created purpose and leaves us guilty before God—condemned already according to John 3:18.

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² All of creation reproduces after its own kind (Gen. 1:11-12, 24-25. The principle is further expanded upon in Hebrews 7:9-10. Those in Christ have been born-again (John 3:5-18) of an incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23) and are in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

The good news is that Jesus is the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.³ He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. There is forgiveness in His name. There is acceptance before God through Him. In Jesus there is salvation available to whosoever will. Look how Paul summarizes all this in Romans 5.

Verse 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned....Verse 17 "For if by the one man's offense death reigned the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."

So here is the contrast that Paul gives. Adam's act of disobedience at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil brought judgment on him and all his seed—even the whole human race. Jesus' one righteous act of obedience at the Tree of Calvary brings the free gift of justification to all who will receive it (One act of disobedience—one act of obedience). Adam's act brought sin and judgment. Jesus' act brought forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.

So the basis of our salvation is not many individual acts of good works.⁴ That's the way humanistic religion thinks. But God's standard of righteousness is perfection. A human being could do many good things over a lifetime, but just one lustful thought, one angry word, one neglected duty brings it all below the standard.⁵ The best man has to offer still comes short of the glory of God. If I try to jump a ravine that is thirty feet deep, it really doesn't matter whether I come short by 5 ft. or 6 inches. In either case, I plunge to the bottom. Jesus' obedience to the Father is perfect.⁶ His righteousness is flawless. What we need and what is offered through the Good News of Jesus Christ is the gift of His righteousness—His right standing before the Father shared with you and me.

Throughout the Old Testament God is pointing people to the cross as the way of salvation. He gives them means by which they can look forward in faith to Christ's death on the cross. Immediately after Adam's sin came the promise that the seed of woman (Messiah) would crush the head of the serpent.⁷ That's exactly what happened at Calvary. Messiah was physically killed at the cross, but His death destroyed Satan's hold on humanity and dealt to him a crushing, fatal blow.⁸ As of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan is like a serpent with his head cut off. He wiggles and moves but it's really all over for him. He is stripped of all legal authority and his final end is certain.

God made a covenant of promise to Abraham and sealed that covenant with the rite of circumcision. Circumcision was an act of faith that looked forward to the cross. The blood of the Lamb on Passover night in Moses' day was given as a means of faith that looked forward to the salvation Christ the true Lamb of God would bring at Calvary. All the Old Testament sacrifices were instructive shadows of what

³ John 1:29, 36. The title recalls the substitutionary blood sacrifices in the Old Testament, especially the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12).

⁴ Rom. 3:19-20 "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

⁵ James 2:10-11.

⁶ Hebrews 4:15.

⁷ Genesis 3:15.

⁸ John 12:31; 1 Cor. 2:7-8; Col. 2:15. Rev. 12:9 and 20:2 refer to the Devil as the serpent.

would come through Messiah. Heb. 9:22, “*And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission*” (forgiveness of sin). According to Hebrews 10:4 the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin—it only postponed the judgment of sin until Jesus could bear it’s punishment for us.

Eph. 1:7 “*In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*”

Eph. 2:4-9 “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

The wages of sin is death.⁹ We were dead in trespasses and sins. A dead man cannot solve his problem. We were in a helpless situation—lying in our blood. But God in His mercy sent Jesus and made a way of salvation. The Good News is that Jesus Saves. The Good News is that God through Jesus’ one righteous act offers the gift of righteousness to whosoever will. The Good News is that you don’t have to earn favor with God; it is offered to you freely through Christ. If you have not received the gift of eternal life, I present it to you today as God’s offer to you. All you have to do is turn your life over to Him and ask Him to come in as Lord and Savior. You have to receive it but He provides it to you freely.

The Cross was necessary in God’s Plan of Salvation because we were helpless to save ourselves. Only by the blood of Jesus can sin be forgiven. Only by the perfect Lamb as our substitute can judgment be satisfied. Only by that one righteous act could the Lord bring many sons unto glory.

II. The Cross is Essential to the Church’s Message.

“*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*” The Good News is about what Jesus has done for us! The good news is more than just positive thinking. It is more than a two-car garage and a paid off mortgage. The good news is more than even friends and family. All of those good things may be peripheral to the good news. But central to everything is Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. It is the offer of the gift eternal life. It is the provision of all things that pertain unto life and godliness. It is Christ living in our hearts by faith, changing us from glory to glory, empowering us to live above sin, enabling us to commune with God and enjoy His company and favor, bringing meaning and purpose to our existence.¹⁰ All of that comes by grace—without us earning it. We choose it; we receive it; but we could never earn it.

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God¹¹.” Our message is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It all revolves around the Person of Christ and His finished work in our behalf. He has sat down at the right hand of the Father.¹² He had already done the work. We simply place our faith and reliance on Him. We do try to make things happen. We simply cooperate with what He is doing in our lives. We

⁹ Rom. 6:23. Death has to do with separation. Physical death entails a separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death entails a separation of the soul from God who is the source of life.

¹⁰ Eph. 3:17; 2 Cor.. 3:18; Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:6; Phil. 3:8-14.

¹¹ Romans 10:17. People can’t respond to a message that is not given (Rom. 10:13-15). This is why the Church’s message must center on the Person of Christ and His finished Work on the Cross—that is the basis for the power of God unto salvation; His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 10:8-9).

¹² Heb. 1:3; 10:10-14.

don't have to strain and fret; abide in Him, rest in Him,¹³ simply obey Him and He will bring His promises to pass. What we want to do is point people to Jesus. We ourselves want to always be "*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*"¹⁴ It is all about Jesus and our relationship with Him.

My concern for any church is that it will get occupied with many good things and lose sight of the one essential thing. We exist to lift up the name of Jesus. We gather unto Him. I enjoy your fellowship, but first and foremost I have come to meet with my Lord.¹⁵ Jesus said in Matt 18:20 "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*" The key to that verse is *eis to emon onoma* (into My name). He must be the common desire and objective. The name represents the person. Did we come together to meet with Him? Is our gathering about Him? Is our connection with one another centered in Him? When even just two or three gather with that motive, God is there.

But if leaders are not very intentional about keep Christ as central to everything—if leaders do not remind themselves and others that it all depends upon Jesus' death and resurrection—then church can become nothing more than a humanistic social gathering—people enjoying people; but God is not there in their midst. He is not there to empower them for service. He is not there to deliver them from evil. He is not there to heal their bodies. He is not there to quicken their souls with the seed of the word. They were just a bunch of people who got together, met some of their social needs, perhaps were kindly entertained—but then leave much like people leave concert or a sporting event. Not bad in itself; but certainly less than God intended for them.

At Life Church we gather in the name of Jesus. We enjoy one another. We encourage one another. But all that revolves around our relationship in Christ. We are worshipping the Lord of Glory and living together in community with Him.

Jesus gave us two ordinances to help us remember what Christianity is all about. Water baptism is a visual reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a tangible declaration of our death to the old life and resurrection to newness of life.¹⁶ The Lord's Supper is commanded by Christ for our benefit. As we hold the symbols of His death—we are aware of what this is all about. The blood separated from the flesh is symbolic of death. Jesus said, "*As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of Me* (1Cor. 11:25). It is a very foolish thing for the church to neglect the Lord's Table. We may think we're smart enough to keep the cross central without the reminder, but Jesus didn't think so. It is something that should be done with understand and in faith, but it should be done and often.¹⁷ There is a protection in doing that. "*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*"

Congregation Took Communion Together at the Conclusion of This Message.

¹³ John 15:5; Phil. 4:6; 2 Thes. 1:7.

¹⁴ Heb. 12:2.

¹⁵ The Apostle John's invitation to fellowship defined it with these words, "...and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

¹⁶ Rom. 6:4.

¹⁷ Acts 2:42; 20:7. The Lord's Supper was probably combined with a common meal together prior to the abuses and correction Paul administered in 1 Cor. 11.