

LESSONS FROM THE CROSS

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Two world/life changing events happened on the same weekend 2000 years ago—first, Jesus Christ died on a cross, and second, He was resurrected to life again three days later.

The greatest events the world has ever known. But the cross without the resurrection would have been meaningless. The One who claimed to be the Messiah would still be in the tomb. This was the condition of the disciples that Friday.

We will never be able to experience Good Friday as the disciples did. We can call it “Good Friday” because we know the end of the story—that after three days, Jesus was alive again.

For the disciples it was anything but “Good” Friday. They had absolutely no hope of resurrection in their minds. They were just as dense as we are; they did not understand the teaching of Jesus concerning His death.

For them the crucifixion seemed to be the end of the story, the failure of the Messiah, of maybe even God Himself. For years they had given their lives for this man and His purpose. Now, in their minds, it was over—and utterly unsuccessful.

I often wonder why God waited those three days. Wasn't Jesus simply aching to get out of that tomb? Perhaps God wanted to teach the disciples something about living in the tension of death.

They needed to learn trust the hard way, needed to learn how to find hope in a hopeless situation. Indeed, they were completely shocked by the resurrection. It was so unbelievable to them that Thomas insisted on touching the scars before he accepted it.

We are stirred to ask deep questions about the cross—WHY? Why did he have to die? Why did this wonderful person—this person of love and kind deeds—why did He have to suffer in this way? What was God doing?

1 Corinthians 15:3 - 4 (NIV) ³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

What was God teaching us at the cross and resurrection?

1. God was identifying with us.

When Jesus cried out asking why God had forsaken Him, had God abandoned Jesus at that moment? No, He was there! God the Father did not turn from God the Son. He turned His face from the blackness of sin, our sin.

Worse than the physical agony of the torturous cross, for the first time ever, Jesus suffered separation from God the Father, the separation sin causes. That's His real identification with us.

When Jesus cried out to God, He was identifying Himself with us. Here was God the Son Himself, nailed to that cruel cross. He took the full weight of human sin—past, present, and future—and all its consequences onto His shoulders.

Sin always comes between God and us. In this moment of agony on the cross Christ shared our sense of being cut off from God.

In this greatest moment of humility the heavy burden of human sin was laid upon Christ, who willingly and obediently bore the sins of many.

Jesus identified with us by taking our sin-guilt. He shares in our darkest moments. Just as we are better able to relate to someone who shares our problem, or who has already been through what we are now going through, God is there for us.

The cross tells us that God is not a distant God. He knows what it means to be human and frail and mortal. He does—He knows and understands.

So when we experience the darker side of life, we can turn to Him in prayer and confidence that He knows what we are going through. Not only was God identifying with us...

2. God was demonstrating His love for us.

Jesus, God the Son, willingly gave His life for you and me. Yes, the Jewish leaders screamed for His crucifixion. The Romans physically tortured and killed Him. For centuries Jews have been persecuted as “Christ killers.”

But we put Jesus on the cross. Just as surely as the Roman soldier drove the nails in, we were holding the hammer. We put the crown of thorns on His brow. We brought the whip across His back. It was our sins that sent our Savior to the cross.

Because He loves us, Jesus went to the cross. We may be able to understand someone willing to give his or her life for a good person—a child, a wife, a husband—

But the amazing thing is that Christ died for us sinners (Rom. 5:8). Now suppose with me that you love someone very much, but that person doesn't seem to appreciate it.

What can you do to help that person know that you love him or her? You can say, "I love you," and that may help because we do like to hear it. But the fact is actions speak louder than words.

If you don't act like it, your words are meaningless. God told us that He loves us. Then He showed us—He gave the most precious thing he possessed, His own Son, to demonstrate the extent of His love.

1 John 4:9 - 10 (NIV) 9This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

(Think on how God identifies with you and loves you as the Lord Supper bread is served.)

3. God was breaking the stronghold of sin.

Because of the cross we know that God loves us. But there's more. God's love didn't stop at the cross. With Christ's resurrection God broke the stronghold that sin has on us. God wants to get us out of the mess we are in.

The consequences of sin, both in this life and the next, are devastating. But when we accept Christ's sacrifice on the cross and give our lives to Him, Jesus delivers us from the stronghold and power of sin.

Through the cross, God set in motion a chain of events—salvation offered to all, defeat of the consequences of sin, the establishing of the world-wide church, sharing the Gospel with the world—all leading up to the victorious return of Christ.

No matter what the events of this world may look like to our eyes, because of the cross, Satan and evil are defeated. We are victorious. Sin and death were defeated with Christ's resurrection.

4. God was making salvation available to all.

How does the cross affect your life? How can Christ's death and resurrection affect you? What difference does it make to you? The fact is not a whole lot unless you let it!

Christ died for you, but He is not your Savior until you let Him become your Savior. He is not your Lord until He is enthroned in your heart.

This is where faith comes in. Faith involves the decision to accept Christ and all His benefits and to make them your own.

Salvation is available, but you have to accept it to receive it. Faith is accepting what God offers through the cross of Christ. The cross is the key. Accepting it opens the door to the Savior.

Imagine that you have purchased a precious gift for a friend. You stand there patiently with your arms holding this gift out to him or her. "Take it! It's yours!" you say.

But your friend won't accept your gift. And so, sadly you turn away. To offer somebody a precious gift doesn't mean that it will be accepted.

Through the cross God is offering us something incredibly precious—so precious that His only Son died so that we could have it.

He offers forgiveness of our sins, victory over death, and newness of life. It's all there. But we must accept it. The cross of Christ can't make any difference to you or change you unless you allow it to.

(Meditate on your forgiveness and salvation as the juice is served.)

Application:

What was God doing on the cross? He was loving you and giving you salvation. As you ask, "Why did He have to die?" let the crowd gradually fade away until you are the only one left and realize that you are the reason that Christ had to die.

There's an old hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Verses 3-4: "See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down; Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." (pg. 144, Baptist Hymnal)

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