

**EASTER SERMON  
THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS  
4-9-23**

**OPENER:**

***1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (NLT) The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. <sup>19</sup> As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."***

***<sup>20</sup> So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. <sup>21</sup> Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. <sup>23</sup> So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.***

***<sup>24</sup> But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.***

**THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IS FOOLISH TO THE WORLD.**

- > Human wisdom tells you that babies aren't born to virgin girls.
- > Human wisdom tells you that God doesn't become flesh.
- > Human wisdom tells you that an almighty God would not allow mere man to nail Him to a cross.
- > Human wisdom tells you that when a man dies he doesn't come back to life again.

**NONE OF THIS MAKES SENSE.  
SO, THE WORLD LOOKS AT THE CROSS AS FOOLISH.**

**BUT WE WILL NEVER KNOW GOD THROUGH HUMAN WISDOM.  
AND SO, WE EITHER IGNORE THE CROSS - WE STUMBLE OVER THE CROSS -  
OR WE CARRY THE CROSS.**

**1. WHO WERE THOSE WHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS? THE CROWDS WHO YELLED "CRUCIFY HIM"**

***Mark 15:12-15 Pilate asked them, "Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?"***

***<sup>13</sup> They shouted back, "Crucify him!"***

***<sup>14</sup> "Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?"  
But the mob roared even louder, "Crucify him!"***

***15 So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.***

**The crowds....Many of these were were first hand witnesses to his teaching, his miracles and his wisdom. Many had been touched by His healing hands. They had felt His overwhelming love and acceptance, yet they shouted “Crucify him!”**

**We need to take heed, because we can become like the crowds. We can listen to His teachings, we can witness His power, and experience the miraculous first hand in our life. We can know His love and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and yet shout, “Crucify him.”**

***1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NLT) I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. <sup>4</sup> He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.***

**We say that the Jewish leaders put Jesus on the cross, we say that the Roman government put Jesus on the cross, or that Judas put Jesus on the cross, but the truth is that our sin is what nailed Jesus to the cross.**

**OUR SIN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LORD’S DEATH.  
AND WHEN WE CHOOSE TO LIVE IN OUR SIN OUR ACTIONS CRY OUT  
“CRUCIFY HIM”.**

**We don’t understand that we are responsible for the suffering, for the shame, for the death of our Savior, because it was for our sins that He died. We don’t understand the message of the cross so we turn our backs on him!**

**WE IGNORE THE CROSS.  
WE DISREGARD ITS MESSAGE.  
WE TURN A BLIND EYE AND LOOK THE OTHER WAY.**

**WE SNUB AND DISHONOR THE CROSS AND THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.  
AND WE NEGLECT THE POWER THAT IT HOLDS FOR  
OUR LIVES.**

***Hebrews 6:4-6 (NLT) For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come—<sup>6</sup> and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame.***

**WHEN WE SIN WE CRUCIFY HIM AGAIN.**

**NOTE:**

The word “shared” here is from the same word used elsewhere in Hebrews. it comes from the Greek word *Metochos*, (*metacose*) and means participator, sharer, or business partner. So, the believers in this passage are the same as the holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling in Hebrews 3:1. They are genuine sharers/partakers of the Holy Spirit. They have been spiritually born again and justified in the sight of God by faith in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. The Holy Spirit dwells in them because they have believed in Jesus. But, they have fallen away.

Paul was concerned about this falling away earlier in the book of Hebrews, at the beginning of chapter 2.... *For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.*

**WHEN WE CHOOSE THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD, WE ARE SAYING THEY ARE WORTH MORE THAN JESUS CRUCIFIED AND WE PUT HIM TO SHAME.**

**WE DISHONOR HIM AND PUBLICLY PUT HIM ON DISPLAY THAT HIS SACRIFICE OF HIS LIFE IS WORTHLESS TO US.**

**WE YELL, “GIVE US BARABAS”. WE DON’T WANT JESUS.**

**AND SO, BY THE CONSEQUENCES THAT SIN BRINGS, OUR HEARTS ARE HARDENED, EVEN MORE THAN BEFORE WE KNEW HIM, BECAUSE WE TURN AWAY FROM HIM.**

**WE FEEL NO REMORSE OR SORROW OR CONVICTION AND WE ARE TRICKED INTO BELIEVING WE ARE SAFE FROM GOD’S JUDGMENT BY THE DECEPTION OF OUR OWN SIN.**

**2. WHO WERE THOSE WHO DIDN’T UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS? THE DISCIPLES - BECAUSE THE CROSS WAS A STUMBLING BLOCK TO THEM**

The Jews stumbled over it because Jesus wasn’t the kind of Messiah they wanted.

> If He had gathered an army, and led them into battle, and defeated the Romans....

> If He would have shown them that He was successful and victorious they would have marched behind Him.

But the cross got in their way.

**YOU SEE, DYING ON THE CROSS DOESN’T LOOK LIKE SUCCESS OR POWER.**

**IT DOESN’T LOOK LIKE VICTORY. IT LOOKS LIKE WEAKNESS.**

**IT LOOKS LIKE FAILURE. IT LOOKS LIKE DEFEAT.**

**SO THEY KEPT STUMBLING OVER IT.**

## **IT KEPT GETTING IN THE WAY.**

Even the Lord's own disciples all ran and fled and deserted him when he was arrested. When in reality by dying He was displaying His greatest power. And by laying His life down for them He was saving them. But they ran and hid and grieved over His death and they grieved in their personal disappointment of what they had expected from Him.

We do the same thing. We want victory, we want to experience God's blessings, we want God's help. We want God to defeat our enemies and fight for us, rescue us, but then we desert Him when he appears weak to us and looks like He is helpless to save us. Or when He is silent and we think He won't answer.

**WE MAKE THE MISTAKE OF CREATING JESUS IN OUR IMAGE.  
WE EMBRACE THE ASPECTS OF JESUS THAT WE LIKE AND WE REJECT THE  
ELEMENTS OF HIS CHARACTER AND HIS TEACHINGS THAT WE DON'T.**

**WE STUMBLE OVER THE CROSS.  
BECAUSE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND ITS MESSAGE.  
IT IS AN OBSTACLE TO US AND WE TRIP OVER IT WITH  
OUR RELIGIOUS THINKING.**

*Jesus said this.....Mark 9:35 (NLT) Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."*

Jesus teachings are upside-down to us. This concept of you-must go-low to go-high is not what we consider greatness. But Jesus was the servant of all and that is what made him great.

*As He said, I willingly lay my life down.* I give up my life so that you can have life. I die so that you can live. The Lord's greatness was displayed in the cross. His greatest power is in the message that this cross brings.

## **THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS**

**DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS?**

Many people do not. We live in a time where the Christian message is being slanted by some in the direction of the current fashion in order to make it acceptable to the public. The new message of the gospel promises the same thing the world does, only at a higher level. Whatever the world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

**THE MODERN CHURCH SAYS, "DON'T TELL PEOPLE ABOUT**

**THE CROSS. IT DOESN'T WORK.  
JUST TELL THEM THAT GOD LOVES THEM AND HAS  
A PLAN FOR THEM."**

**THE MESSAGE OF A CRUCIFIED JESUS ISN'T POPULAR SO  
MOVE ON TO SOMETHING BETTER.  
A CRUCIFIED SAVIOR ISN'T ATTRACTIVE. IT'S NOT POSITIVE. IT'S NOT  
ENTERTAINING, SO MOVE ON TO SOMETHING BETTER.**

**PROMISE THEM PROSPERITY. GIVE THEM EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES.  
PROVIDE THEM WITH SELF-ESTEEM AND  
THEN YOU'LL FILL THE PEWS.**

**AND SO, WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS.**

**3. THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS ARE THOSE WHO  
CARRY THE CROSS.**

*Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV) Jesus said to his disciples..... "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.*

**NOTE:**

Let's begin with what Jesus didn't mean in this verse. Many people interpret the "cross" to be taken up as some burden they must carry in their lives: a strained relationship, a thankless job, a physical illness, etc. With self-pitying pride, they look at their difficulty and say, "That's my cross I have to carry." Such an idea is not what Jesus meant when He said, "*Take up your cross and follow Me.*" When a person carried a cross in Jesus' day, no one thought of it as a persistent annoyance or symbolic burden.

**TO A PERSON IN THE FIRST CENTURY, THE CROSS MEANT ONE THING AND  
ONE THINK ONLY: DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION.**

**TO CARRY A CROSS WAS TO FACE THE MOST PAINFUL AND HUMILIATING  
MEANS OF DEATH HUMAN BEINGS COULD DEVELOP.**

**THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS IS DEATH.**

Two thousand years later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of forgiveness, grace, and love. But in Jesus' day the cross represented a torturous death. The Romans forced convicted criminals to carry their own crosses to the place of crucifixion. So carrying a cross meant one was about to die, and that one would face ridicule and disgrace along the way.

**JESUS' COMMAND TO "TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME" IS A CALL TO  
SELF-SACRIFICE.**

**ONE MUST BE WILLING TO DIE IN ORDER TO FOLLOW JESUS.  
DYING TO SELF IS ABSOLUTE SURRENDER TO GOD.**

*Matthew 16:25-26 (NIV) "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"*

**WE TRY SO HARD TO SAVE OUR LIVES AND YET WE  
ARE LOSING THEM.**

**CLOSING:**

Jesus' statement that following Him requires taking up a cross makes us think twice about our motivations and our level of commitment.

Are you ready to take up your cross and follow Jesus? Consider these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your closest friends?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from your family?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your reputation?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your life?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some comforts? - - Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means giving away your money or your possessions?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means sacrificing your plans for His plan for your life?

In some places of the world, these consequences are a reality.

But notice the phrasing of the questions: "Are you willing?" Following Jesus doesn't necessarily mean all these things will happen to you, but as a disciple of Christ we must be willing to suffer loss. Are you willing to take up your cross? If faced with a choice—Jesus or the comforts of this life—which will you choose?

*Matthew 28:1-6 Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.*

*<sup>2</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.*

*<sup>5</sup> Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying*

**WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS?  
FOLLOWING HIM IN DEATH WILL LEAD TO NEW LIFE!**

**TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW HIM.  
DIE TO YOURSELF SO YOU CAN RISE IN HIM!**