

Matthew 27:32-66 – The Power of the Cross

1. The longer I live the more I see the pain in people's lives.

a. Consider the messed up relationship of young adults:

In 2011 a research study on single men and women aged 18-36 found widespread fears about divorce—even among those whose parents hadn't divorced. The researchers interviewed 122 cohabitating couples. More than two-thirds of the respondents worried about their ability to form enduring marriages. They frequently mentioned the desire to "do it right" and marry only once to the ideal partner. The respondents also frequently mentioned the consequences of a failed marriage—emotional pain, social embarrassment, child custody concerns, and legal and financial issues.

Cornell University, "Divorce fears widespread among young couples," R&D Magazine (12-21-11)

i. I'd call that a kind of emotional "knot" that stymies real relationships.

b. Or consider the doubt that plagues perfectly intelligent people:

In a *Rolling Stone* interview, the richest man in the world, Bill Gates, at age 58, was asked "Do you believe in God?" Gates said that he believes science has now filled in some explanations for disease and the weather. But after admitting that science can't explain everything, he said this:

"The mystery & the beauty of the world is overwhelmingly amazing, and there's no scientific explanation of how it came about. To say that it was generated by random numbers, that does seem, you know, sort of an un-charitable view. I think it makes sense to believe in God, but exactly what decision in your life you make differently because of it, I don't know." <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/bill-gates-the-rolling-stone-interview-111915/>

ii. I would call that a kind of intellectual knot that frustrates faith.

c. Now think of the way people make bad choices that hurt them:

Psychiatrist Dr. Stephen Grosz points to research that shows we usually don't respond when a fire alarm rings. For instance, in 1985, 56 people were killed when a fire broke out in the stands of a soccer match in England. Close examination of television footage later showed that fans did not react immediately and continued to watch both the fire and the game, failing to move towards the exits.

Another example: After a fire in the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Kentucky left 177 people dead, forensic experts confirmed that many of the victims sought to pay before leaving, and so died in a line up at the cashier.

iii. I would call that a volitional knot that cornering people in their complacency or their sinful compulsions.

2. Even the day Jesus died, there were those – like the soldiers of old – who mocked Jesus. vv. 39-44

3. Still, the unadorned, empty cross remains our pre-eminent symbol.

4. Paul wrote of contrasting views of the cross: 1 Cor 1:18-19; 22-24

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called... Christ the **power** of God and the wisdom of God.*

5. I want us to see, this morning, how Matthew's account of the crucifixion shows how the death of JC has the power to transform our whole being— our feelings, our minds and even our wills.

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I. The Cross cuts through our emotional knots

The suffering Christ endured frees the deepest place in our hearts.

A. What's an example of an emotional knot: what about the hatred harboured by abuse victims?

B. The ancient world told of the "Gordian Knot" (now symbolic of an intricate problem); it was tied by King Gordius of Gordium in Phrygia; an oracle declared that whoever loosed it would rule Asia; Alexander the Great overcame the problem with one stroke of his sword.

C. Just so the cross cuts through to the depths of our hearts:

1. On the cross we see the **pathos** (suffering) of Christ. 46

a. Not mere nails & thorns made vivid by medieval art: see Grünewald's Christ in the Isenheim Altarpiece.

b. Contrast Matthew's single word – without details – to tell of the death of Christ. ["having crucified him" σταυρωσαντες]

c. The pathos is heard in the cry of dereliction: Christ has accepted our sins, lost the loving gaze of Father, and felt the forsakenness of the hell of his wrath. V. 46; Ps 22:1 "My God, my God..."

2. At the cross we see the **sympathy** of Creation. [pathetic fallacy]

a. Darkness from noon to 3:00 (45); earthquake. 51b

b. Rom 8:19-22— speaks of a cosmic liberation by a cosmic Christ.

c. Song 107, vv 2-3 "Behold, behold the Lamb of God..."* (J. Hoskins)

Behold his arms extended wide, on the cross;

Behold his bleeding hands & side, on the cross

The sun withholds his rays of light

The heav'ns are clothed in shades of night,

While Jesus does with devils fight on the cross

Come, sinners, see him lifted up, on the cross

He drinks for you the bitter cup, on the cross

The rocks do rend, the mountains quake,

While Jesus doth atonement make,

While Jesus suffers for our sake, on the cross

3. At the cross, by contrast, we see the **apathy*** of the crowd.

a. "Then they sat down and kept watch over him there." 36

b. Hearing his agony they wait for the "Elijah show." 49

c. **Orsborn**, captures it in Song 135, v 2*

We mourn that e'er our hearts should be

One with a world that loves not thee;

That with the crowd we passed thee by

And saw, but did not **feel**, thee die.

Not till we knew our guilt and shame

Did we esteem the Saviour's name

4. Our proper reaction must be to gain an **empathy*** for the suffering Christ— to feel in our hearts his love.

a. **Charles Wesley**:

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?

Died he for me who caused his pain? For me who him to death pursued?

Amazing Love! How can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me!

b. **Empathy** means we understand his pain & he ours.*

Tom was standing at the counter of the neighborhood dry cleaner, which had recently been bought by a Lebanese family. Suddenly a truck backfired nearby with two loud bangs. Tom instinctively hit the floor, face down. Embarrassed, he got to his knees and peered over the counter, only to see the owner also on his knees. Brushing himself off he said, "Saigon '68." Then the owner stood up and said, "Beirut '79."

c. Christ knows our pain, and no emotional knot is too tough for him to cut through; but we also need to enter into his sufferings and understand his sacrifice of love.

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II. The cross transforms our intellectual life

***Understanding Salvation** requires the deep meditation of our thoughts.*

A. Calvin was transformed, in 1533—from reading Seneca and the law to studying Christ and theology.

B. Reflect with me on the profound significance of the cross:

1. Jesus' death was a sacrifice for sin. 50

a. The loud cry: It is finished! John 19:30

b. A **willing** sacrifice. He “yielded up his spirit” 50 cf Jn 10:17-18

i. When *The Hunger Games* heroine Katniss Everdeen willingly subs in to fight for her little sister, Primrose, she lays down her life for a good person. (Rom 5:7). She symbolically lays down her life for all her people in “section 12.”

c. A **propitiatory** sacrifice. Rm 3:25 (wrath and sin)

d. A **real** sacrifice. Heb 10:1a; 9:24 (not a shadow but the reality)

2. Jesus' **reconciling** death provided for at-one-ment of God & us.

a. The 60 foot veil ripped from top to bottom by the hand of God! 51

b. Christ gave us access to the Father. He 10:19-22

3. Jesus' death conquered death, and his sacrifice has **life-giving** power.

a. His death empowered holy people to be rise from the dead, appearing to many after resurrection. 52-53

C. In view of God's mercy (seen on the cross) our minds are transformed as they are renewed. Rm 12:2

D. We find our minds transformed not through willpower (I will not be angry, I will not covet, lust, steal...) but through replacing the bad with good.

1. How do you remove air from a bottle?

a. Use some elaborate vacuum device or...

b. Fill it with water! (Erwin Lutzer, *How to Say No to a Stubborn Habit*)

2. So our intellectual life is transformed by absorbing God's Word, by replacing the bad with the good.

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III. The Cross realigns our volitional patterns

The service he evokes demands the deepest commitment of our wills.

A. Paul, whose heart had been moved, and whose mind had been transformed, wrote of the great commitment of his will: I have been *crucified* with Christ ... and this was a real possibility for the Marys and for Joseph & Nicodemus.

1. Yet we see at the cross the response of willing servants.

a. The care of the **women** at the cross & the tomb speaks of their great devotion & love in a dangerous place.

b. The concern of the **men** shows their willingness to get involved, to sacrifice wealth (Joseph's own tomb) for

Jesus' sake. 57

B. Finally, all things – including God's **opponents** – serve him & work his will.

1. Thus, the involuntary confession of the Centurion with his soldiers (despite the terror they felt): "truly this was the Son of God" 54

2. The bungling by rebellious Jewish leaders who secured his tomb (64) & then bribed the guards to lie about the empty tomb gave proof of his resurrection – he was gone despite the seal and the guard!. 28:12-15

3. In the end every knee will bow—some will bow from fear, the rest will bow out of love.

Conclusion

1. The death of Christ on the cross is the central event of history.

2. It has the power to alter us to the core – emotions, mind & will.

a. Anyone in Christ is a new creation—old gone 2 Cor 5:17

3. How do you react to the cross this morning?

a. Feelings of Apathy in the face of his Passion?

b. Rebellion Thoughts at the prospect of reconciliation with God?

c. Resistance of your Will to Christ's Lordship except when forced?

4. Why not let God's Spirit change your attitude, give you a new empathy for the suffering of Christ, lead you into a friendship with God the Father? He'll show you the joy of serving him with a loving heart.