

Gal 6:14 KJV: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” For the first hearers, this is a ludicrous statement. Absurd. Nonsensical. Remember what crucifixion was. The most shameful of all public executions of the day. Roman citizens could not be crucified. Cicero said that “the very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.”<sup>1</sup>

Only the worst of criminals were crucified: hung up out in the open, usually along roads for maximum public exposure. It was a state murder, the supreme penalty. The express purpose was the elimination of victims from consideration as members of the human race.<sup>2</sup> It was shameful. Full of shame. Strung up naked (no loin cloth in the 1<sup>st</sup> C), and victims would often live on the cross for anywhere from 3-4 hours to 3-4 days. This way crucifixion also served as a deterrent to those entering the city. Don’t mess with Rome or else end up on a cross.

The actual cause of death was usually suffocating on your own blood or sometimes exposure or bleeding out. Passive exhalation would become impossible due to the weight of the body depressing the muscles needed for exhaling. The only way to get oxygen would be to push oneself up using the hands or feet. Inability to control bodily functions, insects feasting on open wounds, unspeakably dry mouth, debilitating cramps in the muscles, severed nerves in the wrists and feet, a shredded back rubbing up against the wood posts.<sup>3</sup> Excruciating pain. *Ex cruc* = from the cross.

In our day, the cross has been domesticated. It has become normal to us. It used to evoke horror. Now we have crosses dangling from necks, printed on t-shirts, on top of buildings. But don’t get it twisted: no one would wear a cross around their neck in the 1<sup>st</sup> C. People of dignity avoided the cross.

Yet. the Son of God was beaten, flogged, hung naked in order to shame him. He was nailed to a cross, He experienced severe blood loss, dehydration, decreased oxygen and increased carbon dioxide causes acidic conditions in the tissues. Fluid builds up in the lungs. He dies. / And he does it for us. So we could be forgiven. So we wouldn’t have to die. It was terrible physical pain, but the physical pain paled in comparison to the spiritual pain. Jesus bore the sin of his people on that cross.

How is it that Paul can glory in, boast in this most gruesome instrument of execution? That’s what we have been looking at in this series on the cross. This is the 14<sup>th</sup> and final sermon and this morning I want to summarize where we have been by asking why can we boast in the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 92.

<sup>3</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 95.

Why are we cross-centered? How can Paul say, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Why so central?

To see why, I want to ask “What problems does the cross solve?” We should glory in the cross because the cross takes care of our greatest problem, which is our sin that separates us from God. God is too holy to look upon sin. He is just. He won’t wink at sin or wipe it under the rug or grade on a curve. His requirement is perfection and we have sinned in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done and shouldn’t have and by what we didn’t do but should have: sins of commission and omission.

Because of our sin, the wrath of God remains on us. We deserve eternal judgment. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36) We are guilty. And every person knows it. We try all kinds of things to appease our conscience and alleviate guilt. But we know we can’t do it on our own. So another alternative is to blameshift. It’s not my fault! I am a victim! I’m oppressed. What do we do with our guilt and God’s wrath?

The cross provides forgiveness. One of the most basic Christian confessions is “Jesus died for our sins.” “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3). *For* our sins. In the place of. As a substitute. We started this series looking at substitutionary atonement: the righteous in place of the unrighteous. The great exchange! Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we deserved to die.

Jesus brings forgiveness and on the cross he absorbs the wrath of God – we looked at that big word: propitiation. A sacrifice that averts wrath. In my place condemned he stood. Rom 5:9: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” 1 Thess 1:10: Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. 1 Thess 5:9-10: “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.” That’s why we can glory in the cross.

The cross accomplishes propitiation and expiation. Our sin is taken away. Jesus is the scapegoat. He removes our sins from us. Ps 103:6-14: Our guilt is removed and friends there is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience.

The cross accomplishes reconciliation. 2 Cor 5:18-19: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” Col 1:21-22: “And you, who once were 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.” Once his enemy, now seated at his table, Jesus thank you.

The cross demonstrates the love of God. Rom 5:8: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” “The love of God is greater far, than tongue or pen can ever tell; it goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell; the guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win; His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin. Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made, were ev’ry stalk on earth a quill, and ev’ry man a scribe by trade, to write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, tho' stretched from sky to sky.”<sup>4</sup>

The cross solves our slavery problem. Before Christ, we were enslaved to sin. Our problem is not our sins, but Sin. It is not that we are sinners because we sin, but that we sin because we are sinners. Jesus frees us. Delivers us. Redeems us. “Redemption” is a term that calls forth the great OT acts of salvation: the Exodus. But our problem is not Egypt, Babylon, Assyria or Rome, but sin, death, and the devil. Jesus makes a way and brings us through. **Rom 6:15-23**. We have been bought with a price. Friend, I know at times it can feel like constant failure. Know this: you’re free. Delivered. Keep on.

The cross defeats our enemy. 1 John 3:8: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” At the cross, Jesus defangs the serpent. How? His main weapon is that of accusation. You are unworthy. Your sin disqualifies you from a place in his Kingdom. You will never get it together. Satan is the accuser of the brethren and Jesus takes away his weapon. Col 2:13-15: “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them by the cross.” Enemy disarmed and mocked. “Well may the accuser roar of sins that I have done; I know them all and thousands more, my God he knoweth none.” Beloved, we should glory in the cross of Christ.

The cross turns death from a period to a comma. The cross removes the sting of death. Oh death, where is your sting? Oh death, where is your victory. Death had no hold on Jesus. Three days later, he walked right out the grave just like he’d been saying he would. He didn’t stay dead. He was raised. Therefore, all who trust him will be raised. Rom 6:23. John 3:16.

We should glory in the cross because it transforms our suffering. This is big. Because we will all suffer. You either have, you are, or you will. Life is loss. To live is to lose. Now, this is a young church so you don’t believe me, but you will. And the best time to have your theology of suffering right is before the cloud comes. Waiting till the storm to patch up the storm shelter is a sure path to frustration, failure, and flood.

The cross shows us that when the dark day comes, it is not because God hates us, but because He loves us. God doesn’t punish his children. There is no wrath left in that cup. **Heb 12:5-13**.

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<sup>4</sup> The Love of God. [https://hymnary.org/text/the\\_love\\_of\\_god\\_is\\_greater\\_far](https://hymnary.org/text/the_love_of_god_is_greater_far)

Rom 8:28-29: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

God is in control. Beloved, when the rain cloud hovers over, every drop hits its appointed target. And the target is your not-yet-fully sanctified heart. There are no maverick molecules in God's universe. JE: every atom is arranged to be of maximum advantage to the Christian. Here is now Newton paraphrases Rom 8:28: "Everything is needful that he sends; nothing can be needful that he withholds." Saint, he aint mad at you. He loves you. You have to get this.

I often illustrate this with two days in my life: a heavenly one and a hellish one. . . . Now, which day was I more loved by God? We're tempted to say the heavenly day because we *felt* better that day, but the truth is that he loved me the same both days – maybe more the hellish one since God typically uses the hard stuff to draw us closer to him. Lewis: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." Joni: God may permit what he hates to accomplish that which he loves. He loves to make us more like Jesus.

The cross makes it where I don't have to just focus on getting out of the trial but I can fight to focus on what I can get out of it. Adversity is the university. Lord, what is that you have for me here? Lord, wipe my eyes with tears so that I might truly see! Newton: "Prosperity may cause us to rise in the world, but affliction is needful to raise us above the world." So, when the hard days come, lean in. People walk away from Christ all the time. For me, it is one of the most emotionally painful realities of aging. And the vast majority of the time, you know what begins the apostasy? A trial. Lean in to the Lord don't move away. Spurgeon: "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages."

William Cowper helps us sing: "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform; he plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines, of never-failing skill; he fashions up his bright designs, and works his sovereign will. Ye fearful saints fresh courage take, the clouds that you much dread, are big with mercy and will break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain."

Or how about this one: "When through the deep waters I call thee to go The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine." The cross transforms our suffering. You can glory in the cross.

The cross also fuels our spiritual growth. As you grow in Christ . . . (cross cart). Ryle: "I believe

that holiness is nowhere learned so well as on Calvary. I believe you cannot look much at the cross without feeling your will sanctified, and your tastes made more spiritual.”

The cross creates a community. God desires to reunite the human race in a new humanity under King Jesus. He brings together Jews and Gentiles and shows his wisdom to the principalities and powers.

The cross calls us to cruciformity: the cross-shaped life. Giving of self for the good of another. 1 John 3:16.

The cross defines your identity Gal 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Col 3:3-4: “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Isaac Watts was quite a man. He was born 1674. He wrote “Whe I Survey the Wondrous Cross” in 1707. Charles Wesley, who wrote 6,500 hymns in his lifetime (And Can it Be, Hark the Herald Angels, O For a Thousand Tongues, Arise my Soul Arise), said that he would have given up all his hymns to have composed just this one: “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. 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 e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown? Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Pray, let your glory be our joy and be our first love.”

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

**Benediction:** The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. Amen.

