

God's Servant Crucified

Mark 15:21-39

If you are a follower of Jesus, then the cross of Jesus is the center of your life. His cross is your cross. His death is your death. His resurrection is your resurrection.

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. (Galatians 2:20 [ESV](#))

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14 [ESV](#))

Truth: If we stray an inch from the cross of Jesus, we will be separated from the Christian faith. Move from the cross and there is nothing good in Gospel.

This is why Gospel churches like ours talk about the cross so much. There is no topic so relevant to real world life.

This is why Gospel churches like ours break fellowship from any teacher that denies the substitutionary atonement that the cross accomplishes. No doctrine is more foundational to our salvation.

This is why Gospel churches like ours refuse to be distracted by even very important moral or political issues. There is no subject that shares the center stage.

This is why Gospel churches like ours sing so many songs about it. There is no other act of God that communicates His love to us in such powerful demonstration. The cross of Jesus is the center of our life.

I have shared previously that people often ask me why I have a "T" in the middle of my name. R-I-T-C-H. In fact, a man asked me that question just five days ago. My answer now is, *"Because it reminds me to live a "cross-centered life".* You might not have a "T" in the middle of your name (though you are very blessed if you do!!). **But you need to find something that reminds you that the cross is now the center of everything for you.**

Friend, do you know that God loves you with a love that is infinite in its willingness to sacrifice for your good?

The devil uses some of the hardships and disappointments in your life to whisper, "God does not really love you." Friend, have you ever had the devil

whisper that lie into your heart? Of course he has. Perhaps he is whispering that lie to you this very morning.

We hear so many stories of people today are “deconstructing their faith”. That is to say that they are tearing apart the convictions and beliefs that they had been using to build their life.

Often this deconstruction takes place around 17-22 years of age. Sometimes it happens in mid-life. And sometime in later life. The pattern is varied, but deconstruction often begins with a disappointment in or disillusionment with a person who represents Jesus to the one who is struggling. The more they think about the weaknesses, the flaws, the faults, the failings of their mom/dad/church leaders/church/friend/spouse, the more the individual questions God’s love and ultimately God’s reality. Add to this mix the many false teachers who claim that the way to happiness is to depart from the ancient paths set forward in God’s Word and instead to adopt a me-centered philosophy of life. That me-centered philosophy might be draped in the clothes of sexual immorality, gender identification, feminism, environmentalism, eastern mysticism, . . . just to name a few. But in all forms, Satan whispers, *“The Gospel is not true. The church is not a special people. There is no special blessing from the LORD that is found in Jesus alone.”*

This deconstructive force is sometimes dramatic in open declarations of departure from the faith, but more often it is quiet in the subtle distancing of one’s soul from vital union with Jesus and from Jesus’ church. Many experience a deconstruction internally while maintaining the external forms of Christianity.

What is the ultimate immunization from deconstructionism? Here is what I believe. We will not be rescued from apostasy by reading more books or listening to more podcasts or looking to better churches or finding more mystical experiences or getting involved in social issues. **Our faith is safe only when we fix our eyes upon Jesus and upon His cross. Everything good flows from the cross.**

He is the King who conquers death for His people. He is the God who gives His life to love us. He is the Savior who alone offers eternal life. Let me ask you, *“To whom will you turn if you turn away from Jesus? Where will you obtain peace in this broken world? Where will you discover hope for the life to come? Where will you find a Shepherd who will lead you into green pastures and who will protect you from your own foolishness, from the devil and from this world of darkness?”* Friends, let us look to Jesus and to His cross! Let us not let our eyes stray from this grand demonstration of God’s power and love.

Main Idea: We glory in the cross of Jesus. The cross is the center of our everyday life. At the cross we learn how much God loves us. At the cross we receive all that we need for life now and forever.

God's Love in Living Color

"Come and see the victories of the cross. Christ's wounds are your healings. His agonies you repose. His conflicts your conquests. His groans your songs. His pains your ease. His shame your glory. His death your life. His sufferings, your salvation." Matthew Henry

Every part of the sufferings of Jesus carried a specific benefit to you and to me. There are too many sufferings and too many benefits to consider this morning. We limit our attention to SEVEN. Each suffering and benefit demonstrate in very tangible ways the love God has for you and for me.

We KNOW that we are loved by God because in our place, Jesus . . .

1. Was condemned as a sinner so that we might not be condemned as sinners.

And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why, What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. (Mark 15:12-15 [ESV](#))

Jesus stood before hate-filled men accused of grave crimes. He who never uttered a false word . . . who never possessed a wicked thought . . . who never acted in selfish pride . . . who never once disobeyed the least of God's holy commandments . . . who only loved with a pure love. This wonderful Man was condemned as a sinner. And not merely a run-of-the-mill sinner . . . but a special kind of sinner . . . a sinner deserving of the death penalty under Roman law. A person could not have been found guilty of a more serious offense.

In addition, Jesus is the One who created all that is. He is the One whose entrance into humanity was an act of indescribable humility and love. He did not have to leave His glory in heaven, but He did out of love for His Creatures. And yet when He arrives, He is treated as a nobody and worse . . . as an outlaw. The One who created the Law is scolded and reproached by those who broke the Law.

Furthermore, as we think of Jesus condemnation, let us remember who He is. The Father gives all judgment over man to this One who is condemned by man to death. He is the One before whom each of us will one day stand to give an account of our lives. He possesses all knowledge of every thought, motive, action, relationship, word that we have ever done. He alone possesses the knowledge of true righteousness and justice. And to HIM we will one day give an account.

You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, (Mark 14:64-65 [ESV](#))

Why did the Judge of all the earth allow Himself the indignity of being condemned by wicked men? Answer: So that those who deserve to be condemned for their sins might be justified . . . declared righteous by God.

Friends, do you know that you have committed sins for which God says are worthy of being condemned to death? Imagine hearing the verdict, "Guilty" and then the sentence, "Forever torment." If Jesus had not been condemned, we would be.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us . . . (Romans 8:1-4 [ESV](#))

"Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to sing to Him, and say, 'Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am Your sin. You have taken upon Yourself what is mine and given me what is Yours. You have become what You were not so that I might become what I was not.'" — Martin Luther

When you think of the cross, think of the day that you stand before the Judgment and are presented as "FAULTLESS"!

2. Was mocked so that we might be honored.

The hardened soldiers mocked Jesus.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling

down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. (Mark 15:16-20 [ESV](#))

The furious crowd mocked Him.

29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"

The chief priests mocked Him.

30-32a So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

The two guilty murderers hanging on crosses next to Jesus mocked Him.

Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. (Mark 15:32b [ESV](#))

Do you know that Jesus loves you so much that He endured humiliation so that He might provide future glory for you?

I know that your life might be very difficult today. You may endure physical weaknesses that humble you. You may have enemies that labor to harm you with slander or ridicule. You may have friends who betray you. You may have employers who do not honor you. You may have trials that embarrass and weary you. That is YOUR TODAY. But if you are in Jesus, that is NOT your FOREVER FUTURE.

In love, Jesus suffered humiliation on your behalf so that one day He might lift you up in glory.

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. (1 Peter 5:10 [NLT-SE](#))

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:16-18 [ESV](#))

When you think of the cross, think of the glory you will share with Jesus for all eternity!

3. Was stripped naked so that we might be clothed in righteousness.

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. (Mark 15:24 [ESV](#))

Death by crucifixion was exceedingly excruciating. It was intended to maximize human suffering through slowly sapping the life out of both the body and spirit of the person being crucified. The cross did not kill anyone quickly. The person lingered in agony suffering sometimes for days before they succumbed to the exhaustion of reaching up for one more breath. We often fix our minds on the physical agony that the cross brings to the condemned man . . . nails pounded in to a wooden post. Both feet pounded into another crossbeam. The lifting of the cross and the sudden jolt of the cross dropping in to a deep hole sending bolts of anguish through every nerve of the sufferer.

But the cross was also meant to exact emotional suffering too. It's purpose was to humiliate the sufferer and to rob him of his human dignity. Every part of the process was demeaning and this is particularly the case with Jesus.

Though artworks depict Jesus as wearing a loincloth, it is likely that he is hung publicly on the cross without any covering. John tells us more details about Jesus' clothes.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:23-25 [ESV](#))

So both the outer garments and the undergarment was taken from Him when He was nailed to the cross. Not only exposed to strangers, but also to those women whom He had personally known in close fellowship.

Question: Why did He allow this indignity to His divine Person?

Answer: So that He might clothe us forever with His righteousness keeping us from being experiencing the shame of being naked in our sin.

The theological word for Jesus clothing His people with His righteousness is IMPUTATION.

Definition: Imputation is Jesus giving His righteousness to sinful people who believe in Him.

you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (1 Corinthians 1:30 [ESV](#))

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 [ESV](#))

Jesus tells a wonderful parable in Matthew 22 to bring color to this doctrine of imputation. A king gives a wedding feast for his son and he invites as many people as his servants can find. People from every farm and street and town are invited to the banquet . . . some of the people are “bad” and some are “good”. All the guests have one matter in common . . . the king gives free of charge special clothes to everyone who plans to attend. The king wants them all looking like they belong at the wedding of the king’s son.

Jesus story teaches us God invites every person to be part of His Son’s future reign and glory. But we need better clothes if we are to participate. Jesus provides with brilliant pure clothes of His righteousness to wear. This gift is FREE! It is received simply by faith in Christ!

Jesus gives a warning at the end of His parable to those who try to enter in to the wedding banquet without wearing the new clothes that Jesus freely gives.

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matthew 22:11-14 [ESV](#))

When you think of the cross, think of the white clothes that you will wear as you celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb with Jesus in the kingdom of God!

4. Was made a curse so that we might be forever blessed.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. (Mark 15:33 [ESV](#))

When Jesus is born, the Father shines light upon shepherds in the midnight sky to show His pleasure in His Son. When Jesus dies, the Father closes the light of the noon day sun to show His displeasure placed upon His Son.

The darkness represents the judgment of God upon Jesus.

Jesus was not merely cursed by man. On the cross, Jesus is cursed by the Father as well.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (Galatians 3:10 [ESV](#))

Paul is pointing out Deuteronomy 21:23 where the LORD says, "a hanged man is cursed by God." The curse refers to God's judgment on sin. Notice that Paul moves from a general statement about God's curse on sinners to the curse that Jesus received in the place of all who break the Law of God.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— (Galatians 3:13 [ESV](#))

Why did Jesus become cursed of God? So that we might receive all His blessings that He deserves!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Ephesians 1:3-4 [ESV](#))

What are those blessings? Forgiveness of sin, adoption into God's family, sealing by the Holy Spirit, access to God in prayer, freedom from slavery, an inheritance that awaits you, a home in heaven, a resurrection from death, a purposeful life, a knowledge of God, a part in God's work, membership in Jesus' church, a love that will not let you go! Just to name a few!

When you think of the cross, think of the blessing that you received because the curse has been lifted from your life!

5. Was numbered with criminals so that we might be numbered with saints.

And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. (Mark 15:27 [ESV](#))

Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. (Mark 15:32 [ESV](#))

The Father purposed for His Son to be condemned with people who deserved condemnation. Hundreds of years prior to the death of Jesus, the LORD foretold this detail of the Messiah's death:

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. (Isaiah 53:12 [ESV](#))

Commercial for Together Day by Day:

Why did God choose to have two other men crucified along with Jesus? The picture of the three crosses on the hill is so familiar to me that before today I've never really stopped to consider this question. Of course it was no accident that Jesus was crucified with these two, and it was not by chance that he was placed in the center, between them. As I consider this scene again, here are some things that stand out to me:

- Two men, representing the only two possible outcomes for each of us (eternal life or eternal death)
- Jesus is between them, dividing he who was saved from he who was condemned
- Both are equally guilty sinners, showing us clearly that it is faith, not works, which saves

*God is not haphazard in his designs. Even in planning the death of his Son, he lovingly conveys to us the truth of the gospel. **Jesus was crucified by sinners, between sinners, FOR sinners.** Like me and like you.*

Friends, why was Jesus hung between two criminals? So that we might be numbered with the saints.

I love the song, "When the saints go marching in." It is upbeat, jazzy and joyful. It was popularized by Louis Armstrong in 1938 and is often played at New Orleans jazz funerals. The song envisions the joyful moment that a believer enters in to heaven with all who are in Christ.

Last verse says,

*Up there I'll see the Savior
Who redeemed my soul from sin,
With extended hands He'll greet me
When the saints go marching in. [Refrain]*

Refrain:

*When the saints go marching in,
When the saints go marching in;
Lord I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in.*

When you think of the cross, think of your being numbered with the saints and marching into God's presence together!

6. Was forsaken by the Father so that we might be accepted in the beloved.

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. (Mark 15:34-37 [ESV](#))

In this last hour at 3 pm, God the Son calls out upon God the Father. "My God, My God . . . " **Is this a cry brought** by the physical pains endured? No. **Is it a cry of** physical despair? No. **Is it a cry of anger** towards those who unjustly mistreated him? No. **This is an anguished cry from a Son to His Father.** It is a **personal conversation** He is having with His Father.

"MY God, MY God."

It is a cry produced by **the spiritual agony of His separation from the Father** whom He eternally loved and who eternally loved him. He was **forsaken** by God the Father at that moment. His communion, joy in fellowship with the Father was broken. This is a cry not merely from the human part of Jesus' person; this is a cry from the divine part of Jesus' person. Jesus in His whole person, both human and divine, quivers under the pain of this rejection from the Father.

A. W. Pink comments, *"This was a cry of distress, but not of distrust. God had withdrawn from Him, but mark how His soul still cleaves to God."* He knows His Father still loves Him. He calls out to Him for help in this dark hour. Yet He suffers. Suffers in a measure that is too great for words.

I cannot fully explain what happened in this dark moment. **Martin Luther comments**, **"God forsaken by God, who can understand that?"**

On the cross, Jesus receives what every sinner deserves to receive from the Father. He endures the Father's wrath against sin on our behalf. Jesus

experienced the full weight of our sin and its judgment upon his person. He did not merely FEEL forsaken by the Father, He WAS forsaken.

The physical agonies on the cross are difficult to describe, yet it is not these that are the deepest pains. The most excruciating suffering Jesus endures is the suffering under the judgment of God in our place. **Jesus is treated by the Father as though He had committed our sin.**

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, **smitten by God, and afflicted**. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5 [ESV](#))*

We can be accepted by God only because He was rejected by the Father on the cross!

When you think of the cross, think of God's open arms embracing you in love . . . knowing that despite your failures, the LORD accepts you!

7. Was torn open so that He might open a way to God for us.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38 [ESV](#))

The curtain in the Temple separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place was where the ark of the covenant resided and where God symbolically dwells with His people. The tearing from the top to the bottom communicates that man did not tear the curtain. God did. The curtain was 60 feet high, 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick. Not easy to tear!

God Himself opened a way for all to come to Him. Hebrews explains . . .

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, . . . (Hebrews 10:19-22 [ESV](#))

When you think of the cross, think of Jesus opening a way for you to the presence of God.

You and I once had no path to draw near to God without being consumed by His holiness. But now through the blood of Jesus, we can draw near.

Conclusion:

When the Triune God created the world and made man in His image, He knew what lie ahead. The Father knew that He would see His Son stretched out by evil men upon a wooden beam. He could see His Son have a crown of thorns placed upon His royal head. He could see the mocking, the scourging, the stripes upon His Son's back, the nails driven into feet and hands, the thirsting, the gasps for air upon the cross. He could see His judgment against sin placed upon His only begotten. And yet the Triune God moved forward with this plan. Friends, this is love.

Louis Bayly wrote a devotional book in the 17th century. It was one of two books that John Bunyan's wife brought to him when they were married. Near the end is a dialogue between the soul and Christ in which Jesus explains the meaning of the cross.

Soul: Lord, why wouldst Thou be taken, when Thou mightiest have escaped Thine enemies?

Christ: That they spiritual enemies should not take thee, and cast thee into the prison of utter darkness.

Soul: Lord, wherefore wouldst thou be bound?

Christ: That I might loose the cordes of thine iniquities.

Soul: Lord wherefore would Thou be lifted up upon a Crosse?

Christ: That I might lift thee up with Me to heaven.

Soul: Lord, wherefore were They hands and feet nayled to the Crosse?

Christ: To enlarge thy hands to doe the works of righteousness and to set thye feete at libertie, to walk the ways of peace.

Soul: Lord, why wouldst Thou have Thine arms nayled abroad?

Christ: That I might embrace thee more lovingly, My sweet soul.

Soul: Lord, wherefore was Thy side opened with a speare?

Christ: That thou mightiest have a way to come near to my heart.

Friends, God's love is not merely a spoken sentiment; God's love is demonstrated in living color to you and to me on the cross of Jesus. Friend, do you know that God loves you so deeply. He looks inside your wicked, selfish heart and sees all of its corruption and He says, "I love you."

In our place, Jesus . . .

- 1. Was condemned as a sinner so that we might not be condemned as sinners.**
- 2. Was mocked so that we might be honored.**
- 3. Was stripped naked so that we might be clothed in righteousness.**
- 4. Was made a curse so that we might be forever blessed.**
- 5. Was numbered with criminals so that we might be numbered with saints.**
- 6. Was forsaken by the Father so that we might be accepted in the beloved.**
- 7. Was torn open so that He might open a way to God for us.**