

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

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John 19:16-18 (NLT) Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus away. ¹⁷ Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the place called Place of the Skull (in Hebrew, *Golgotha*). ¹⁸ There they nailed him to the cross. Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

Galatians 6:14 (NLT) As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Jesus was not the only one nailed to a cross on the day of his execution. John records that two others were crucified alongside him. Matthew reports that the other men were thieves. So, we see three crosses as part of the redemptive story. However, there is only one cross that made an eternal difference. The redemptive cross of Christ.

The symbol of the cross, in the Roman world, was seen as a sign of the execution of the guilty, but for the Christian the cross of Christ has become the sign of redemption and forgiveness. Not just any cross but the cross of Christ.

Consider this: every time people see the cross, they think of what Jesus did.

The wooden cross itself possesses no power. No, the sign of the cross does not expel demons, and hanging a cross in one's home or around one's neck offers no protection.

However, there is power in the message (the gospel) about the one who hung on it.

Romans 1:16 (NKJV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

The cross of Christ has a message and it is the message of salvation by grace alone. The innocent died for the guilty. The price for salvation was paid in full.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT) God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

To Paul, it was not his good deeds that saved him and transformed him into a new person; it was Christ's redeeming work on the cross that brought forgiveness and transformation.

Galatians 6:14-15 (NLT) As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the

world's interest in me has also died. ¹⁵ It doesn't matter whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation.

The Apostle Paul contrasts himself with the Judaizers who had infiltrated the Galatian church and demanded that gentile Christians obey the law and be circumcised if they wanted to be saved.

To them, salvation meant Jesus plus works. They were proud to be circumcised, law-abiding believers who upheld the exterior rites and customs of Judaism. To them, Jesus was just a bonus. (6:11-13)

If anyone could have boasted about following the law to the letter, it was Paul. However, He had come to realize that nothing we could accomplish would result in our salvation. There was a time that everything he said and did came from a place of boasting and pride. Now, because of the cross, the shed blood of Christ he wasn't the person he used to be. He didn't talk like he used to talk nor live like he used to live.

There was a time that he tried to wash himself on the outside through his good works to make himself acceptable to God, but because of what Jesus did on the cross, he was now cleansed from the inside out.

It wasn't Jesus plus works, nor works plus Jesus. It was Jesus, period! It was the cross of Christ that transformed his life and made him new.

It is only in the cross of Christ, the giving of His life, the shedding of His blood for us that we find hope and confidence of salvation.

Even on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, this truth was clear in the scenario involving Jesus and the two thieves who were being punished for disobeying the law.

Luke 23:39-43 (NLT) One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself and us, too, while you're at it!" ⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Three men hang on a cross, two guilty of their misdeeds and one destined to die for the sins of the entire world. Three men are bleeding out their life, two for their personal crimes and one for the sins of the world. Three crosses, yet only one contains the message of salvation.

In this scene we see two responses to the work of Christ.

One of the criminals cries out, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself and us, too, while you're at it!"

This man, like Jesus, is on a cross, and instead of feeling sorry for him, he joins the throng and mocks Him.

Jesus could have saved himself for all from all of this torment and suffering. He had the ability to do so.

He made this clear when he was arrested in the garden the night before when Peter tried to come to his defense with a sword.

Matthew 26:51-54 (NLT) But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's slave, slashing off his ear. ⁵² "Put away your sword," Jesus told him. "Those who use the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? ⁵⁴ But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"

Jesus wasn't focused on Himself. He was focused on the plan to provide the means for which people could be saved. He was that means. His life for ours. His blood for our sins.

The prophet Isaiah over 700 years earlier foretold the events that were going to play out on the day Jesus would be crucified.

Isaiah 53:3-6 (NLT) He was despised and rejected a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. ⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! ⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

Jesus could have spared himself from all of this pain and suffering. He had the capability to do so. However, if he were to save himself, we would all be lost.

The second man on the other hand responds with brokenness and humility.

Luke 23:40-41 (NLT) But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

Notice that his request wasn't to be saved but simply to be remembered.

Luke 23:43 (NLT) And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Two men are given the choice to put their faith in Christ, and only one decides to do so.

This scene is still being played out today. People are presented with the message of Christ's cross, and some mock it and reject it, while others become aware of their sinfulness, accept the message and turn to Him for forgiveness.

What would our lives be if not for the cross of Christ?

The cross is the central message of the good news! It represents salvation, grace mercy and the Love of the Father.

The scriptures are clear that all of us were utterly helpless and sinful and on our way to an eternity without God.

But the good news is:

Romans 5:6-8 (NLT) When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

To the Christian, the cross is the reason we rejoice and glory.

May we never boast or place our confidence for salvation in anything other than the cross of Christ. It is only what He did that makes salvation possible. It's not about performing, nor is making ourselves worthy it's only about the blood stained cross, the work of Christ.