

WHAT THE CROSS MEANS TO ME

INTRODUCTION

On Friday 30 March, Good Friday, we will be walking through our city, crying out, "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on our city". We will be carrying a cross through the city and handing out small wooden crosses. (Hand out crosses).

The Cross is a message of opposites, it speaks of death and life, hate and love, violence and peace, accusation and forgiveness, sin and purity, punishment and atonement, all lost yet everything is gained, destruction and restoration, defeat and victory. The cruelest form of execution, yet the most powerful symbol of eternal life.

The cross is displayed in many forms in many places, Churches, Christian institutions and homes have them erected as a symbol of faith and belief. People wear them as jewelry, some even have tattoos of crosses on their skin.

Why is the cross so important? What does it symbolise, what is it's meaning to you and I today?

MESSAGE

WHAT IS THE CROSS?

From about the 6th century BC until the 4th century AD, the cross was an instrument of execution that resulted in death by the most torturous and painful of ways. In crucifixion a person was either tied or nailed to a wooden cross and left to hang until dead. Death would be slow and excruciatingly painful; in fact, the word **excruciating literally means "out of crucifying."**

Simply put, the meaning of the cross is death. However, because of Christ and His death on the cross, the meaning of the cross today is completely different. It has become a symbol of hope and forgiveness.

THE CROSS IS CONTROVERSIAL

The cross has been a controversial symbol for as long as it has been around. Some say it wasn't Jesus who died on the cross, others say that He was crucified but didn't die, but historical evidence proves that He died on the cross.

The cross is a stumbling block to the Jews. How could their promised Messiah die on a cross? They could not come to terms with Jesus when He said He was the Messiah and they mocked Him at the crucifixion: **Matthew 27:37-40** (NKJV) And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38 Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. 39 And those who passed

by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Even today the cross remains controversial.

In the wreckage of the World Trade Centre, two intersecting steel beams were found in the shape of a cross. To the unbelievers, it was a co-incidence, but to Christians it was a symbol of hope. The Ground Zero Cross, as it quickly became known, was installed on a mound of rubble and sprinkled with holy water by a Catholic priest who said masses beneath it. The cross attracted devout pilgrims and curious tourists without notable controversy, until it was brought into the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. Then the lawsuits began—the cross was a slap in the face of the non-Christian victims of 9/11, it had no place in a publicly funded institution. The museum prevailed in court, however, on the grounds its exhibit had already made the transition from religious symbol to historical artifact.

What does the cross mean to you today. Do you believe it's real? Is there a controversy going on in your own heart?

THE CROSS IS THE INTERSECTION OF GOD'S JUSTICE AND HIS LOVE!

We may ask why God used such a terrible, cruel method for His Son to die. The answer is found in the justness of God. Sin had to be punished. Jesus did not die only for some sin, or for the sins we may see as "soft sins". He died for ALL the sin ever committed.

What does that include?

- He died for the atrocities committed by Hitler and his army against the Jews.
- He died for the sins of every serial killer.
- He died for every fornicator and adulterer, for every vile sexual transgression.
- He died for liars, thieves, fraudsters, wife-beaters, drunks and drug addicts.
- **Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned"** – Jesus died for you and me.

The just payment for our sins is so terrible and so great that the punishment had to match it.

In Christianity, the cross is the intersection of God's love and His justice.

John 1:29 (NKJV) The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Romans 5:8 (NKJV) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The cross is the demonstration of God our Father's love for us! And the cross is the demonstration of Jesus Christ's love for us. He spread out His arms on the crossbeam of that terrible instrument of death and said, "I love you this much".

Jesus still loves sinners. He came and gave His life for them. The message of the Cross remains: a gift of love to those undeserving.

Have you accepted the cross of Christ for what it means to you? A symbol of God's mercy and a demonstration of His love?

THE CROSS IS PERSONAL

In most religions, people strive to reach deity. Christianity is the only faith where God has reached down to us. He seeks a personal relationship with us.

Our parents can't accept the power of the cross on our behalf, nor can our spouse. Our pastor or mentor cannot have a relationship with God through the power of the cross on our behalf.

You and I must come to a personal acceptance, belief and faith in the cross and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to benefit from its life-saving power.

Our response to the cross must be to know Jesus, our Saviour personally.

The apostle Paul recognised this as the most important thing in His life. He said, "I count everything else as rubbish". Then he identified himself with Christ's death:

Philippians 3:10 (NKJV) that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

The only way we can experience the power of the resurrection and be resurrected ourselves is if we conform to Christ's death. If He died, we must die. Have you chosen to die to your old life as Paul did, or are you holding on to it's dangerous, temporal value?

THE CROSS IS A SYMBOL OF HUMILITY

Philippians 2:5-8 (NKJV) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus, fully God, the creator of heaven and earth, left His throne in Heaven to come and die a criminal's death on the most despised of instruments, a Roman cross!

We are so concerned about what others think...

- "What will they say of I become sold out for Jesus".
- "What of I become radically saved".
- "What will my colleagues and friends say if I start speaking about Jesus, my Lord and Saviour, my best friend, the one for whose sake I choose not to get involved with worldliness and sinful behaviour."
- "What will they say if I choose to leave a family gathering to come to church".

We are so proud...

- *"How can I ever say sorry – they were in the wrong".*
- *"How can I forgive - they hurt me first".*

Jesus was betrayed, mocked beaten, whipped, crucified for you and I and yet today He is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us! He humbled Himself and God raised Him and gave Him the name above every other name.

James 4:10 (NKJV) Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Are we willing to wear a cross of humility? Are we willing to be conformed to Christ's death? Today we have an opportunity to choose.

THE CROSS IS THE PLACE WHERE GOD DOES ALL THE WORK

Galatians 6:12-16 (NKJV) As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

- Ephesians 2:8 teaches us that we are saved by grace through faith alone.
- The cross was the place where God alone did the work.
- Our works could never save us and when we accept Christ's work on the cross, we acknowledge that God is the one who made the way. It means there is no place for self-pride and works.

Do you possibly still believe that you can earn your salvation through good works? The cross reminds us that all the work required for our salvation and redemption was done there, that's why Jesus declared at the end, "It is finished".

TODAY WE ARE INVITED TO PICK UP OUR OWN CROSS

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Christ hung on the cross on purpose. He could choose to live as he pleased, but he chose to give his life for our sake. Galatians 2:20 says: "***I have been crucified with Christ***" – past tense. As Christians, we are to be dead to our will, as Christ was. Our life's prayer should be, "Not my will, Yours be done."

Like Jesus it is our responsibility to act on that prayer. Living the crucified life is not a passive thing. It is an act of the will.

Are we willing to make the cross our place of surrender today? Are we willing to take the me, myself and I out of the equation, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. Let's make that our choice today.

CONCLUSION

We have heard about the Cross of Christ Jesus today: It's controversial; it's the intersection of God's justice and His love; It's personal; It's a symbol of humility; It's the place where God has done all the work; It's an invitation to live the crucified life by picking up our won cross.

I close this message by saying, the Cross is final!

From Pilgrim's progress: "Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore did burdened Christian run, but with great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a pace somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre (a tomb). So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."

So many come to the Cross and yet hold on to past hurt, pain, and problems. They don't belong on your back any longer – Jesus has taken them on his. The debt is paid. Leave your burdens at the cross and leap forward in freedom into the arms of our heavenly Father.