

INTRODUCTION

If I knew I could only preach one more message before Jesus called me home to heaven, there is no doubt I would preach on the cross. I suspect the Apostle Paul felt the same way. From the moment Jesus appeared to him, he was obsessed with the power and wonder of the cross. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth, “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2) Someone said: The heart of Christianity is the Bible; and the heart of the Bible is the Cross; and the heart of the Cross is the very heart of God.

Some of the most powerful words about the cross are found in Colossians 2:11-15:

“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God [notice God is the subject of the following action verbs] made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. [literally: “God took it away, God nailed it to the cross.”] And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Have you ever noticed that before? The Roman soldier wasn't the only one with a hammer in his hand that day. Almighty God was nailing something to the cross as well. What really happened on the cross? In this age of computing, we have generated a new word: Multitasking. That means while you are working on one particular task, your computer can be working on two or three other processes simultaneously. You may think that's neat, but God is the original Multitasker. He can ignite the mighty sun in the sky to hold the planets in orbit, and He can use that same sun to ripen your tomatoes as if He had nothing else to do. As I began to study this passage I realized there were several divine tasks occurring simultaneously at the Cross of Jesus. At the same moment Jesus Christ was being nailed to the cross, God was also nailing three other things to the cross.

1. ALL MY SIN AND SHAME

The reason we couldn't relate to a holy God on our own is because our lives were full of wrong thoughts and wicked deeds. *The Message* paraphrases verse 13 this way, “When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ!” (Colossians 2:13 *The Message*)

The Romans crucified thousands of criminals, and it was customary to place a sign above the head of the person crucified. The sign listed their name and their crime. For instance, a typical sign might say, “Simon Bar Rueven: Murder.” This sign was called a *titilus*, from which we get our English word “title.”

Perhaps you’ve seen depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus in which the four letters “INRI” appear. Those are the first four letters in the Latin phrase *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*, which stands for “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” When Pilate examined Jesus, he said, “I find no fault in this man.” But the Jews demanded Jesus’ crucifixion. So Pilate mocked them by having that sign placed on the cross, which made Jewish leaders angry. They demanded Pilate change it to, “He CLAIMED to be the King of the Jews.” But Pilate said, “What I have written, I have written.” (John 19:20-22) The Bible says, “Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened it to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS...and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.” (John 19:19-20) Aramaic was the spoken form of Hebrew—it was the spiritual language of the covenant relationship with God. Latin was the language of the Roman Empire—it represented power, government, and conquest. Greek was the international language of culture, representing philosophy, art, and commerce. So without realizing it Pilate was announcing Jesus is *King* over all these areas of life—spiritual, governmental, and intellectual!

When Jesus went to the cross, the only crime Pilate accused Him of was being a King! But there was an unseen titulus on the cross—written by the finger of God—and on it was listed all of my sin and all of your sin. And according to Isaiah 53:6, it was God who placed our sin on Jesus. The Bible says, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” That word literally means to be crushed—God placed the crushing weight of my sin and your sin on Jesus.

Have you ever considered the shame of the cross? The purpose of crucifixion was to execute a criminal in the most shameful, inhumane way possible. Victims were often crucified naked to increase their shame.

On one of my trips to visit our partner city in China, I was walking downtown one afternoon. In front of one of the largest stores there were three men sitting on low stools, each with a sign on the sidewalk before them. A policeman was standing behind them. I asked my Chinese friend who those men were. He explained they were petty criminals, and as part of their punishment they had to sit in a public place with a sign listing their crime. One of the signs said, “Drunk driver.” The other said, “Thief.” Another said, “Drug user.” The streets were crowded and people walked by identifying those men by their crimes. You may think public shame is a too strong a form of punishment, but our crime rate in American is 7 times higher than in China. Maybe they have an idea there. Shame can be a powerful force.

Hebrews 12:2 says this about the shame of the cross, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the JOY set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its SHAME and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The phrase “scorning its shame” means even though Jesus found the sin and the shame of the cross revolting, He endured it anyway. He despised it, but He embraced it. In His grace, He embraced my disgrace! If you are a Christian, you can rejoice, because you don’t have to carry the weight of your sin and shame any more: It was nailed to the cross!

2. ALL THE OLD TESTAMENT REGULATIONS

The Bible says when Jesus died, God “cancelled the written code with its regulations.” Eugene Peterson expresses it this way, “Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ’s Cross.” (Colossians 2:14 *The Message*) We are entering one of the most life-changing passages of scriptures in all the Bible. Many Christians are confused about what parts of the Old Testament we should obey today. For instance, they ask, “Is all the Bible true?” And the answer is: Yes. Then they read a verse in Leviticus that says you can’t eat pork, or catfish, or men shouldn’t cut the hair at the sides of their head. And they ask, “Why don’t we obey that?” Here’s your answer: Because at the Cross, God cancelled all the Old Testament ceremonial regulations. He took them away nailing it to the cross.

In the Old Testament there are hundreds of rules and regulations God set down for the Jews dealing with diet, festivals, hygiene, and the sacrificial system at the Temple. There is even a verse in Deuteronomy 21 that says the way to deal with a stubborn, rebellious teenage son is to take him outside the city gates and stone him to death! Some parents might be interested in restoring that regulation! Of course, the most common question is, “Why don’t we observe the Sabbath Day?” When we get into the Grace Robbers series next week, I will be addressing some of these specific questions, because they are addressed beginning in Colossians 2:16. You may be in for a surprise!

As I was preparing this message, I started to make the sign say, “Old Testament Law” but that would have been erroneous. In order to understand what was nailed to the cross, we must make a distinction between the moral law of God and the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament. For instance, as we will learn next week, we don’t have to obey the Jewish dietary laws, because those are ceremonial regulations. But we must still God’s moral law, which says, “You shall not murder.” We will learn we don’t have to observe the Old Testament festivals (ceremonial regulation), but we *do* have to obey the moral law of God which says, “Do not steal.”

Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17) The Old Testament commands all find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. But sadly, many people, even some calling themselves Christians, are trying to live by these Old Testament Regulations and Rules. As Jesus was hanging on the Cross, He was fulfilling all of the Old Testament sacrificial regulations. He was the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. As He breathed His last breath, He shouted, “*Tetelestai!*” which means, “It is finished!” That word literally means, “It is fulfilled!”

About 1/4 mile from the Cross stood the Jewish Temple. Inside the innermost building were two rooms, one called the Most Holy Place and the other was the Holy of Holies. Inside the Holy of Holies it was believed the presence of Jehovah dwelt—His Shekinah Glory. No person could enter the Holy of Holies except for the High Priest—and he could only enter for a few hours on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. There was a large, thick curtain hanging between these two rooms. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the curtain was sixty feet tall and thirty feet wide and as thick as a man’s hand. The moment Jesus died; the Bible says the curtain was torn in two from *top to bottom!* God was saying, “You don’t need the sacrificial system anymore. You don’t need the ceremonial regulations anymore!”

The priests had to be shocked, but after their initial shock, they repaired the curtain and

continued to perform the same old sacrifices at the temple until it was destroyed in 70A.D. I know some Christians who erect their own curtains and try to live lives of legal observance instead of basking in the grace and forgiveness that is ours in Christ. Those regulations were nailed to the Cross! You are set free from the law!

3. ALL OF SATAN’S POWER

There was something else nailed to the cross that day. Satan’s authority and power was nullified by the cross. I was looking for a nicer way to say this, but will you understand me if I say, “God nailed Satan’s hide to the cross?” The Bible says, “He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.” (Colossians 2:15 *The Message*)

Anytime I hear someone say, “Satan is alive and well,” I correct them by saying, “He’s alive, but he hasn’t been well since Calvary!” God dealt Satan a mortal wound at the cross. 1 John 3:8 says, “...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” Hebrews 2:14 says, “...so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.”

You talk about shame! Satan surely must have snickered at the shame Jesus endured on the cross, but when Jesus finished His work, Satan was the one who was shamed. In order to help you grasp the turn of events, consider during the last week of Jesus’ earthly life, He was involved in three marches—three parades—three processions.

(1) The march into Jerusalem

One week before Resurrection Sunday, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem. We call this Palm Sunday, because the people waved palm branches. If you look in your NIV Bible, it has section titles. If you look above the section beginning in Luke 19:28 describing Palm Sunday the heading says, “The Triumphal Entry.” Take your pen and scribble that out. Those headings aren’t inspired by God—and it wasn’t a triumphal parade yet. It was a tearful entry, because Luke 19:41 says as Jesus approached the city He wept over it. He knew the same fickle crowd shouting, “Crown Him!” would be shouting “Crucify Him” in a few days. The people yelling, “Hail Him!” would be the same ones bellowing, “Nail Him!” The people crying, “Save us!” would soon be the ones crying, “Save yourself...if you are truly the Son of God!”

(2) The march with the cross

Then on the morning Jesus was crucified, He was part of another procession. After He had been beaten, tortured and mocked, they laid a heavy cross on His back and made Him carry it to the place of the Skull. They spat on Him and mocked Him as He walked the narrow streets of Jerusalem.

Sandy Patti recorded a song called, “The Via Dolorosa.” It means, “the way of suffering.” The words say: “Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day; the soldiers tried to clear the narrow street; but the crowd pressed in to see; the Man condemned to die on Calvary. He was bleeding

from a beating; there were stripes upon His back; and He wore a crown of thorns upon His head; And He bore with every step, the scorn of those who cried out for His death! Down the Via Dolorosa called the way of suffering; like a lamb, came the Messiah, Christ the King. But He chose to walk that road out of His love for me and you; Down the Via Dolorosa all the way to Calvary.”

To this day, every Friday morning in Jerusalem, there is a procession winding through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, stopping at the twelve places called “the stations of the cross.” I’ve followed the Via Dolorosa myself, and it is a moving experience to think about Jesus’ forced march to Calvary.

Hundreds of paintings depict Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and His procession to Calvary. But there are no paintings of this next parade. This march was not witnessed by human eyes, so it would be impossible to reproduce it. But it was:

(3) The march of triumph

Read Colossians 2:15 again, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” The words “triumphing over” means to lead prisoners of war in a victory procession. The picture is of a military procession leading captives of war. A victorious Roman General would lead his captives through the streets of Rome in a massive parade. Behind him the conquered kings, officers and soldiers of the defeated nation would follow. They were openly branded as his victims and spoil. This one of the highest honors a Roman general could achieve.

Bible scholar William Barclay describes it this way: “Satan’s demonic forces were hostile, malicious, malignant to men. Jesus conquered them for ever. He stripped them. Once and for all Jesus broke their power. He put them to open shame and led them captive in His triumphant train. Paul thinks of Jesus as a triumphant conqueror, enjoying a kind of cosmic triumph; and in His triumphal procession are the powers of evil, beaten for ever, for every one to see.” (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p.172). Some picture the cross only as an instrument of death and defeat, but the Bible says the cross was Jesus’ chariot of victory over Satan!

As I said, no human eye witnessed this victory parade; the but great British preacher Charles Spurgeon imagined it this way:

“Lift up your eyes to the battlements of heaven, the great metropolis of God. The pearly gates are wide open, and the city shines with her bejeweled walls like a bride prepared for her husband. Do you see the angels crowding to the battlements? Do you observe them eagerly desiring and looking for something which has not yet arrived? At last, there is heard the sound of a trumpet, and the angels hurry to the gates—the vanguard of the redeemed is approaching the city.

He comes! He comes! It is Christ himself! “Lift up you heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in.” See, he enters in the

midst of acclamations. It is he! But he is not crowned with thorns. It is he! But though his hands wear the scar, they are stained with blood no longer. His eyes are as a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns, and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

But who are these at his chariot wheels? Who are these grim monsters that come howling in the rear? I know them. First of all there is the arch enemy. Look at the old serpent, bound and fettered, how he writhes his ragged length along! his azure hues all tarnished with trailing in the dust, his scales despoiled of their once-vaunted brightness.

With what derision is the chief of rebels regarded. How is he become the object of everlasting contempt. He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh, and the Lord doth have him in derision. Behold now how the serpent's head is broken, and the dragon is trampled under foot. See how he rolls his fiery eye-balls, mark how he twists and writhes in agonies. Mark how he glares upon the holy city, but is unable to spit his venom there, for he is chained and gagged, and dragged along an unwilling captive at the wheels of the victor!

And there, too, is old Death, with his darts all broken and his hands behind him—the grim king of terrors, he too is a captive. Hark to the chorus of angels as they see these mighty prisoners dragged along! "Worthy is he," they shout, "to live and reign at his Almighty Father's side, for he hath ascended up on high, he hath led captivity captive!"

("Christ Triumphant" preached at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, September 4, 1859)

Satan didn't realize it at the time, but those hammer blows on the cross were the hammer blows that would nail him in his coffin. Those hammer blows echoed and echoed for three days until Jesus burst forth from the grave in victory.

So what does this all mean for us? Because of the cross, you don't have to suffer the shame of your sins—Jesus did. Because of the cross, you don't have to live according to a long list of do's and don'ts—you can enjoy God's grace. Because of the cross, you don't have to fear the devil—he is a defeated foe and if you resist the devil he will flee from you!

But don't ever forget there was something else nailed to the cross that day. More correctly, I should say *Someone* else. It was Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

CONCLUSION

Last summer I stood in the National Gallery in London, intrigued by a painting by David Gerard entitled, "Christ nailed to the Cross." (1480) I stood there for over thirty minutes fascinated by the details. I noticed the robe, the puppies playing, the expression of the men who were crucifying Jesus, and the two little boys watching from the background. But the one detail that most caught my attention was the face of Jesus. *He was looking at me.* I moved ten feet to my left, and Jesus was still staring at me. It was as if the painter wanted us to understand Jesus is

looking into our eyes saying, “I love you so much that I am enduring this cross for you.”

And right now, Jesus is looking into your heart with a gaze of unconditional love saying,
“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

Don’t you want to follow a man like that for the rest of your life? Don’t you want to serve a Savior like that for the rest of eternity? You can, if you will turn from your sins and place your faith in Him today.

OUTLINE

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2. ALL THE OLD TESTAMENT REGULATIONS

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The three marches of Jesus:

- (1) The march into Jerusalem
- (2) The march with the cross
- (3) The march of triumph



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes