



CROSS: GOD DIES

Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | May 18, 2008

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In this lecture, number eight, we're dealing with the cross and the fact that not only did God come into human history as the man Jesus Christ, but that he died in a particular way.

Now what's interesting is that Christians use, as the symbol of our faith, the cross. The early church considered many different symbols of our faith. Jesus fed a multitude with a little boy's lunch, they considered that. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove. They considered that. There was a rainbow in the days of Noah, they considered those kinds of things.

Ultimately, they landed on the cross, started making the sign of the cross, wearing the cross, adorning their homes with the cross, using it in their artwork. As the song rightly says, it was an emblem of suffering and shame. And so that Christians would choose the cross was scandalous, barbarous. This would be like you and I deciding that all of our children would start wearing little electric chairs or .357 magnums around their neck, objects of murder and pain and bloodshed and death, very unusual. It's because the Christian saw rightly that the cross is literally the crux of our faith. It represents all that it means to be a Christian: to believe in the cross.

Let me tell you a little bit about crucifixion. It was an open, public, shameful mode of execution. It was reserved for the worst of criminals, those who had committed high treason. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus called it, quote, "The most wretched of deaths." Cicero said that Romans shouldn't even speak of it because it was too barbarous a topic for those who were civilized.

It was done openly and publicly and shamefully. It was preceded by flogging, where a *flagrum*, or a cat-of-nine-tails with a handle and strips of leather with tenderizing balls of metal at the end were affixed next to hooks made out of metal or bone. The criminal would be strapped with his arms above his head, and the executioner would tenderize the flesh with the balls and sink in with the hooks and rip the flesh off the man's body, traumatizing it. Occasionally a rib would come flying off.

This was done to the Lord Jesus after a night of false trials and false witnesses. This was a murder, and not a trial. Jesus was a bloodied mess. Isaiah says that he was marred in appearance beyond human likeness. He was then forced to carry his cross—the cross bar probably weighed upwards of a hundred pounds—across his barren, bloodied, traumatized back, heart laboring to beat, sleepless night, dehydrated, hungry, falls.

The cross bar crushes his chest as he falls to the ground. Most medical doctors concur that would be the equivalent to a car crash at a high speed without an air bag and the heart and the body and the chest cavity are thrust into the steering wheel. They compare the flogging to being repeatedly shot with shotgun blasts of buckshot.

On top of that, Jesus had a crushed chest cavity that would have bruised his heart, and he's laboring to pump blood throughout his body and blood is seeping out of his body. He was assisted to his point of crucifixion. There, long nails, 5- to 7-inches perhaps, were run through the most sensitive nerve centers on his body, through his hands and his feet. Jesus the carpenter had driven many nails, these were driven through him. He was literally nailed to a Roman cross bar.

He was lifted up. He saw his own mother. The crowds were mocking him and making sport and light of him. Off of his body would have been dripping sweat and blood and tears. Some men became incompetent, and included in that pile beneath their body was urine and feces. Jesus labored to breathe.

At this point, many men would seek revenge, they would curse people. They would urinate on them. They would spit upon them. Isaiah says that like a lamb is led to slaughter, he was silent. He forgave the man at his side, "Today you will be with me in paradise," because that man was repentant, and he was ultimately going to die for his sins, 'cause the wage for sin is death.

Even in hearing this, some of you will struggle with this concept of blood. I tell you about the details of the crucifixion because we do not live in a day, generally speaking, where we witness crucifixion. It does happen occasionally in places like Sudan, but most of us have not seen it and never will. In their day they saw it often. I believe that's why the Bible is so remiss to give us many details because those who read the Bible had seen it for themselves. Crucifixion was commonly and publicly practiced. On the day that Spartacus fell in battle, six thousand of his followers were crucified in a single day along a 120-mile stretch of highway.

When you hear of blood, it's troubling, and it's supposed to be. We have an aversion to blood, a repulsion to blood. God identifies sin and blood throughout the Old Testament sacrificial system all the way up to the cross of Jesus. He wants us to be as disgusted as he is. And so he puts sin and blood together often, as he did at the cross of Jesus, so that we would be as troubled as he is, that as much as blood disgusts and concerns us, so sin disgusts and troubles God.

Jesus was murdered, executed, crucified. I believe that his heart was undergoing a heart attack. I don't believe he died of asphyxiation—which commonly happened to those who were crucified, slumping on the cross, unable to retain air in their lungs—because he cries out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And in that moment, the

Father turned his back on the Son. For that moment, the Trinity and the intimacy and the love and the joy were momentarily suspended. And in that moment, Jesus took our place.

We call this substitution, *penal substitutionary atonement*. He paid our penalty as our substitute to atone for our sins. Second Corinthians 5:21 says God made him who knew no sin to become sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, that in that moment—Martin Luther says—the great exchange occurred, that Jesus took my place, took upon himself my sins and as a result was forsaken by God the Father and God the Spirit.

Jesus then proclaims, “Father, forgive them.” Jesus proclaims forgiveness to his murderers. I believe that these are the moments of Jesus’ final breaths, and he knows it. I believe that he is suffering a heart attack at this moment from the crushed chest cavity, laboring to pump blood through the dehydrated, exhausted body that is opened up and is shedding blood. It’s seeping out of the pores. And Jesus has a heart attack and is dying on the cross and cries out for the forgiveness of the daughters of Eve and the sons of Adam.

Then he cries out in a triumphant loud voice—I believe as his heart is beating its last—“It is finished!” And the work of salvation is finished. All religion is wrong to add anything to the cross. Jesus plus anything ruins everything. It’s just Jesus. And when he died, the work of salvation was finished, and then he says, “Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.” And Jesus dies and breathes his last and gives up his life.

To ensure that he was dead, a professional executioner took a spear, ran it under his side, and out of his side flowed blood and water. Medical experts will tell you that Jesus’ heart was likely bruised, perhaps even punctured, when the cross bar fell on him; under the pressure of crucifixion, it started leaking blood into the heart sac surrounding the heart, and he was having a heart attack as he preached his last sermon of forgiveness; and that’s why the blood came gushing out of his side when the spear was thrust through it. Jesus literally died of a broken heart.

What’s curious is that as Christians, we call this the good news. That’s what “gospel” means, good news. We celebrate it particularly every year on Good Friday. Why is this good news? How could this be good news? The Bible explains the crucifixion of Jesus and then uses the little word “for” to denote why it’s good news. If it didn’t have the word “for” in the explanation, all we would have would be the historical telling of the crucifixion of Jesus, and this would not be good news. It would be the most horrendous murder of the best man who has ever lived. But that word “for” changes everything.

Isaiah 53:5, “he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.” Romans 4:25, “he was delivered up for our trespasses.” Romans 5:8, “God demonstrates his love for us in this, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” First Corinthians 15, the shortest and most succinct summation of the gospel in the New Testament. First Corinthians 15:3, “Christ died for,” what? “Our sins.” The reason we love Jesus so much is because he suffered so much for us. For us.

Jesus went to the cross and he suffered and died as a substitute in my place for my sins. He did this willingly. He said during his own earthly life, “No one takes my life from me. I lay it down, I pick it up again.” Jesus did this with his full dignity intact. He’s not a helpless victim. He’s a courageous savior.

This means that Jesus is the source of what the Bible calls our justification. Galatians 2:16, “a person is not justified by works of the law,” being moral and religious and trying harder and doing better. That’s all garbage. We hate religion. Religion is the antithesis of the cross. Religion is about what we do for God, the cross is about what God does for us.

As well, you need to see the cross not just as something that was done for you, but something that was done by you. You murdered God. You murdered God. I did too. “A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” Justification is our legal standing before God, declared righteous in his sight, though guilty sinners, because of the substitutionary death of Jesus that pays the penalty of death for sin.

Jesus is also our propitiation. The wrath of God is mentioned more than six hundred times in the Bible. First John 4:10, “in this is love, not that we love God, but that God loved us and sent his Son,” the Lord Jesus Christ, “to be the propitiation for our sins,” and not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world. Everyone’s saved in the same way, through the propitiating death of Jesus. Propitiation means that Jesus bore the wrath of God, that he substituted himself in our place for our sins, that the wrath of God that we deserve came upon Jesus.

That’s why John says anyone who is not in Jesus, the wrath of God remains on him. We believe in the wrath of God. We believe in the wrath of God, and we believe it is just and holy and good. It is absolutely inconsistent, absolutely hypocritical for us to cry out for justice for rape victims and those who are murdered and those who are oppressed and robbed and the weak and the infirmed and those who are taken advantage of and children who are beaten and abused and women who are maligned and mistreated— It is absolutely inconceivable that we would cry out for justice for everyone but God.

No one has been sinned against like God. No one has been mistreated like God. No one has been neglected like God. And the cross is where the justice of God and the mercy of God kiss like nowhere else in all creation. The demands of justice are satisfied so that God remains holy, good, and just, and mercy is given, as God does not require our own blood, he gives his own. He does not require our own suffering, he endures it himself.

This makes God different from, superior to, better than all other false gods, demons, goddesses, religions, philosophies, and ideologies. The cross is where the justice and the mercy of God meet so that God’s demands of justice would be satisfied and that God’s character of love and mercy would be satisfied.

I’ll close with this, some of you will ask, “But I thought God was loving. The cross seems so much in conflict with the love of God.” And friends, I would say this, you know nothing of the love of God apart from the cross. Apart from the cross, the love of God is mere sentimentality. The cross is God’s efficacious, not just sentimental, love. Sentimental love gushes feelings. Efficacious love accomplishes purposes. God doesn’t just feel loving. He does something. His love compels himself to serve us even though we are ill deserving.

If you wonder whether or not God loves you, look to the cross of Jesus. John 3:16, “God so loved the world,” that what? “That he gave his only Son.” John 15:13, Jesus says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone would lay down their life.” Romans 5:8, “God shows his love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He initiates, we respond. And again, 1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and he sent his only Son Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins.”

God loves you. He loves you passionately. He loves you thoroughly. He loves you redemptively. He demonstrates his love to you by coming into human history to live without sin and die in your place for your sins. He does this not because you are lovely, but to make you lovely. He does this not because you’ve obeyed him but that you might. And Jesus says, “If you love me, you’ll obey me.” So the right response to the love of God demonstrated in the murder of Jesus is to love and obey God, that’s what it means to be a Christian.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.

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