

I want to take a moment to publicly celebrate what God is doing in this country. Genesis 50:20: You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive." I am astonished and grateful for how God is bringing good from the tragic assassination of Charlie Kirk.

Are not the contrasts in the aftermaths of George Floyd and Charlie Kirk not telling? One: riots, loitering, violence, gunshots. Another: prayer and praise meetings. I saw one Turning Point staff say about the memorial with 200K people in attendance: "There wasn't one hiccup in the production. There wasn't one protester. There wasn't one fight. There wasn't one arrest. The whole tribute was covered in grace and peace." The lines between left and right are clearer than ever. The reality is the left is just getting more anti-Christ (the murder of babies, the mutilation of children, the celebration of sodomy, men playing like women seen as progress, sexual perversion, hatred of law and order, redefinition of marriage, on and on) meanwhile the right is getting more Christian. The time for moral equivalence has expired. And things could be very different. I think it's safe to say this country has never seen its leaders speak so clearly about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

President Donald Trump: "But what was even more important to Charlie than politics and service was the choice he made in the fifth grade, which he called the 'most important decision of his life,' to become a Christian and a follower of his savior, Jesus Christ. On that terrible day, September 10th, 2025, our greatest evangelist for American liberty became immortal. He's a martyr now for American freedom. I know I speak for everyone here today when I say that none of us will ever forget Charlie Kirk. And neither now will history. Because while Charlie has been reunited with his Creator in Heaven, his voice on earth will echo through the generations, and his name will live forever in the eternal chronicle of America's greatest patriots. He will live forever."

Trump Jr. mostly spoke common sense (the need of the day) and mentioned the goal of making one income families the norm again and renouncing political violence.

Vice President J.D. Vance: "The evil murderer who took Charlie from us expected us to have a funeral today. And instead, my friends, we have had a revival in celebration of Charlie Kirk and of His Lord Jesus Christ. Charlie Kirk brought the truth that marriage and family are the highest callings, far more important than any job or educational credential. ... He brought the truth that life is precious and we must fight to protect it at all times. But most of all, Charlie brought the truth that Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and that all truth flowed from this first and most important one. He loved God. And because he loved God he wanted to understand God's creation and the men and women made in God's image." . . . "I have talked more about Jesus Christ in the past two weeks than I have my entire time in public life." "It is better to be persecuted for your faith than to deny the kingship of Christ"

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth: "More importantly, he was a true believer: only Christ is King, our Lord and Savior. Our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus. Fear God and fear no man.

That was Charlie Kirk. But over time he realized, like so many of us have, that this is not a political way, it is not even a cultural war, it is a spiritual war. Faith and family first. There is a God, and as Charlie would say, it is not us. We are sinners saved only by grace in need of the Gospel. You see, we always did need less government, but what Charlie understood and infused into his movement we also needed a lot more God. Charlie had big plans, but God had even bigger plans. Charlie stated a political movement but unleashed a spiritual revival. My pastor texted me that day after that horrific event and said, "Pete, the devil overplayed his hand." Charlie started with liberty but lit our country on fire for Christ."

Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.: "Charlie's overarching passion was his Christianity and his devotion to his God. He believed what Saint Francis taught us almost a thousand years ago, we should strive to live our lives in perfect imitation of Christ."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio: "We were all created, every single one of us, before the beginning of time, by the hands of the God of the universe, an all-powerful God. Who loved us and created us for the purpose of living with Him in eternity. But then sin entered the world and separated us from our Creator. And then God took on the form of a man and came down and lived among us and He suffered like men. And He died like a man. But on the third day He arose, unlike any mortal man, and to prove any doubters wrong He ate with His disciples and they touched His wounds. He didn't rise as a ghost or a spirit but as flesh. And then He rose to the heavens but he promised he would return. And He will. Because He took on that death, because He carried that cross, we were freed from the sin that separated us from Him. And when He returns there will be a new heaven and a new earth. And we will all be together."¹

Clear gospels from Pastor Rob McCoy, Tucker Carlson, Tulsi Gabbard, and Frank Turek even preached PSA: "Now I want you to know Charlie right now is in heaven, not because he was a great husband and father, not because he saved millions of kids out of darkness on college campuses, not because he changed minds and chased votes to save the country, not because he sacrificed himself for his Savior—
Charlie Kirk is in heaven because his Savior sacrificed Himself for Charlie Kirk."

Erika Kirk called men to rise up:² "To all the men watching around the world, accept Charlie's challenge and embrace true manhood. Be strong and courageous for your families. Love your wives and lead them. Love your children and protect them. Be the spiritual head of your home. But please be a leader worth following on your wife. Your wife is not your servant. Your wife is not your employee. Your wife is not your slave. She is your helper. You are not rivals. You are one flesh. Working together for the glory of God. Women, I have a challenge for you too. Be virtuous. Our strength is found in God's design for our role. We are the guardians. We are the encouragers. We are the preservers. Guard your heart. Everything you do flows from it. And if you're a mother, please recognize that is the single most important ministry you have." Then in an incredible act of grace:

“My husband, Charlie. He wanted to save young men, just like the one who took his life. That young man. That young man on the cross. Our Savior said, “Father, forgive them, for they not know what they do.” That man. That young man. I forgive him. I forgive him because it was what Christ did in his. What Charlie would do. The answer to hate is not hate. The answer we know from the gospel is love and always love.” / Praise God. The gospel has never been preached this far and wide in the history of the world.

-Martyn Lloyd Jones said, “The state of the church can be explained by the fact that for nearly 100 years we’ve been preaching morality and not the Christian faith.” What is the solution to preaching morality? Preaching Christ crucified. Christianity is the religion *of the cross*. This Fall and early Spring I will be preaching a doctrinal series called “The Cross of Christ.” Around 15 weeks, maybe 19 we’ll see. Surely less than 30. This morning: what happened and then for the rest of the series: what does it mean?

The cross is the central event of human history and the center of our religion. Newton: “I advise you by all means to keep close to the atonement. The doctrine of the cross is the sun in the system of truth.” Gal 6:14. 1 Cor 2:2. The cross changed everything for all time. In many ways, the Protestant Reformation was a recovery of the centrality of the cross. Theologian Emil Brunner wrote, “The Cross is the sign of the Christian faith, of the Christian Church, of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ . . . The whole struggle of the Reformation for the *sola fide*, the *solus deo Gloria*, was simply the struggle for the right interpretation of the Cross. He who understands the Cross aright – this is the opinion of the Reformers – understands the Bible, he understands Jesus Christ.”³

But why crucifixion? Jesus didn’t just die. It was a particular kind of death. A horrific one. Crucifixion was shameful public execution. 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.”⁴ 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.⁵ It was shameful. Full of shame. Strung up naked (no loin cloth in the 1st 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.

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, cramps in the muscles, severed nerves in the wrists and feet, a shredded back rubbing up against the wood posts.⁶ Excruciating pain. *Ex cruc* = from the cross.

This is the heart of the Christian faith? What Paul calls the “word of the cross.” Gross. Seems excessive. As one female Presbyterian professor at a Presbyterian seminary said once at a conference: the church needs to move away from focusing on the cross “with blood dripping and all kinds of weird stuff.”⁷ The brutal execution of a God runs counter to all religious and political thinking of the time. Incredible: in: not, credere: believe. Unbelievable. As one scholar puts it, “To believe that the one pre-existent son of the one true God, the mediator of creation and the redeemer of the world had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness. The real gods of Greece and Rome could be distinguished from mortal men by the very fact that they were *immortal* – they had absolutely nothing in common with the cross as a sign of shame.”⁸

Another scholar refers to the cross as the “most nonreligious and horrendous feature of the gospel.”⁹ Why such an extreme way to die? / Because of sin. Anselm to Boso in *Cur Deus Homo?* Written in the 11th C: “You have not yet considered the weight of sin.” Or as NT scholar Stephen Westerholm puts it, “So catastrophic a remedy demands a catastrophic predicament.”¹⁰ Sin is a catastrophic predicament. If we don’t appreciate the gravity of sin, we will not truly grasp or appreciate the necessity of the cross.

But sin is a dead category in the world. It has been replaced by sickness, addiction, neurosis and disease. There are no longer sinners – just victims. / This year’s annual “state of the church” theology survey by Ligonier and Lifeway was recently released.¹¹ Always disheartening and wants to make pastors quit. It is a survey of evangelicals: those who claim to be Bible people. 64% of evangelicals believe that “Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.” 2/3 are Pelagian – condemned at the Council of Carthage in the year 418. False teachers. 53% affirm that “Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.” Yet 100%: The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe. We have work to do.

Sin is catastrophic. Something is wrong in the world that must be put right. We are sinful to the core. Ps 58:3: the wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray from birth, speaking lies, they have venom like the venom of a serpent. Our hearts are desperately sick. As the pig head says in *Lord of the Flies*: “Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you!”¹² To fix us will require the sacrifice of the Son of God.

Flip to the Gospel of Luke – ch. 23 [830]. The Gospels – Matt, Mark, Luke and John have been called “Passion Narratives” with long introductions. They are mostly about the cross. / Why was Jesus crucified? This first sermon in this series will focus on the historical reason – he offended the Jewish leadership. The rest of the series – 8-15 sermons – will focus on the theological reasons. Let’s consider two points: Israel’s rejection and the crucifixion of Christ.

I. Israel’s Rejection of Her King - 13-25. This is. . . - Both Pilate and Herod find no guilt in this man. Luke wants all to know that this man is innocent. **23:4 14 22 41 47.** Acts 13:27-28: “For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand

the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed."

Rome says he is innocent and *all* the Jews cry out together: away with this man and give us Barabbas. Barabbas was a guilty man, an insurrectionist and a murderer. Shocking. He came to his own and his own did not receive him. / Can you imagine being Barabbas? What a good day! We don't know what happened but you gotta know the dude was converted. I mean, c'mon. Can't wait to meet that guy. / Remember blogs? I had one. Ablakew.blogspot.com. I named it Barabbas: the R for the unR. We are all Barrabbas. He is us. Deserving of judgment: scot free because of Christ is our substitute.

The Jews say trade this condemned criminal for Jesus. Three times Rome pleads with Israel: this man is innocent. They shout "crucify him, crucify him." They were urgent. They demanded his blood. The gospel according to Matthew says, "So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." *And all the people* answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matt 27:24-25). Chilling statements.

Why did Jesus die? On the historical level: Chief blame is laid upon his own people condemning him. Luke volume 2: **Acts 2:22-23, 36, 3:13 4:8-10**. This is why the book of Revelation describes Jerusalem as a prostitute who rides on the beast, who is Rome. Together, they kill the Messiah. John 19:14-15: Pilate says to the people of Israel: behold your King and they reply: away with him, we have no King but Caesar. Israel rejects her King and demands that Rome crucify him.

II. The Crucifixion of Christ (26-49) – 26-31 – Normally the criminal would carry his own crossbeam and a sign around the neck saying what they did to deserve public execution. Simon carries the cross for Jesus. Jesus tells the Israelite women to weep for themselves for terrible judgment is coming. *Blessed* are the women with no children – for they will suffer less than those with children when Rome invades.

Jesus had promised that within a generation Rome would come in and destroy the temple. **13:34-35a, 19:41-44, 21:5-6, 20-24.** / In that day the people of Israel will call upon the mountains to fall on them for that would be better than to endure the judgment they are experiencing through ruthless Rome. This language is actually from Hos 10:8 about the fall of the N Kingdom in the 8th Century. Rev 6 uses the same language to speak of the Jerusalem War. Jesus says if Rome does this when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry. In other words, if the fire is hot enough for Rome to destroy one they deemed innocent so what must the guilty expect?¹³ Weep for yourselves. Weighty words from the One who wields the sword of judgment to those who do not follow him.

32-34a – The place of the skull. Golgotha is the Aramaic. Crucified between criminals. Isa 53:12, the song of the suffering servant: "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he

shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

34b-38 – Jesus forgives them. They know not what they do. What compassion. What a Savior! / The soldiers cast lots, like rolling dice to see who got his stuff. Psalm 22 had prophesied as much: **1, 16-18**. The rulers mock him: let him save himself if is the Christ. The soldiers offer sour wine and mock him as well. They put up a sign which spoke more truth than any of them knew: this is the King of the Jews.

39-43 One of the criminals joins in the mocking. The other rebukes the scoffer. He believes Jesus is the Holy One of God and he asks to be remembered by Jesus. Jesus grants the penitent request. Maybe you have seen the sermon by Alister Begg who asks us to picture this thief at the pearly gates?¹⁴ The angel asks how did you get here? I don't know. Are you clear on the doctrine of justification? I don't know what you are talking about? What about your doctrine of Scripture? Never read it. Church attendance? It was on my list. All I know is the man on the middle cross said I can come.

Jesus promises this thief that he would be in paradise that very day. No soul sleep. No baptism needed. Only the empty hands of faith. / Can you imagine the parents of this thief? Imagine if they ended up being converted. They had no idea that their punk son had a deathbed conversion. Oh how many will be in glory from a deathbed conversion. Ryle says Scripture only records one that none might despair, but only one that none might presume.

"With me" in paradise. Really what makes paradise paradise is the presence of Christ. That's the end goal of this thing. 1 Pet 3:18: Christ suffered once for sins, the R for the UnR that he might bring us to God. Phil 1:23: I desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. To die is gain.

44-49 The place goes dark at noon. All over Scripture, darkness is a sign for the judgment of God. The curtain of the temple torn in two. Mark adds the detail that it was torn from top to bottom, a sure sign of God's judgment.¹⁵ He already took a whip through the temple and in a generation, he'll wipe it off the face of the earth forever. The ripping of the veil vindicates Jesus by signaling that the temple is on the verge of destruction. It signals the end of a world. The end of the old age. The end of the old world order.

So, why the crucifixion? Who killed Jesus? Jews. Yea. Rome. Yeah. You and I? Yes. 19th C Scottish pastor Horatius Bonar: "I see the crowd in Pilate's hall, Their furious cries I hear; Their shouts of "Crucify!" appall, Their curses fill mine ear. And of that shouting multitude, I feel that I am one, And in that din of voices rude, I recognize my own. I see the scourgers rend the flesh, Of God's beloved Son; And as they smite I feel afresh, That I of them am one. Around the Cross the throng I see, That mock the Sufferer's groan, Yet still my voice it seems to be, As if I mocked

alone. 'Twas I that shed that sacred Blood, I nailed him to the Tree, I crucified the Christ of God,
I joined the mockery. Yet not the less that Blood avails, To cleanse me from sin, And not the less
that Cross prevails To give me peace within."

Friend, maybe you are here and new to this thing called Christianity. This is our main thing. Of course, Jesus didn't stay dead. He was raised on the third day. He died for our sins, was raised on the third day, ascended to the right hand of God and promises to forgive yours sins and give you eternal life if you turn from your sin and put your trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

¹ https://excellentthought.substack.com/p/americas-rulers-speak-the-word-of?utm_source=share&utm_medium=android&r=b773f&triedRedirect=true

² <https://www.livenowfox.com/news/charlie-kirk-funeral-wife-erika-speech-remarks-watch-video>. 7:08:50 mark https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAWG_LCRIWc

³ Emil Brunner, *The Mediator*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 435.

⁴ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 30.

⁵ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 92.

⁶ Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 95.

⁷ Rutledge, *Crucifixion*, 235.

⁸ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 5.

⁹ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 207.

¹⁰ Stephen Westerholm, "Righteousness, Cosmic and Microcosmic," in *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans*, ed. Beverly R. Gaventa (Waco: Baylor University press, 2013), 33.

¹¹ https://thestateoftheology.com/?mkt_tok=MTg5LUpMQS0yMTYAAAGc_jXrES3jsl50vN9IVPFfFISRijrd-_3nScPK-en3O06u9sbDz98jyDq13FBgZ1yAhZnwn9Q1vlf4jqBQXoWwG5swNBki1P9jo9Cljrg99azzs&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

¹² Golding, *Lord of*

¹³ Wilcock, 204.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJIKOVQVCE4>

¹⁵ Destruction in Gospels, not access but Heb 6:19-20, 9:6-14, 10:19-22.