

The Gospel of the Cross

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In first Corinthians, Paul wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 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” (1 Cor. 1:17-18).

Christians at Corinth thought the person who baptized them was significant; that one’s spiritual identity was found in one’s baptizer. Paul clarified this misconception. God did not send him to Corinth to baptize. He did not say this as a slight to baptism. Baptism was and is an important part of our spiritual regeneration. Rather, God sent Paul to Corinth to preach the Gospel.

The Gospel was not reflective of contemporary wisdom and philosophy. Nothing like the Gospel had ever been considered in Corinth before Paul arrived. The Gospel of the cross of Christ was unique. Neither the Jews nor the pagans could understand the cross through their respective worldviews. They would have to reimagine the possible through the lens of the cross.

While much has changed since the days of Paul and the Corinthians, nothing has changed. Everyone must come to terms with the cross of Christ. In the remaining article, we will consider the significance of the Gospel of the cross.

1. Luke’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion. Each of the gospels documents the crucifixion of Jesus. We will notice several features of Luke’s account. First, Jesus was put on trial. The Jewish leaders arrested Jesus and took Him before Pilate. They made accusations of insurrection against Jesus. When Pilate asked Jesus about claiming to be King of the Jews, Jesus simply replied, “You have said so” (Luke 23:3). Unknown to the Jews and Pilate, God was in the process of making Jesus the King of kings.

Second, Jesus was sent to Herod for examination. Herod hoped to see Jesus perform a miracle. Herod listened to the Jews rail accusations at Jesus, but he found no legitimate reason to punish Jesus. Herod returned Jesus to Pilate.

Third, Pilate attempted to release Jesus. At the Passover, the Romans would traditionally pardon a Jewish prisoner as an act of mercy. Pilate hoped that he could pardon Jesus. The Jews became increasingly angry at this suggestion. They demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus and pardon Barabbas. Barabbas was an insurrectionist and murderer.

Fourth, Jesus was paraded through Jerusalem to the execution site. He had been scourged. In an extremely weakened condition, Jesus needed someone to carry His cross. Luke tells readers that a man named Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus’ cross. Cyrene was a city in the North African country of Libya.

Fifth, Jesus was crucified among two criminals. Jesus managed to offer a few words of warning to the women who wailed at His procession (Luke 23:27-31). Eventually, Jesus arrived at Calvary. Roman soldiers commenced with their work. In a short time, Jesus died.

2. The relevance of the cross today. As we note the details surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, we need to understand why this event occurred and what it means. Jesus was dying a sacrificial death as an atonement for the sins of the world. This was alluded to by Jesus' cousin, John, when Jesus came to be baptized. John declared, "...Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Jesus was dying for the sins of the world past, present, and future. Therefore, the crucifixion of Jesus was the most relevant event in world history. The death of Jesus is the only solution for our sin. This is why the Gospel of the cross needs to be preached today.

The blood of Jesus forgives our sins and reconciles us to God. Instead of being estranged and hostile toward God, we can become His children by faith in the cross of Jesus. Paul wrote, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:13-14).

3. We must remember the cross. A brief but significant conversation took place between Jesus and the thieves with whom He was crucified. One thief joined the bystanders in railing insults at Jesus. Surprisingly, the other thief defended Jesus. Then, he asked Jesus, "...remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus responded to the thief's request, "...Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Regrettably, this conversation typically becomes a theological battleground. We fail to see the enormity of what is happening between these sinners and the Lamb of God. One sinner looked at the cross of Jesus with scorn. The other sinner looked at the cross of Jesus with a faithful, penitent heart. He asked Jesus to remember him in His kingdom, something he thought would happen in the distant future. Shockingly, Jesus told the sinner, "today you will be with me in Paradise."

We are all sinners. There is no denying this hard fact. How we look at the cross of Jesus will make the greatest difference for us. If we look at the cross with disdain, we will live and die in our sins. If we look to the cross with faith and contrition, we can live and die in hope of being with our King.

Conclusion

The Gospel of the cross is old news. Its age has caused us to devalue its rarity. The cross of Jesus is our only hope in this world. We must renew our understanding of the cross. It is the only atonement for our sins. Try as we might, there is no substitute for His sacrifice. We cannot atone for our sins. When we come to this realization, we can be saved by the power of the cross.