



MESSAGE ONE: THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Galatians 6:11–16 (NASB)

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

MESSAGE GOAL:

The goal of this message on **The Hope of the Cross for Today** is to learn how to make the cross central in our lives so we can experience the power, peace, and mercy that comes through a relationship with Christ.

INTRODUCTION:

I want to share something incredibly important with you: In Christianity, the cross is the main thing. What Jesus satisfied and gained at the cross is the main thing. Without it, there is no power, no freedom, no forgiveness, no authority, no strength, no victory—nothing at all. The cross is the main thing.

Every year around Easter time, people will typically focus on the cross. We remember that Christ's death paid the penalty for our sins. We meditate on how the reality of the cross enables those who believe and trust in Jesus to spend eternity in Heaven. However, once Easter passes, we frequently go back to doing our own thing and trying to live our lives without the cross as the central focus.

See, it isn't enough to gather together at the right place each Sunday—the church. It isn't enough to gather together with the right people in our lives—fellow believers. It isn't enough that there is a program and a plan, or that there are books, seminars, worship and personal devotional time on Sunday and throughout the week. All of that is good, and all of that is critical. But all of that means nothing without the centrality of the

main thing—the cross. If we leave out the cross, we are only left with the empty shell called religion.

Without the cross, we are left with an empty set of rules, laws, requirements, and judgments—an attempt to legislate spirituality without the power, intimacy, grace and ability to live spiritually victorious lives. As a result, believers find themselves in perpetual defeat—never measuring up, never fully overcoming their struggles, never rising above their circumstances, never fulfilling their destiny, and never achieving the complete manifestation of their significance because they are operating without the power and deliverance of the cross. They are trying to live the Christian life without the main thing—the cross.

Many believers today want to live in victory yet continually live defeated lives. The problem that we face in our modern, contemporary Christian culture is that we have forgotten the purpose, preeminence, and the power of the cross. We view it as an icon reflecting something that happened thousands of years ago but that has little relevance to us today other than at communion or Easter in order to produce feelings of guilt or appreciation. Far too many Christians view the cross as an historical event that will take them to heaven rather than as a current event wielding everything they need to bring heaven to bear on earth.

In writing to his audience at Galatia, Paul urged them over and over again, in one form or another, to remember Christ and the cross.

SERMON POINTS:

1. THE CROSS IS CENTRAL TO THE CHRISTIAN

Remember Christ and the cross

- Paul wrote to the Galatians in large letters that He boasted only in the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14)
- Paul recalled the historical reality of the cross

Make the cross central in your life

- To Paul, the cross was not a decoration or an icon—it was the centrality of his very existence (see Galatians 2:20)
- The cross was Paul's identity and hope





2. THE CROSS PROVIDES POWER

Look to the power of Christ

- The church at Galatia looked to their flesh instead of Christ's power (Galatians 3:1–3)
- The Galatians focused on what they could do in their flesh instead of what Christ already did (see Galatians 6:12)

3. THE CROSS PROVIDES A RELATIONSHIP AND NOT RELIGION

Don't let religion replace the cross

- The Judaizers tried to subvert the message of the cross by pressuring new Christians to conform to external religious observances which were symbolized by the chief one known as circumcision
- The Judaizers had religious rules but not a relationship with Jesus

Focus on your relationship with Christ

- Whenever religious activity trumps a relationship with God, the power of Jesus is no longer experienced in a believer's life
- Religion is anything you do for God that does not stem out of a heart connected to God
- Religious activity can sever us from Christ's strength, intimacy, and power (see Galatians 5:1–2, 4)

Serve God out of love rather to duty

- God wants your morality, prayer life, dedication for Him and all else to be predicated on your relationship with Him rather than on religious duty
- Don't be defined by what you do—be defined by knowing Jesus

4. THE CROSS PROVIDES A NEW WORLDVIEW

Let yourself be spiritually crucified with Christ

- Paul says there are two crucifixions that need to occur—Jesus' and your own (Galatians 6:14)
- Paul was crucified to all things belonging to this world

Align yourself with Christ

- Being "crucified" with Christ creates a disconnect from this world's order and subsequent attachment and alignment with Him
- Crucifixion involves no longer living a worldly life that leaves God out

5. THE CROSS PROVIDES YOUR IDENTITY

Carry your cross daily

- This is an ongoing identification as Paul pointed out to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:31)
- The cross represents the moment-by-moment connection to and identification with Jesus Christ and the purpose of His life, death, burial and resurrection
- The cross is an acknowledgment of complete and total dependency on Christ and His sufficiency, along with recognition of personal sin

Bear the reproach of Jesus

- Carrying your cross is to identify with Jesus so when they accuse you of being a Christian you are found guilty
- Carrying your cross is to admit publicly that you are guilty of the crime of being committed to Christ, guilty of placing Him first
- Carrying your cross is dying to yourself and what you want and putting Jesus first

Recognize you are a new creation

- Your identification with Christ means you are a new creation (Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Your victory in your daily life, decisions, emotions, finances and in all things is tied to the new creation within you, not to the flesh

6. THE CROSS PROVIDES PEACE AND MERCY

Walk according to the rule of the cross

- You will experience peace and mercy when you align your frame of thinking with the centrality of the cross
- Functioning by the rule of the cross provides a peace that passes understanding

Guard against trusting in religious activity

- Trusting in religious activity to earn favor with God results in severing yourself from Christ
- Being severed from Christ means you've been disconnected from the power of Jesus

Let the Holy Spirit empower you

- When the Spirit permeates all that you do, you will think, act, live, and love differently and see yourself in a different light





- The Spirit, who comes to us by way of the accomplishment of the cross, will empower you

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS: In football, the football determines everything. First downs are measured by where the ball is placed. Touchdowns are measured by whether the ball crosses the plain. "Out-of-bounds" is tied to your control of the ball and its relationship to the feet of the person holding it. Fumbles are determined by who grabs the ball. Field goals are measured by whether the ball goes through the Up Rights. Men fight over it, rejoice over it, and strive to possess it. In other words, if a football is missing then there is no football game. Without the football, everything else that goes on in a stadium or on a field is a waste of time. In football, the football is the main thing. In Christianity, the cross is the main thing.

CHOOSING RELIGION OVER RELATIONSHIP: In school, we may be asked to write a research paper. To accomplish this assignment, we perform due diligence, control the material, and analyze all of the arguments. After our hard work, we feel great about our paper. Now suppose we get our paper back from our professor and there is a big fat red zero at the top, along with a smaller note at the bottom scrawled, "Great work. Great preparation. Wrong assignment."

It wasn't that you hadn't done great work, it was that you had done great work on the wrong assignment. You had researched the wrong topic. As a result, you didn't get credit for what you had done. Christianity is no different. It's not that there aren't a lot of people doing a lot of excellent things. It's not that a lot of these same people attend church, help the hurting, or say all the correct spiritual platitudes. It's just that they've missed the cross. They've missed Jesus Christ. And then they wonder why they aren't getting any credit. They wonder why they aren't experiencing any victory, power, hope and authority. External observances, the rules of religion, can actually get in the way of a relationship with Jesus.

FINDING IDENTITY IN THE CROSS: Have you ever gone swimming in a deep lake or in the ocean? If you chose to swim several hundred feet down in the depths of the water, you wouldn't survive simply because your body was not made for that environment. Without the proper equipment, you wouldn't last more than a few minutes.

The cross is your equipment in this world. It is your GPS. It is your identity. It is your oxygen. It is your point of reference. It is your life. Why is it that so many believers are struggling to live victorious lives in the world? Because they are leaving the cross at the benediction. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) He didn't say that you are to pick up your cross and then set it back down. He said you are to carry your cross.

BEING SEVERED FROM CHRIST: Electricity is the flow of power that makes everything work in your home. Virtually everything in your house operates because of electricity. Your appliances, lights, heat, air conditioning, computers, television and many things work because they are receiving electricity. If you are severed from electricity, the flow of the power stops even though you still own the appliances, lights, heater, air conditioning unit, computers, television and all else. It's not that you no longer possess these items, nor is it that you didn't pay for and purchase them. But you can have something that you have paid for and not enjoy it simply because the flow of electricity is no longer there. To be severed from Christ or to fall from grace means that the flow of what God wants to do in you and through you is no longer flowing. You have essentially been unplugged, or disconnected, from the power of Jesus even though you still have all of the paraphernalia of religion. Therefore, your hope is gone, your peace is gone, your courage is gone, your faith is gone and your authority is gone.

BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:

JUDAIZERS: (ioudaizō) (Romans 6:12) meaning to "live according to Jewish customs." In the first century AD, circumcision was the external symbol of religious commitment and involvement. In fact, there was a specific group of people who would follow Paul around to wherever he went, and whenever he would start a church they would try and interfere with the belief structure of the church. This group of people was known as the "Judaizers." The Judaizers were a group of people who were still attached to the religious rules of the Old Testament. Because of this, they would try and get the new Christians to conform to external religious observances, which were symbolized by the chief one known as circumcision. The Judaizers were trying to subvert the message of the cross. They had religion. They just didn't have a relationship with Jesus Christ.





WORLD: (*Kosmos*) (Galatians 6:14) simply refers to an organized world system or arrangement designed to promote a specific emphasis or philosophy. For example, we will often talk about the “world of sports,” or the “world of finance,” or the “world of politics.” These phrases are not referencing a location or a place. They are referencing an organized system inclusive of certain definitions, regulations and philosophical worldviews. When Paul states that he has been crucified with Christ, he is saying that he is no longer alive to this world’s system that wants to leave God out. He was crucified to the strategies and rules that are set up to try and make humanity acceptable to God independently of God.

CRUCIFIXION: (Luke 14:27) The Romans invented crucifixion. When the Romans wanted to put a condemned criminal on public display to humiliate him, they paraded him down the street carrying the crossbeam of his cross. Carrying your cross to the place of execution was a public display that you were guilty of the crime you were condemned for. To carry your cross means to bear the reproach of Jesus Christ. It is to be so identified with Him that when they accuse you of being a Christian, you are found guilty. When someone accuses you of being His disciple, you say, “You got me.” To carry your own cross is to admit publicly that you are guilty of the crime of being committed to Christ, guilty of placing Him first.

SERMON LINES:

This sermon will help you understand the biblical principle of the centrality of the cross so you can experience the power that Christ provides.

This sermon will outline how the cross proves essential to our lives and the benefits Christ provides to those who walk according to its rule.

QUOTES ATTRIBUTED TO DR. TONY EVANS:

“If we leave out the cross, we are only left with the empty shell called religion.”

“Essentially, we have made the cross nothing more than a replica to induce guilt rather than what it is – the single most greatest affirmation and demonstration of pure love.”

“Far too many Christians view the cross as an historical event that will take them to heaven rather than as a current event wielding everything they need to bring heaven to bear on earth.”

“Whenever religious activity, however sincere, trumps relationship, the power of Jesus Christ is no longer experienced in the believer’s life.”

“The key to the cross is not the two beams of wood, one vertical and one horizontal. The key to the cross is the One who hung on it as a sinless sacrifice.”

“Never let religion get in the way of your relationship with Jesus Christ. Rather, take the cross off from around your neck and carry it instead. You have been crucified with Christ, and as a result you are a new creation.”

