

Series: **Easter 2022 - Good Friday**

Today's Title: "The Impact of the Cross"

April 15, 2022 - Selected Passages

OBJECTIVE: To help people see spiritual realities and blessings of the cross.

Devo #1: The Spiritual Battle of the Cross

The war between God and the Devil has been waging since the creation of the world.

We see the first words spoken of the war in **Genesis 3:15** when God told the Devil:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

In that moment, God proclaimed that His offspring - the Messiah - would be victorious in this war.

The Devil would suffer a fatal injury - a blow to his head.

But this would be a long war - with many battles - and many casualties through the centuries.

The fatal blow that was prophesied in the Garden of Eden - was delivered on the cross.

In **Colossians 1:20**, the Apostle Paul declares that God the Father:

"...through Him (Jesus) to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross."

Paul tells us that the cross brought "peace".

The war between heaven and hell was decided on the cross - the outcome was secured - God is victorious over evil - but the devil will keep swinging all the way to the time of his eternal judgment.

History is littered with the corpses of this supernatural war.

The nation of Israel was/are God's chosen people to use in this war.

From Abraham's seed would come the victor - the promised one - the Messiah.

Isaiah prophesied that this Messiah would be more than a mere person. He would be divine!

Isaiah 9:6-7

"...His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."

To the Devil - these were fighting words - promises of victory from God - and the Devil would do everything he could to prevent this Messiah from ever being born.

In waging this war - nothing and nobody was safe from the Devil's evil.

In his attempt to kill the Messiah, he used evil men to murder the innocent baby boys of Bethlehem.

Jesus - on the night He was betrayed by Judas and arrested - declared if He wanted, He could call forth 12 legions of angels to defend Him - to fight on His behalf.

Matthew 26:53

“Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?”

The cross is not an isolated event in history.

It's the culmination of thousands of events in history. These events - like movements on the chess board - were the battle plans and strategies played out in the supernatural realm, which often spilled over into the physical world of humanity.

The Apostle Paul ends his great chapter on the resurrection with these verses.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He writes in **Colossians 2:15** that God...

“...disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.”

The cross was the deciding battle in the spiritual war between God and the Devil.

Even though the outcome is determined - victory has been won - the Devil and his demonic forces of evil

continue to fight - taking as many corpses as they can with them in defeat and eventual judgment.

Let's not be ignorant of the ongoing battles.

The Bible is clear about the ongoing spiritual warfare we face as followers of Jesus.

Let's give thanks - that God has won - on the cross Jesus was victorious - and God and His angel armies continue to fight on His behalf - on our behalf - helping those who follow Him.

Song: God of Angel Armies

Devo #2: The Cruelty of the Cross

It's difficult for us to grasp - to understand the cruelty, torture, and suffering of the cross.

The Romans - who in the most sadistic sense perfected crucifixion.

On the road leading into a town or city - they would line that road with those being crucified.

As you would walk along that road into the city, you would walk through, in some cases, a corridor of crosses. Some of the crucified would be dead.

Others would be near death - and the sounds of death would fill your ears - and the gruesome sight of these men would be burned into your memory.

The Romans did this as a deterrent.

They wanted everyone to know if you were a criminal - and the penalty for your crime was death - they wouldn't hesitate to crucify you too!

This form of capital punishment was typically reserved for the worst criminals.

Which is what makes the crucifixion of Jesus the greatest injustice the world has known.

Jesus was not a criminal.

Even Pilate - the chief judge for the Romans in Jerusalem - declared Jesus' innocence on more than one occasion.

But he was pressured, by the Jewish religious leaders - and those who followed their lead - to crucify Jesus.

Their hatred of Jesus - their fear of Jesus - was so great, that they were willing to free a hardened criminal, just to get rid of Jesus.

Crucifixion was extreme in the agony, pain, and torture it caused - and the Romans were so skilled at this horrific form of capital punishment that the soldiers who carried out crucifixions were able to keep a crucified man alive - in the most severe level of suffering and pain - for days - maximizing the level of pain and suffering.

When Jesus was handed over to be crucified, He had already been scourged by Pilate's orders (John 19).

The brutality of scourging - and the other abuses and torture the soldiers put Jesus through can hardly be understated.

Even before the cross, Jesus endured so much physical trauma, that it would have killed most men.

Why so much suffering?

Why so much over-the-top ridicule?

I believe it was the Devil and his demonic influence in the process.

You cannot downplay the spiritual battle taking place around the cross through the human agents involved.

But primarily, I believe this was what the Bible means when it talks about the terrible and awful wrath and judgment of God.

Isaiah 53:10

“it was the will of the LORD to crush Him...”

Think about that verse...think about what its saying about God the Father - crushing His Son - the 2nd person of the Triune God - Jesus - God incarnate.

It was “the will of the LORD to crush Him...”

Why?

Because of the demands of God’s holiness - and His justice.

Because of the seriousness of sin.

Because of the number of sins that were placed on Jesus.

The wrath of God poured out on Jesus by the Father as punishment for the sins placed on Him needed to be in proportion to the number of sins!

Why?

Because sin was being punished - sin was being judged. If God cut corners...if He went easy on His judgment of the sins of the world - then He would not be just - He would not be Holy or Righteous.

This is why...

Matthew 27:46

Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying... “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

When you look at the cross - don't ever forget the cruelty of it.

Don't ever forget the love that drove Jesus to the cross.

Don't ever forget the divine judgment that took place on the cross as God poured out His wrath on His Son - on Jesus - as He bore our sins and was punished for our sins.

Song: Hallelujah for the Cross

Devo #3: God's Unconditional Love for Sinners

The statement I'm about to make may shock some people.

It may startle others...and cause others to doubt my theology.

Here's the statement:

- **God loves you - no matter what you have done - no matter what you do.**
- **God loves you - no matter who you are.**
- **God loves you.**

He doesn't love you less than He loves someone else.

He doesn't love you more if you're someone who goes to church, prays, reads, and studies their Bible, serves others - and a myriad of other wonderful, ministry-oriented things.

If you doubt this is true...or if you think my theology is off...then what do you do with this verse?

Romans 5:8

"...God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This verse is extremely clear.

God doesn't love us - or love us more - when we do the right thing.

He loved us - He loves us - "while we were still sinners".

His love was not conditional - as long as we were not too bad - as long as we don't sin too much.

His love is unconditional.

He loves us - because He loves every single person.

1 John 4:10

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

He doesn't love us - when we begin loving Him and serving Him.

He gave His Son - because of His love for us.

John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

It's difficult for us to understand this kind of love, in large part because we usually don't love like this.

We tend to love conditionally - on certain terms.

As long as you treat me nice - do what I like - don't upset me or do something to hurt me - then I'll love you.

But if you cross the line - if you ignore me - if you hurt me in some way...

We know that God calls us to a higher love - a better love - but that's a dangerous love that leaves us exposed and puts others first.

When a couple exchanges their vows on their wedding day, the words can flow so easily.

For better for worse / for richer, for poorer / in sickness and in health / to love and to cherish / till death do us part.

I promise to give you / all that I am / all that I have / for all my life.

These vows describe the kind of love God has for us.

This is the kind of love we're supposed to practice for our spouse - and in reality, for one another.

But we often fail to love like this - because of our selfishness, our pride, and our desires.

But God's love for sinners - His love for us - is unconditional - and it cannot be measured or contained.

Scope of God's love...everybody.

The reason for the cross...God's love for the world...for everybody.

How wide is God's love? Wide enough for the whole world.

If you're in the world...then you are loved by God!

How deep is God's love?

“David the adulterer never found the bottom.

Paul the murderer never found it.

Peter the liar never found it.

They hit bottom in their own life...

But they never hit the bottom of God's love!”

(He Chose the Nails, by Max Lucado, p. 115)

Tonight, are you thankful for God's love - that He loves you - unconditionally?

Are you thankful that no matter what we do - what we don't do - God still loves you?

Song: How Deep the Father's Love

Devo#4: The Battle of Gethsemane

Jesus chooses us - not Himself.

But Scripture does give us clues and glimpses to the heart of God – the emotions and feelings of Jesus...God-incarnate.

Keep in mind - God is not like us - He doesn't have emotions like us - at least not in the same manner or intensity - but the Bible does use language that helps us understand the thoughts and feelings of God.

Luke 22:41-44

He...knelt down and prayed, "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done...And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

Anguish = ἀγωνία (*agōnia*)

Bodily strife, struggle or contest; violent struggle or agony both of body and mind (from ἄγω (agō 71), to bring, carry, remove, drag).

Only time this word is used in the N.T.

The Gethsemane passages have intrigued and amazed me for years. For me, the Garden prayers of Jesus are the most insightful look we have into the pain and suffering of God.

They give us a peek into the battle that was waging between the human nature of Jesus - and His divine nature.

Matthew 26:37-39 (see also Mark 14:33-35)

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.” Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will”

Ephesians 1:4 “...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...”

tells us that God has chosen us before the creation of the world.

Meaning, that the plan of God to redeem humanity – which was in place before creation – in place all throughout human history – as God chose Israel to be the source of blessing to the nations as the Messiah would be of Jewish blood – as the plan of God approached the final stretch – the Incarnation occurs as God became flesh – Jesus matures and begins His ministry – and at the very edge of the focal point of God’s purpose in History – moments before Jesus is betrayed and the events toward the cross are put in motion – here is Jesus – God-incarnate – saying that He would rather not go through with the plan!

How much pain does God have to be in – before He cries out and pleads; “*Please find another way!*” “*What is option B?*”

Jesus - at least His human nature - was afraid - maybe for the first time in His life - He was afraid.

Why?

Because He knew what the next 12-16 hours would contain.

I don't believe His fear was of the physical pain and torture He would endure.

I believe it was the fear of separation from the Father.

It was the fear of being the object of God's wrath against sin - and being isolated from the Father - for the first time in eternity.

The words of Jesus on the cross reveal the pain and isolation He was experiencing as the Father turned away from the Son - as Jesus was bearing the world's sin.

Matthew 27:46

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" -- which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The spiritual battle in Gethsemane might be where the cosmic battle between God and the Devil was won.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness as He was about to begin His public ministry.

But the temptation in Gethsemane was more pointed and exact.

God's plan of salvation hung in the balance for a time - uncertain until the final submission of Jesus to the will of the Father.

This was truly a battle for the ages - a battle for all of humanity - a battle for heaven itself!

The battle was won - a decisive victory indeed - not by a mighty punch or a sword piercing the body of the enemy.

The battle was won by Jesus submitting.

Jesus submitted to the Father's will - to God's perfect, but costly plan of salvation.

Redeeming humanity would come at the highest cost, and Jesus was willing to pay it.

Why?

Because He was always obedient to the Father's will.

Because He loves us - He chose us - over Himself.

Song: Gethsemane

Devo #5: Jesus paid for our debt

Fairness - paying your fair share - it's a buzzword - a politically loaded buzzword in our culture.

But beyond the political circles, we're all big into fairness.

We have umpires and referees at sporting events - to make sure everyone plays by the rules - play fair.

We have government agencies and inspectors to make sure businesses deal fairly with their customers.

Teachers grade student's work - and each student gets credit for their work - not for the work of others - that's fair.

But there's one area in the Christian's life that isn't fair.

We get what we don't deserve.

The price of our sin was paid by someone else.

Someone else suffered for the things we think and do.

For the past 20+ years, churches around the world have been singing a song, written by Keith and Krystn Getty, "In Christ Alone".

*Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid —
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

Theologians refer to this as:

- Substitutionary Atonement
- Vicarious Atonement
- Penal, Substitutionary Atonement

All of these really mean the same thing...

Jesus died - for us - on our behalf - as a substitute for us.

This was always the plan of God.

It was always His plan that He would give Himself as a sacrifice for our sin - for the sins of the human race.

Before the birth of Jesus, the angel told Joseph:

Matthew 1:21

“She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The 2nd person of the Triune God - taking on flesh - becoming incarnate - being named Jesus - to be the Savior humanity needed - was the plan of God - from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

As Jesus was about to begin His public ministry, He went to His cousin, John, to be baptized, and we read:

John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Decades later, the Apostle John wrote:

1 John 2:2

“He (Jesus) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

I mentioned a moment ago that this was always the plan of God.

Almost 800 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesied about the Messiah and what would happen to Him.

Isaiah 53:4-6

“...He has borne our griefs...He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed...the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Jesus was our substitute. He paid what we cannot ever pay.

Why did this happen?

Why did Jesus take our place - take the punishment we deserved?

One reason was God's love for us - which we talked about earlier.

But the Apostle Paul tells us another reason.

2 Corinthians 5:21

“For our sake He (the Father) made Him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God.”

Because of the cross and the death of Christ on our behalf, we, through faith, can have not only our sins forgiven, but we gain the “righteousness of God”.

This is why we can call this ‘Good Friday’.

The greatest act of love the world has ever known - was on full display - as Jesus was nailed to the cross and lifted up - mocked, ridiculed, humiliated, cursed, for you and for me.

He took our place, so we could have His forgiveness - His righteousness - and His life.

Song: Lamb of God