



## 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 than 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.”





## MESSAGE TWO: THE BENEFITS OF THE CROSS

### **SUGGESTED PASSAGE:** Ephesians 1:3–19 (NASB)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. 15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might...

### **MESSAGE GOAL:**

The goal of this message on **The Hope of the Cross for Today** is to learn about the surpassing greatness, power, and authority of the cross so we can respond in praising God for defeating Satan and giving us access to Christ's rule and authority as heirs of an eternal inheritance.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

It is unfortunate that many Christians come to church every Sunday and every Wednesday still functioning without knowing all of the rights and privileges that the cross has afforded them. They fail to maximize and utilize the benefits that God has ordained and bequeathed for His saints. Knowing about the cross without knowing the authority and benefits of the cross will keep you from experiencing all that God has in store for you.

What the cross provides to you and me is the opportunity to see what God can do beyond the normal, every day routine of life. The cross is the key to God invading the difficult or mundane circumstances of life just like He invaded the tomb of Jesus after He died on the cross, flipping things around in order to reveal His power and authority.

A lot of Christians sing about God's power, and talk about God's power, but can never testify to experiencing God's power since they have never accessed God's power. They have never seen Him turn, twist and tweak things beyond their human comprehension.

Have you ever watched an action-adventure film where the hero of the story is trying to locate a special artifact or treasure? All along the way, he or she faces opposition after opposition coming from the enemy who is trying to divert him or her from reaching their goal and benefiting from their prize. These films often remind me of what Satan attempts to do in the lives of believers.

See, you and I have a precious treasure – a unique possession – that our enemy doesn't want us to discover. We have things available to us that he doesn't want us to get. He will use no limits to stop you or I from picking up the treasure that God has for us.

Paul gives us some insight into the benefits and authority that the treasure of the cross has to offer when he writes to the church at Ephesus.





**SERMON POINTS:**

**1. THE CROSS DISPLAYS GOD'S SURPASSING GREATNESS**

Believe in the greatness of God's power

- The resurrection of Christ demonstrates God's power (Ephesians 1:19-21)
- God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavenlies

Believe God provides power to you

- God's power that raised Christ from the dead is also available to you
- God has enough power to turn even the worst scenario in your life into a victory

**2. THE CROSS DEMONSTRATES CHRIST'S AUTHORITY**

Believe Jesus has supreme authority

- Jesus' ascension placed Him above all rule and authority (Ephesians 1:19-21)
- Jesus disarmed sin's power over you (Colossians 2:14-15)
- Jesus sits far above any situation you are dealing with

Believe Jesus imparts authority to you

- Authority is the right to use the power that you possess
- When you identify with Christ's cross, resurrection, and ascension, you identify with His authority that overrides Satan's power

Believe Jesus' authority rules over Satan

- Although Satan is more powerful than you, he is not strong enough to overcome Christ's authority
- Jesus disarmed Satan (Colossians 2:15)
- Satan doesn't have the last word because Jesus now sits high above all rule and authority

**3. THE CROSS'S AUTHORITY AND POWER MAY BE ACCESSED THROUGH COMMUNION**

Take communion to access the authority and power of the cross

- Communion ushers in both a physical and spiritual reality allowing you full entry into the cross's accomplishments
- Communion provides the blessings attached to Christ's death and resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 10:16)
- Communion reminds us Satan no longer holds

authority over us (see Colossians 2:13-15)

Proclaim the Lord's death by taking communion

- Eating the bread and drinking the cup proclaims the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- When you take communion you are proclaiming or preaching to the evil principalities that Christ has defeated Satan
- Through communion we proclaim the regaining of the victory and authority that was originally lost in the garden of Eden

**4. THE CROSS GIVES US REASON FOR PRAISE**

Praise God for His authority

- God is seated high above all rule and authority
- Because of our relationship with Him, we are seated with Him and have access to His rule and authority in our life (Ephesians 2:6)

Praise God for His triumph over Satan

- The blood of the lamb overcomes Satan (Revelation 12:10-11)
- The cross has conquered Satan, granting us access to an authority higher than Satan's authority

**5. THE CROSS PROVIDES VICTORY OVER YOUR ENEMIES**

Believe you are spiritually seated in heaven

- God seated us with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:5-7)
- Understanding where you are seated and what that means provides access to Christ's authority

Believe that your spiritual inheritance affects your physical reality

- Connecting with Christ's authority changes your fear levels, worry, dread and all else
- Living in light of Christ's authority changes how you walk, talk, and think because you remember He is ultimately in control

**SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:**

**INHERITANCE:** There are certain advantages that come from being a platinum flyer. When you accrue a large number of miles with an airline company, they may send you a book of benefits and significant opportunities for you to take advan



tage of. There may be upgrade options, booking options, and priority access options among other benefits. But in order to use them you must know the privileges of what your platinum level relationship with the airlines company affords. Failure to understand your “inheritance” of benefits results in not enjoying the significant opportunities available for you to enjoy. Many Christians also fail to know all the rights and privileges that the cross has afforded them. They fail to utilize the benefits that God has ordained for His saints.

**SURPASSING GREATNESS:** Jesus was crucified, and nailed to a cross on Friday. Friday was a bad day. It was a bad day physically – Jesus was beaten to a pulp. It was a bad day emotionally – Scripture says Christ cried tears of blood. It was a bad day spiritually – He was separated from God, the Father. However, Friday did not determine where Jesus would wind up. What started off bad on Friday wound up being awesome on Sunday. This is because God reversed the effects of Friday, raising Christ from the dead and seating Him in the heavenlies. (Ephesians 1:19–21)

**AUTHORITY:** Referees are not the strongest men on the football field. In fact, they are older, slower and heavier. Yet when a referee throws out a yellow flag on a player who is much bigger than him, the bigger player has to yield. The faster player has to slow down. The stronger player has to do what he says. This is because the referee has a greater power called authority. Authority overrules power.

**CHRIST IS ABOVE ALL POWERS:** The president of the United States sits in the Oval Office at the White House yet what he decrees from there can impact you wherever you are, and can even impact people halfway around the world. This is because where the president sits is a powerful location above all other powers in our nation. If one man in one city can affect an entire nation, or even the world, politically, what do you think that the King of kings and the Lord of lords can do sitting far above all rule and authority?

**CHRIST’S AUTHORITY OVER SATAN:** What Satan does is similar to a man holding a gun on you. At first, you may feel afraid and at this man’s mercy. Yet if someone were to point out to you that the man’s gun did not have any bullets in it, he would no longer control you. That’s the difference between power

and authority. See, at the cross, Jesus Christ “disarmed” Satan (Colossians 2:15). Jesus Christ removed the bullets from Satan’s gun. Satan still likes to play like a tough guy and try and intimidate everyone with his power, but ultimately, Jesus Christ has stripped him of his authority; therefore, his power is only as strong as he can persuade you to believe that it is. In and of itself, it is not strong enough to overcome Christ’s authority.

### BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:

**INHERITANCE:** (κληρονομίας) (Ephesians 1:14) “our salvation” (BDAG, 548).

**PLEDGE:** In Greek, the word “pledge” can mean a “down payment.” Through the cross, God has set aside a “down payment” on heaven for you to receive while on earth. As a believer, you are on your way to heaven. However, God does not want you to have to wait to get there in order to feel and experience what heaven is like. There is a piece of heaven that has been allocated to you right now.

**POWER:** (δυνάμεις) (Ephesians 1:19) “potential for functioning in some way, power; might, strength, force, capability” (BDAG, 262).

### SERMON LINES:

This sermon will help you understand the power and authority of the cross so you can enjoy your inheritance in Christ.

This sermon will explain why the power and authority of the cross enables you to enjoy your inheritance in Christ today.

### QUOTES ATTRIBUTED TO DR. TONY EVANS:

“...the surpassing greatness of God’s power that worked to raise Christ from the dead, turning death into life, is the same exact surpassing greatness of power available to you. God flipped the script with Jesus, and He can do the same with you.”

“Friend, whatever it is that you are dealing with, or whomever it is that you are dealing with, it or they do not have the last say. No matter how big, mighty, powerful or pushy they are or it seems to be, Jesus Christ is sitting far above all of it. He is positioned higher than all rule, authority, dominion and power.”





"Communion is your time to preach your sermon to the evil principalities and remind them that they have been defeated, and that you know it. It is your turn to serve notice on Hell, based on the cup and the bread, that Hell has already lost."

"When you take the bread and the blood, you can tell Satan to go to hell because it is by virtue of the bread and the blood – the body and blood of Jesus Christ – that you have the ability to piggy-back on the authority of Christ over Satan."

"Friend, not only does Jesus Christ have a chair in heaven to sit down in but you have a chair there as well. You have been "seated ... with Him" above all rule and authority. You have been spiritually relocated."

"You must approach your life spiritually in order to attain spiritual authority. If all you see is what you see than you will never see all there is to be seen...Earth's seat doesn't give you authority. Only heaven has access to that authority because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross."

"When you live in light of Christ's authority, gained for you at the cross, it will change how you walk, talk and think."

"Friend, before you give up, look up. Fix your eyes on Jesus and see yourself seated with Him in the heavenlies, granted full access to His rule and authority according to the power of God that works in you."





## MESSAGE THREE: THE NEW COVENANT AND THE CROSS

### SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Hebrews 12:18-27 (NASB)

18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." 27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

### MESSAGE GOAL:

The goal of this message on **The Hope of the Cross for Today** is to find ultimate stability in the cross of Christ and the New Covenant He established, in the midst of an unstable world.

### INTRODUCTION:

Many years ago, Marvin Gaye penned the lyrics of this song summarizing a number of the negative realities of the world, and asking the question, "What's going on?" He knew that something was amiss bringing havoc on many dimensions within our world and society.

A similar question is often asked by Christians. They wonder, "What's going on? What is happening?" As we look at the landscape of the society in which we live, a day does not go by where there does not seem to be more calamity, more chaos, more confusion, and even more uncertainty.

This uncertainty doesn't just occur in our society, though. There are countless numbers of people who are looking at their own personal lives and struggles and raising the question, "What is going on with me? What is happening in my life?"

In the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, the author is writing to Jewish Christians who are raising the very same question. They are about to enter into the most climactic time that their generation has ever experienced as Jerusalem is about to be besieged by Titus and his army. The temple will soon be destroyed and the dark clouds of despair have already gathered on the horizon. Later on in the book of Hebrews we even learn that some have been imprisoned while others have had their property confiscated.

As you might imagine, in the midst of the pain, turmoil, disruption and uncertainty, the question that emerges is, how is a person to respond to the chaos ensuing all around? Thus is the setting for the book of Hebrews.

### SERMON POINTS:

#### 1. LIFE BEFORE THE CROSS

Remember the Old Covenant (Hebrews 12:18-21)

- At Mt. Sinai, God established the old, Mosaic Covenant
- The Mosaic Covenant was ratified by the blood of animals

Recall God's holiness, which prevented the Israelites from approaching Mt. Sinai (Hebrews 12:18-21)

- Any man or beast who touched the mountain would be stoned
- Even Moses was afraid to climb the mountain

#### 2. LIFE AFTER THE CROSS

Thank God for the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24)

- The blood of Jesus ratified the New Covenant
- Because of the cross, we no longer live under the Old Covenant

Realize the display of God's holiness on the cross (Hebrews 12:22-24)

- God proved His holiness by pouring out His wrath on Jesus





- Now we can approach God the Father with confidence because of Jesus Christ's death on the cross

### 3. NEW ENVIRONMENT OF THE CROSS

#### Start living in your new environment

- Before the cross, people lived with terror, trembling, and insecurity
- The cross moved us to a new city, a new realm, and a new relationship with God through Jesus (Hebrews 12:22-23)

#### Understand what Jesus Christ's blood accomplished

- In Genesis, after Cain murdered his brother, Abel's blood cried out from the ground for God's justice (Genesis 4:10)
- In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ's blood satisfied God's justice and is therefore better than Abel's blood (Hebrews 12:24)

### 4. STABILITY OF THE CROSS

#### Don't trust in relationships, money, or your own good works (Hebrews 12:21-25)

- Our world is unstable and can't provide ultimate security
- If your world has been shaken up, you're not alone

#### Trust in the cross (Hebrews 12:21-25)

- Only through faith in the cross can we find ultimate security
- Remember that you are part of the New Covenant community
- God has a purpose in allowing your life to get shaken up

### 5. ATTACH YOURSELF TO THE CROSS

#### Allow God to detach you from worldly things

- When life gets shaky, God's goal is to detach you from trust in the things that don't provide security (Hebrews 12:25)
- God speaks through the instability in your personal life – finances, relationships, etc.
- God speaks through the instability of our world – politics, weather, etc.

#### Allow God to attach you to the cross

- Accept the painful process of detachment from the

world, knowing that it will lead to attachment to the cross (Hebrews 12:27)

- The Israelites faced an uncertain situation when the Egyptian army and the Red Sea blocked them in (Exodus 14)
- Like the Israelites, we need God to erode our trust in earthly things so we can see our need for heavenly things (Haggai 2:6-7)

### 6. THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CROSS

#### Fix your eyes on the stability of the cross

- When the walls of Jericho crumbled, Rahab's house didn't because she trusted in the God of the Israelites (Joshua 2:15)
- When your life crumbles, trust the promise of the New Covenant and you won't crumble

#### Allow God to continually remove unstable things from your life

- Remember that God will continue to "shake" your life so that you put your trust in Him, not in money, careers, relationships, etc.
- God will always prove Himself to be the most stable foundation—for eternity

### SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

**LIFE BEFORE THE CROSS:** When Tony Evans was a young child and an enormous thunderstorm would develop outside, his grandmother would always make him turn off the television or the radio because, as she put it, "God is talking." So they would all sit there in the silence as "God talked." Actually, it was just thunder, but the principle holds true when things become shaky in your life. God is talking and He wants you to listen.

**LIFE AFTER THE CROSS:** You are not living at Mt. Sinai where there is terror, trembling, insecurity and where you are being uprooted. That is not your home as a believer in Jesus Christ because of what Jesus accomplished at the cross. Why? Because the blood of Jesus Christ has orchestrated a New Covenant. Therefore, you are functioning underneath the umbrella of a whole new realm, and a whole new way of life in that Jesus has served as Mediator between you and God. Through Christ's atoning blood, God has set up a brand new arrangement whereby He is covenantally committed to you.



**STABILITY OF THE CROSS:** When you wake up in the morning and you need to wear a nice outfit to work or to church, you will often want to iron your clothes before putting them on. This is because you don't want wrinkled clothing to reflect you poorly to those around you. So what you do is take out your iron, plug it in and let it get too hot to the touch. Then you slowly move it back and forth over the wrinkles in your clothes. Your clothes feel the heat, the pressure and the sting of the iron. You aren't putting the hot iron on your clothes because you want to burn them. You are not trying to be mean. You are simply trying to improve them and return them to their intended look. Your iron becomes a consuming fire. It doesn't consume the clothes, it consumes the wrinkles in the clothes.

**ATTACH YOURSELF TO THE CROSS:** The writer of Hebrews quotes the prophet Haggai where God references that He is going to shake things up in order to transfer things over. An easy way to get a picture of this is by comparing it to a child's piggy bank. The child's piggy bank would need to be shaken and shaken in order to get out the valuable items from within it. God says He is going to "shake" things up in order to shake something loose from one realm and deliver it to another, His own.

**THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CROSS:** What the blood of Christ did on the cross was mediate a new arrangement – a new realm – that God has with every believer, as well as with His church. That new arrangement is called the New Covenant. Yet in order for this New Covenant to manifest itself in your life, God needs to first disconnect you from the illegitimate blockages in the arteries of your spirit. He needs to remove your attachment and dependency on that which is not Him. God has to remove that attachment because it is standing in the way of your relationship to Him.

#### **BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:**

**MT. SINAI:** "On Mt. Sinai, God spoke to Israel in the Old Testament (Exodus 19). When God had come down and spoken prior to giving the Ten Commandments, it was a sight to behold as the mountain began to smoke and quake. All of the environmental aspects happened in order to let the people know how serious a moment it was. God's presence on the mountain shook the entire mountain so much that the people ran away, did not want to listen, and even Moses himself trembled."

**MT. ZION:** In the Old Testament, Mt. Zion seems to be equated with Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:31). King David calls Zion both the mountain of God and the city of God (Psalm 2:6; 48:1-14). Isaiah refers to Mt. Zion as the mountain in Jerusalem from which God would one day reign (Isaiah 24:23). And according to Revelation 21:10, the heavenly Jerusalem, Mt. Zion (Hebrews 12:22), will descend and God's dwelling will be on earth. "On Mt. Zion, we are introduced to the New Covenant given to us by the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross. It is under the tenants and truths of Mt. Zion that Christians live today. It is precisely because of the cross of Jesus Christ that we no longer live in light of Mt. Sinai."

**NEW COVENANT:** In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God promised to institute a New Covenant in which He would write His law on His peoples' hearts and forgive all their sins. Through the cross of Christ, this New Covenant has been established. Now Jesus serves as the only mediator of the New Covenant between humans and God.

#### **SERMON LINES:**

This sermon will help you trust the stability of the New Covenant when the world around us crumbles.

This sermon will outline five aspects of New Covenant living that will help us detach from worldly things and attach to the cross.

#### **QUOTES ATTRIBUTED TO DR. TONY EVANS:**

"While things around you may become shaky, when you fix your eyes on Jesus you will remember the promise of His covenant and that you belong to an unshakeable kingdom."

"The trials in your life are there to reveal the treasure of the new covenant and the stability and permanence that comes with alignment under God."

"When things in your life seem messed up, shaken or are uncertain, you need to view God and His relationship with you through the lens of this new arrangement—the cross—or you will get it all wrong."

"God's goal is not simply to announce His presence and lead you to fear, awe and trembling to such a degree that you beg Him to leave because you cannot bear it. No, rather it is to announce His presence in order to draw you close to Him"



because He has something that He wants to not only tell you but also to do in you."

"Frequently, when God is ready to do something new in our lives, He knows that we are not ready for it. . . . Because we are not ready, He makes us ready. A separation to what we previously depended upon must occur so that we will not only look to Him but be able to see Him."

"When God either allows or creates discontinuity in your life, He is speaking. . . . What He is saying is that He wants to disconnect you from the things, thoughts, or people of this world order so that He can reveal to you eternal things."

"As long as you are too attached, or too dependent, on anything other than God and His relationship with you, you are not hearing Him which means He must continue to turn up the heat in your life."

"Friend, if you are only looking at the stock-market pages, the banking system, your job, co-workers, family members, health, relationships, or that which you can see – you are looking at things which can be affected by what goes on around them. If that is all you can see, you will be shaken."

"Our God is a consuming fire. He renders discipline on that which does not belong in our lives in order to remove that which can be shaken so that we can fully experience the unshakeable stability of Him."





## MESSAGE FOUR: IDENTIFY WITH THE CROSS

### SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me.

### MESSAGE GOAL:

The goal of this message on **The Hope of the Cross for Today** is to help Christians find their identity in the cross, to die to self, and to experience the power of Christ in their daily lives.

### INTRODUCTION:

On one occasion a man went to a psychiatrist because he was having problems. They were serious problems so he thought he needed to seek out a serious solution. Entering the psychiatrist's cozy and neatly decorated office, the man took a seat. Then he headed straight into his problem. "Doc," he said. The doctor kept his eyes straight on him, and nodded his head urging him gently to continue.

"Doc, something's wrong," the man blurted out.

"What's the problem, sir?" the doctor asked, trying to get more information.

"Well, every time I go to the supermarket, I am drawn to the dog food. I just want to be around the dog food. In fact, I love to eat dog food."

The doctor shifted his weight in his chair, and decided to search for some background on this man's issue. "How long have you been struggling with this problem?" the doctor asked patiently.

"Ever since I was a puppy," the man replied.

You see, how you perceive yourself will determine what you seek after. If you perceive yourself as a puppy than you will naturally want to find some dog food. In other words, your identity is critical to your behavior, habits and ways of operating.

Many Christians today are confused about who they are which, in turn, brings about confusion in how they are to function. We function the way we function because of how we perceive ourselves to be. This means that if your self-perception is incorrect, your function will be errant as well.

### SERMON POINTS:

#### 1. THE CROSS IS CENTRAL TO A CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY

Examine the role the cross plays in your personal identity

- Though Peter was a Christian, he put his cultural identity above his Christian identity. (Galatians 2:11)
- Paul confronted Peter and reminded him that he wasn't functioning in light of identification with the cross. (Galatians 2:14)

Make the cross the centerpiece of your identity

- If you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior, a crucifixion has taken place. (Galatians 2:20)
- When you became a Christian, a legal transaction took place that justified you and made you one with Christ.
- When we find our identity in the cross, we will have the power to live a victorious life that pleases God.

#### 2. THE CROSS ESTABLISHED A NEW REFERENCE POINT

Allow your oneness with Christ to influence your thoughts, actions, and decisions

- Paul died to himself daily in order to maximize his union with the cross. (1 Corinthians 15:31)
- To die means to put your desires, thoughts, and motives on the altar of Jesus Christ and pick up His instead.

Choose to die to yourself and live for God

- There can be no resurrection without a crucifixion.
- You don't belong to yourself. You were bought by Jesus Christ's blood.

#### 3. HOW TO IDENTIFY WITH THE CROSS

Live by the faith of the Son of God

- Paul trusted in Jesus' own faith in Himself. (Galatians 2:20)
- Trust in Jesus' ability to come through for you.





#### Put your faith in the only worthy object

- The object of your faith, not the size of your faith, is what matters.
- Jesus Christ is the only One worthy of your faith.

#### 4. THE CROSS GIVES US POWER

##### Identify with the Cross of Jesus and find strength

- Paul found strength in Christ to face daily challenges. (Philippians 4:13)
- Christians today have access to the same power as Paul.

##### Allow Christ to empower your mortal body for His service

- Paul encouraged believers to let Jesus Christ live through them. (Colossians 1:27)
- When we yield to Christ, He will enable us to function supernaturally, not just naturally.
- A supernatural life will be glorious and victorious.

#### 5. IDENTIFY WITH THE CROSS THROUGH RELATIONSHIP, NOT RULES

##### Don't add anything to the cross

- Paul warned Christians not to add anything to the cross thus rendering it null and void. (Galatians 2:21)
- When we add rules and rituals to the saving power of the cross, it no longer has an effect in our lives.

##### Open the door to God's blessing by identifying with the cross

- God will only flow His power through you if you're connected to the cross.
- God wants a relationship with you through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

#### SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

##### THE CROSS IS ESSENTIAL TO A CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY:

You probably own different appliances. Each appliance has a unique responsibility. The refrigerator keeps things cold. The stove makes things hot. The toaster toasts things. Can openers open things, and so on. But there is one thing that each appliance holds in common – none of them function for themselves. The refrigerator does not keep the food cold so that it can eat the food. The stove does not heat the food so that it can eat the food either. The toaster doesn't toast it and the can opener doesn't open it in order to consume it. Each appliance that you have purchased exists to serve you. If it didn't, my guess is that

you would no longer have it in your home. The reason why the appliances were bought and paid for was so that the one who bought them and paid for them would benefit from them. The purpose for the purchase was that the thing purchased might benefit the purchaser. Friend, you were bought with a price – the shed blood of Jesus Christ. You exist for the Purchaser, not for yourself.

**THE CROSS ESTABLISHED A NEW REFERENCE POINT:** When people drink coffee in the morning, they usually find some cream or some milk to pour into their coffee. After they stir it, the coffee and the cream are now one. There is no way that they could possibly disconnect their coffee from the cream once they've stirred it. However, what many believers will do in their Christian lives is become one with Jesus Christ at salvation and then attempt to disconnect Him from their thinking, actions, choices, decisions and all else in their lives. The union is still there, of course. But they wind up with a big mess and a lot of wasted time and effort.

**HOW TO IDENTIFY WITH THE CROSS:** Have you ever taken a child on a piggyback ride? Do you know what that child believes in? That child is not just believing in you, he or she is believing that you believe in you. They believe that you have confidence in you. That is why they will ask, "Do you have me?" In other words, they are asking, "Do you believe that you have me?" This is because even though they may have doubts, if you believe then they will believe in your belief.

**THE CROSS GIVES US POWER:** When a pole-vaulter tries to clear a pole, he will typically try to get over a much higher level, even more than double of what the high jumper will attempt. This is because the pole-vaulter has a pole in his hands and he is not merely resting on his own ability to make it. He is resting in his confidence in the pole that the pole has enough strength and elasticity to do what is needed to be done in order to propel him to victory. The pole-vaulter is banking on what he is attached to rather than simply on himself. Because of this, he is able to go higher and further than he ever could on his own.

**IDENTIFY WITH THE CROSS THROUGH RELATIONSHIP, NOT RULES:** Let's say your refrigerator is not working. Your ice cream is melting, and your food is beginning to spoil. So you go online and you research how to fix your refrigerator. You find a manual for your model and it shows you all of the parts of your refrigerator. You spend a lot of time studying this manual. Yet, no matter how much you apply from this book, nothing seems

to be working. In fact, all you have done is frustrated yourself and wasted your time while your food rots even further. Yet after all that you have done, someone comes up to you and gives you a suggestion. "Why don't you plug it in?"

"God is not free to flow His power through you if you are not identified with the cross."

"A lot of believers today are blocking what God wants to do in them and through them because they are trying to get there in their own strength."

**BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:**

**CRUCIFIED:** (συνεσταύρωμαι) (Galatians 2:20) "to crucify with in a transcendent sense, crucify with..." and "...of identification w. Christ's crucifixion..."

**LOVED:** (ἀγαπήσαντός) (Galatians 2:20) "to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love..." "of the affection of transcendent beings...for ordinary human beings..."

**SERMON LINES:**

This sermon will help you understand the biblical principle of dying to self and living for God.

This sermon will outline five aspects of Christian identity.

**QUOTES ATTRIBUTED TO DR. TONY EVANS:**

"If you received Jesus Christ as your Savior, a crucifixion has occurred."

"It is not just that we are to believe in Jesus Christ, but we are to believe in Jesus' belief in Himself. It is because of your full confidence that Jesus has full confidence in Himself that you discover the ability to piggyback on Him."

"It's not the size of your faith that matters, it is the object of your faith that matters."

"Friend, you can't identify with the cross of Jesus by rules. In fact, the cross did away with the system of rules and replaced it with a relationship."

"In order for God's grace to flow, your focus must be on Him. It must be on Jesus. It must be on the cross. Your identity must daily be in His crucifixion."

"Friend, no matter how hard you try and no matter how hard you work, you will have only wasted your time and your life if you do not live connected to the power of the cross in Jesus Christ."

