

The Glory of Jesus' Cross "Palm Sunday"

PRAYER

Gracious Father,

Enlarge our hearts, warm our affections, open our lips, and supply words that proclaim, "Love radiates at Calvary."

There grace removes our burdens and heaps them on Your Son Jesus, made a transgressor, a curse, and sin for us; there the sword of Your justice struck Your Son; there Your infinite attributes were magnified, and infinite atonement made; there infinite punishment was due, and infinite punishment was endured.

Christ was all anguish that we might be all joy, cast off that we might be brought in, trodden down as an enemy that we might be welcomed as a friend, surrendered to hell's worst that we might attain heaven's best, stripped that we might be clothed, wounded that we might be healed, thirsty that we might drink, tormented that we might be comforted, made a shame that we might inherit glory, entered darkness that we might have eternal light.

Our Savior wept that all tears might be wiped from our eyes, groaned that we might have endless song, endured all pain that we might have unfading health, bore a thorny crown that we might have a glory-diadem, bowed his head that we might uplift ours, experienced reproach that we might receive welcome, closed his eyes in death that we might gaze on unclouded brightness, died that we might forever live.

O Father, who spared not your only Son that you might spare us, help us to adore you with our lips and life. Help us to glory in the Cross of your Son Jesus. Amen.
(Taken from **The Valley of Vision: Puritan Prayers and Devotions**)

ENGAGING the Audience

For centuries, every major religion and ideology has chosen a central symbol to represent their faith or cause.

Buddhism has the lotus flower, which, in its wheel shape, depicts the emergence of beauty and harmony in the midst of chaos.

Judaism has the Star of David, which represents God's covenant with David that his throne would be established forever and that the Messiah would descend from his lineage.

Islam is symbolized by a crescent and five-pointed star.

Communism is symbolized by the sickle and the hammer, which represents industry and agriculture. The sickle and hammer are crossed to signify the union between workers and peasants, as well as factories and fields.

And then, there is Christianity. The earliest Christians could have chosen a wide variety of symbols to represent their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord – a manger which represented his miraculous birth, an apron which symbolized his servanthood, a stone which represented his resurrection, a throne which represented his royalty, a dove which represented his anointing by the Holy Spirit.

Yet, by the 2nd Century, none of these symbols had been adopted as the central symbol of the Christian faith. The chosen symbol was a cross. In the ***Cross of Christ***, John Stott writes...

“The early Christians wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus neither his birth nor his youth, neither his teaching nor his service, neither his resurrection nor his reign, nor his gift of the Spirit, but his death, his crucifixion.”

As a result, church history records that the early Christians drew, painted, and engraved the cross as a pictorial symbol of their faith. Furthermore, they made the sign of the cross on themselves and others. At the end of their prayers, they made the sign of the cross. When tempted, they made the sign of the cross as a symbol of protection.

It was the Roman cross, a feared instrument of brutality, horror, and death that the early Christians chose to be their symbol of focus and hope. It was the bloody cross of Calvary that the early Christian church fixed their gaze squarely on as they prayed and faced temptation. It was the bruised, tortured, pierced, naked, and humiliated Jesus hanging cursed on a tree that the early Christians clung to in the face of their own opposition, persecution, and death.

For these early trail blazers, the cross was the center of their gaze. It was the Cross of Calvary they clung to. The cross was the central emphasis of their faith and worship. The cross was everything. Their faith and hope hinged primarily on Jesus Christ hanging cursed and dead on a Roman cross.

Making the CONNECTION

What is the central symbol of our 21st Century Christianity? Is it the cross – an instrument of loneliness, torture, humiliation, bloodshed, and death?

Is the cross everything to you and me? Is the cross at the center of our gaze? Have our hearts and minds and souls been captured by the glory of the cross and its life altering ramifications?

As we approach Resurrection Sunday, we must choose to see and anticipate the triumphant victory of the empty tomb thru the magnifying glass of Calvary's cross. We must not lose sight of the profound reality that the Cross of Christ precedes the Resurrection of Christ. The cross must come first. The cross must be central.

Here's why...

Before there could be victory thru the resurrection, there had to be death on the cross. Before Christ could be exalted thru the resurrection, he had to be humiliated on the cross. Before Christ could ascend to heaven as the victorious Lord, he had to descend to the grave as the dead God-Man.

Before Christ could offer us "reconciliation" with God thru the resurrection, he had to satisfy the holy "wrath" of God against our sin on the cross. Before Christ could offer us "justification" thru the resurrection, he had to bear God's "judgment" against our sin on the cross. Before Christ could offer us "adoption" into God's family thru the resurrection, he had to make blood "atonement" for our sin on the cross. Before Christ could offer us "righteousness" thru the resurrection, he had to pay our "ransom" on the cross. Before Christ could offer us "salvation" thru the resurrection, he had to become our substitutionary "sacrifice" on the cross.

It is only thru the pain, suffering, humiliation, loneliness, judgment, and death of Christ on the cross that God offers fallen humanity reconciliation, justification, righteousness, salvation, adoption, and eternal life. Without the Cross of Christ, there is only eternal separation, guilt, sin, lostness, despair, and death.

Like our early Christian ancestors, we must make the Cross of Christ the central focus of our gaze, our passion, and our worship. Like our ancestors, our faith and hope must hinge primarily on Jesus Christ hanging cursed and dead on a Roman cross.

Let me show you why.

GLORIOUS TRUTHS of the CROSS

Throughout the New Testament, if you look close enough, the cross is central. Every truth, every promise, and every hope flows from the Cross of Christ. Every command we have been given by God is possible because of the Cross of Christ.

Today, on this Palm Sunday, as we approach the cross and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us fix our gaze on the wondrous promises that were secured for us thru the Cross of Christ.

Romans 5:6-11

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

In Romans 5:6-11, God promises us that we have been...

1. Justified by the blood of Christ.
2. Saved from the wrath of God.
3. Reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

Prior to the Cross of Calvary, God reminds us that we were weak; utterly incapable of pulling ourselves out of the pit of depravity that sin had thrown us in to. We were ungodly people who, by nature, rebelled against God and chased after the wickedness, evil, and immorality of this fallen world. We were profoundly and entirely unholy at the core of our being. Thus, we were enemies of God, deserving His righteous and terrifying wrath against our sin and rebellion.

It is the Cross of Christ that changes all of this.

It is the precious, perfect blood of Jesus Christ that justifies us before the holy God. Thru the Cross of Christ, we, whom once stood utterly guilty before God, have now been acquitted of our sin-guilt and proclaimed innocent and holy in the eyes of the holy Judge. We who once stood condemned in our sin have now been made righteous and holy thru the blood of Christ’s cross.

Thru the Cross of Christ, we, whom once were viewed by the holy God as children deserving His righteous wrath, have now been saved from his terrifying wrath. How? Thru the Cross of Jesus Christ! On the cross, Jesus diverted God's wrath away from us and onto himself. Jesus bore the terrifying and righteous wrath of God toward our sin, in order that we might be spared. Think about this! God, in his grace and mercy, imputed our sin to Christ on the cross, and thus Christ became our sin, so that He could satisfy His wrath against our sin. We are no longer enemies of God; we are his friends and children.

Thru the Cross of Christ, we, whom were once eternally separated from God and the glory of heaven, have now been reconciled to God. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross reunited God and man. We were once spiritual orphans. Now, as a result of Christ hanging cursed on the cross, we are adopted children of the holy God.

Friends, without the cross, there is no justification, no appeasement of God's wrath, and no reconciliation. Hanging on the cross, Jesus was the great Justifier, Wrath-Satisfier, and Reconciler.

That is exactly why the Cross of Christ must be central in our lives.

Are you being weighed down by the guilt and shame of sin? Look to the Cross!

Are you fearful of God's wrath and judgment against your sin? Look to the Cross!

Do you need to be reconciled to God? Is there a broken relationship in your life that needs reconciliation? Look to the Cross!

Galatians 3:13

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged from a tree.'"

In Galatians 3:13, we are promised by God that we have been...

4. Redeemed and set free from the curse of the Law.

Prior to the Cross of Calvary, God reminds us that we were under a curse – the curse of the law. Back in the Old Testament, why did God give Israel the Law? God gave Israel the Law to expose their sin and the utter incapability of meeting the perfect and righteous standard of God demanded.

The curse of the Law is that God demands what we, because of our sin, can never produce - holy, righteous, and perfect living. Such a curse brought us hopelessness, despair, and judgment.

It is the Cross of Christ that changes all of this.

Because Jesus lived a sinless life, he perfectly met God's holy standard of righteousness and perfection – the standard of the Law. Thus, when Jesus hung cursed on the cross and died, he perfectly fulfilled the Law and by doing so, liberated us from its curse.

Friends, without the cross, we are cursed. Without the Cross of Christ, we are bound to a righteous and holy standard sin will never allow us to fulfill. Hanging on the cross, Jesus satisfied the Law and freed us from its hopeless curse. The Cross of Christ has set us free. We are no longer cursed; we are righteous, holy, and blessed because of the blood of Christ's cross.

That is exactly why the Cross of Christ must be central in our lives.

Are you living a life of legalism? Are you still trying to live up to the righteous and holy standard of God's Law? Look to the Cross!

Are you being enslaved by the curse of the Law because you have rejected Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Look to the Cross!

Colossians 1:19-22

“For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

In Colossians 1:19-22, we are promised by God that we will be...

5. Presented before God holy and blameless and above reproach

Once again, God reminds us of whom we were prior to the Cross of Christ – alienated, hostile, and evil. Our sin had alienated us from God. Our sin had produced hostility toward God. We were not his friends; we were his enemies. Our sin produced evil deeds that were an offense against the holiness of God.

It is the Cross of Christ that changes all of this.

Thru the Cross of Christ, the chasm that alienated God from man was eternally bridged. The death of Christ produced eternal access to the glory of heaven.

Thru the Cross of Christ, our enmity towards God was destroyed. The blood of Christ transforms hardened, rebellious, defiant and wicked enemies of God into holy children, blameless children who are no longer the object of God's righteous reproach. Thru the cross, we are transformed from enemies into lovers; rebels into worshippers; sinners into saints; wretched into redeemed; heathens into holy.

God says it this way in Jude 24-25...

"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

How is it that we, who were once alienated from God, hostile toward God, and workers of evil be kept from stumbling and presented before the glory of God blameless? The Cross of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Friends, without the Cross of Christ, we are alienated, hostile, and evil. Jesus hung naked and cursed on the cross that we might be reconciled and presented holy, blameless, and above reproach before God Almighty. Jesus shed his precious blood that we might have his peace – a peace that surpasses all understanding.

That is exactly why the Cross of Christ must be central in our lives.

Are you living this life without peace? Look to the Cross!

Are you choosing to live a life that is alienated and hostile toward God and His Word?
Look to the Cross!

CLOSING COMMENTS

For the early church, no other symbol represented their hope and faith more than the Cross of Christ.

As they looked to and remembered the cross, they saw their justification, salvation, and reconciliation before the holy God. They saw the precious blood of Christ that cleansed them of their sin, saved them from the wrath of God, and reconciled them for all eternity.

As they looked to and remembered the cross, they saw the curse of the Law lifted forever. No longer were they bound to perfectly fulfill a righteous standard that sin would never allow. They saw freedom and hope, for Christ and his sacrifice had liberated them from the slavery of God's Law.

As they looked to and remembered the cross, they saw eternal peace thru the blood of Christ. They saw the promise that, thru Christ's cross, they would never stand before the Holy Judge, God Almighty, alienated, hostile, and evil, thus deserving His punishment and eternal death.

At the cross, we find salvation, mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness, cleansing, pardon, adoption, freedom, and the hope of eternal life.

Easter demands that we set our gaze on the Cross of Christ. This Easter, God's Word exhorts us to make the Cross of His beloved Son the central symbol of our worship and praise.