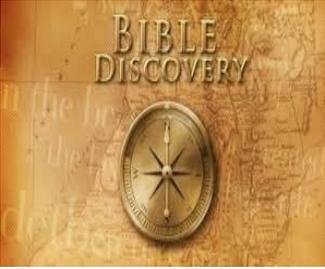


August 23, 2015

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

## The Message of the Cross



As we journey through each message encouraging us in the basics of the Gospel, I believe I'd be in error to neglect the obvious need to address how many within the modern Church, has little idea of how to truly live for God. We can come to God even yet not knowing how to properly live for Him. But we can never walk in victory without knowing the way of living for God. If we fail to comprehend the message of the cross, even as it was given to the Apostle Paul, then simply put, we've not grasped what it means to live for God.

It's quite peculiar that we can look about us at the jewelry people are wearing today and notice many wear the cross – as necklaces, earrings, pins – even as bracelets such as I have on my wrist. Yet I ponder at how many wear the cross out of tradition, in ignorance of its purpose, as appreciation for the gift without knowing the Saviour who died upon a cross many years ago – FOR THEM! What is the significance behind the crosses we wear, or see on the gravestones of our loved ones, or find gracing local church steeples? Whatever we display, whatever we choose to wear, whatever we profess is meaningless unless there accompanies such acts a devotion to and a commitment with the God who has brought us salvation.

As Christians we point to the cross of Christ as a reminder He died an agonizingly painful death. Historically, we recall how the Romans executed criminals by nailing their hands and feet to large, wooden frames formed by vertical and horizontal beams “crossed” into a huge “t”. Hanging on a cross was purposely designed as a humiliating, excruciatingly slow, cruel form of death meant in every way to be punishment. For the Jew, such a death warranted a curse from God; separated from God's love, dismissed eternally from fellowship with the Father.

How is the message of the cross relevant in your life? Does knowledge of the cross effect how you make daily decisions – in fact the choices you make? I think all of us want to live above sin, to do the will of the Father, to walk in step with God, to love as He loves, to forgive as He forgives – to live as Jesus lives! Why then do we so often fail? I believe the answer lies in the message of the cross.

Sometimes we can overthink something and get ourselves into great distress over it. Nothing is more obviously a problem for us then when we try to overthink God's way and work to understand in human terms what is best for us, what makes sense as a cure for our problems, what it takes to give us power and success. In fact, only as we cease to use human understanding at all can we begin to comprehend the message of the cross. In the passage we read from 1 Corinthians, Paul focuses on “the problem”. We by nature want to be wise; to be strong in our own strength. The message of the cross says we must come to the cross and die. That's not a popular message. We don't want to come and die. We want to

**We must come to the Cross and die!**

come and live. We want the resurrection without the sacrifice. We want to bring our wisdom and understanding to God and ask God to bless it. So often, this is the root of why we don't know how to truly live for God. We're still living for us!

The message of the cross is to understand what Christ accomplished in His death.

While it's foolish from the point of the world for someone to die for another that's exactly what Jesus did for you and me. What message does that leave us with but that we too must live sacrificially for Him! How do we face harsh realities in the way Jesus faced as He embraced the cross? Rather than think only of Himself, His troubles, Jesus did something else entirely. Have you ever noticed how many people Jesus ministered to while He hung on the cross? On the cross Jesus ministered to His mother by putting her into John's care [John 19:26-27], to a thief hanging next to Him [Luke 23:39-43], to the people who crucified Him [vv.33-34], to a Roman centurion [v.47; Matthew 27:54], and by forgiving our sins through His sacrifice to each of us. All of this was done in the middle of

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His suffering before things got better at His resurrection. Writer, Sheridan Voysey reminds us that, so too, out of our suffering will come opportunities to serve people in ways we otherwise never could.

At the heart of this message of the cross is how we can accomplish this awesome task of living sacrificially for Christ. Paul tells us that for *“us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* Did you catch that? It is the power of God! Each of us who has really heard the message of the cross understands when Jesus says, *“Without Me you can do nothing”* [John 15:5]. While we often agree with this statement in our mind, our hearts fail to respond. To let God penetrate the depths of our hearts, to let God touch our secret motives and ambitions, to let God have complete control over our lives and to live sacrificially for Him takes real dealing with and from God. It doesn't happen overnight. We have to lower our defenses, vulnerably open ourselves, as we come before the Lord, and allow His word, His will, His way, His power to penetrate and shed light knowing, *“the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* [Hebrews 4:12].

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In fact, we must take our lessons from Jesus. When Jesus walked among us, what angered the religious leaders of His day most was His claim to be God – at John 10:30 we have His testimony as He declares, *“I and the Father are one.”* In response, the authorities had Him arrested, sentenced to death and nailed to a cross. Even though Jesus didn't deserve such a horrible death, it was part of God's plan! Jesus was with Him through to the end fulfilling the Father's will. So then despite worldly foolishness, we must accept that as our Saviour, Jesus is the Son of God; is able to save us; is able to give us life through death.

***“Christ died for  
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In Jesus' faithful obedience to His Father, we learn the pattern for sacrificial living but even more we discover how Jesus' death, rather than being the end of a human life, accomplished amazing things for our benefit because He is the Son of God. Even as Jesus died on the cross, He took upon Himself the sins of each of us - *“Christ died for the ungodly”* [Romans 5:6] – that's me (and probably you too) as our substitute, He paid the penalty for our sins. Jesus' death on the cross means when we accept Him as our Saviour, our sins are forgiven, we're declared righteous in God's sight. We're born again, given a new life in Him – the old is passed away and everything becomes new.

All this lies in complete contradiction to the wisdom of the world. Yet our Heavenly Father declares, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”* One of the most difficult areas for us in overcoming our leaning on worldly wisdom, however, is our daily walk with God. We believe we've turned aside from the world and all that it has to offer, that we've lain down every goal and set our eyes solely on the kingdom of God; that we want Jesus and we want to live for Him but when we begin to face the needs that crowd into our lives, when we recognize the need to die with Him, it's easier to turn to our own resources to meet those needs because we're still living in us.

In all of this, we find ourselves looking to our own intellect in trying to grasp the things of God. We come up with answers, even good answers, but they lack power because they don't have their root in the revelation of God in understanding the cross. We fail to look to what God has to say. The question is do we read His word and let Him speak to us through His Spirit? Do we read the context in which these passages are written? Do we check the phrases we turn to against similar passages to ensure a clear comprehension? Have we surrendered our concepts to the ways of God? Paul indicates what pleases God– that we preach Christ crucified! This is the very thing which was a stumbling block to the Jews and outright foolishness to the Gentile.

When we think in worldly ways we may do marvelous deeds - we may even see the needs of others around us, and desire to meet some of them (*and that's good*). We may marshal our resources and plan *and plan and plan*. It may seem to be doing the will of God, it may meet with the praise of mankind, but it lacks the longevity, it fails to be fired by the power of God. Folks are not being delivered from sin. Lives are not spiritually resurrected. The sick are not being healed. Spiritual fire is not pouring out of our meeting places.

The kingdom being built rests not on the power of God found at the cross but on us! It's because we've failed to focus on the cross, we've failed to receive what God provided for each of us at the cross. We've preached, we've run programs, we've served our communities; we've practiced a message dependent on our ability, instead of taking all of it, our sorrows and our joys – all we have and all we are - to the cross, dropping it at the foot of Jesus; letting it die that it might be resurrected with Christ.

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Letting it die! The Apostle Paul warns us in Galatians, that if we place our faith in anything except "*Christ and Him Crucified,*" that "*Christ shall profit you nothing*" [Galatians 5:2]. The kingdom which lasts is built on what God can do; on what God has done at the cross of Christ. "*It is finished*" are the words Jesus spoke as He gave up His Spirit. What was finished? Sin was vanquished, Satan was defeated, and death was overcome. Jesus became the way, the truth and the life by which we're saved, by which we live – but we must come to Him and be willing to give up our old life before we can receive the new.

As Paul instructs in our walk with God, "*the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*". None of what I've encouraged you to follow today is of your own might, your own intellect, your own skillfulness. In our sin nature we desire to believe we've what it takes to prevail, to succeed, and to overcome. But not one of us is able. No not one. Do you hear the still small voice of the Father calling out to you, the solution which we seek is found only in the Cross! The Cross holds ***the Power of God***

simply because it was there our sins were paid for, it was at the cross we found forgiveness and were set free, giving the Holy Spirit latitude to work mightily to overturn our lives from our sin-scared ways, breathing new life into our broken, wayward hearts. For our Heavenly Father is building a spiritual kingdom, calling us home, with the message of the cross being: all we need is Jesus. If we would be the Church of Christ, the people of God, triumphant, filled with power, prevailing against temptation, victorious in hope, we don't need wisdom through education and medicine. We don't need great institutions of learning. We don't need great musicians and musical instruments, nor great fund-raising programs or attractive media presentations. We don't need great buildings or beautiful surroundings. All of these have use for temporal gain and are not wrong in themselves, they even aid in ministry and should not be ignored, yet having their roots in man, there's much opportunity to tote our own fleshly efforts. They borrow from the way of the world – something the modern church chooses often with mission statements, business models and programing. We think we can come up with new gimmicks to win souls, "buy" people's affection for God. These touch the emotions and intellect and may look good, even be effective, for a while, but they don't reach the spirit and heart of mankind.

***Where are the 10 commandments?***

***Where is the Lord's Prayer?***

***Where is the covenant of God's Word?***

***Where is a heart for Christ, choosing to pick up our cross and follow Him?***

If we would see the power of Christ unleashed in our churches today, let us turn to the message of the cross which goes beyond human will, beyond human understanding, piercing the heart, putting us in touch with God. Are we willing to be peculiar people, in the world but not of the world, persecuted for the message of the cross? Are we willing to put to death our pursuits, our plans, our schemes and let the Spirit of God pour out upon us? Paul was, and God used Paul to lay the foundation of the early church. What about you? How do you believe God can and will use you?

The message of the cross is clearly available to you today. As the greatest symbol of Christianity the cross stands to remind us not only that Jesus died for us, taking our place and paying the penalty of our sin, but that we died with Him in our sinful state and are raised with Him into a new eternal life in relationship with our Heavenly Father. So then the next time you see a cross, the next time you wear a cross as jewelry, think of the

empty tomb, the risen Lord and remember to ask yourself if you've truly surrendered in every way to Jesus, ask yourself if you've died to self and been raised in Jesus. Ponder the message of the cross and its effect in your daily life. Check your pulse to see if you're willing to die to your old ways and let Christ dwell in you thanking Him that He's brought you to eternal life.

The message of the cross is essential to where you will spend eternity. Don't wait another day to decide whether you are ready to stand with Christ. If you have decided to follow Jesus, then give us a call at 1-519-317-8659 or email us through our website address.

**Blessings,**

*Pastor Dave*

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