Clearly The Cross

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Date: 24 March 2024

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[0:00] I also want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Five weeks ago, I asked you, four weeks ago, excuse me, I asked you to fill out a little card with five people's names on it that you would be willing to pray for that God would give you the opportunity to invite. I asked you to turn those cards in and left you a bookmark with those names on it so you could pray over those daily. We placed those names at the foot of this cross, handed them to the Lord. And we saw last year when we did this very same effort, we saw lives change from that. Not only were people invited to church, but we've had people who joined our church since then. We've had some get saved. People who were on those cards who we prayed for. So we did that same thing this year. And I appreciate so much you participating in that. Having said that, have you given out your invitation cards? That's my question.

So we gave the next week or the two weeks after that, we gave, made these available to you, five cards hooked together, perforated. And so you could easily tear them off and give those, particularly to those five that you've been praying for as God would have you opportunity.
Well, I'll tell you, these cards will do us no good come April 1, okay? Please don't hand them out to anybody. Easter's gone. In the meantime, I want to encourage you to find a place, find an opportunity to invite somebody. If you haven't already, or even if you have, maybe you have hoarded these things and grabbed a bunch of them and give out a bunch of them. Give out a bunch more, okay? Because how easy it is for us to just hand somebody a card. God don't give us the words to say. When you go through a drive-thru, put them in your car. When you go through a drive-thru, you give them your money.
Give an invitation. When you leave a tip, leave a good one, okay, if you're going to do this. But if you leave a tip on a table, leave a card with it. Invite them to come. Listen, even if they're working next Sunday and they can't come, you never know what the impact of that. As I preached on a few years ago, a few weeks ago, God's web, and I preached on a few years ago too, but God's web has a way of working in the little things to bring somebody to the Lord. So I encourage you to do that.
I think this morning I looked, we had 12 yard signs left. Do you know how much good those yard signs do when they sit in the foyer of the church? No good at all. So if you don't have a yard sign, I'm taking inventory this afternoon. I'm going to your house and check. Anyway, I encourage you to participate and be a part of that. God's going to do wonderful things next week. We want as many people to be a part of that as possible, and I encourage you to pray through it, work it out, and let's see what God's got in store. Standing on the stage with me as we approach Easter is the cross.
[3:05] It is appropriate because that it's appropriate that it's before us because the cross is not only central to Easter, but the cross is central to all that we have in Christ Jesus. The significance of a man dying on a cross 2,000 years ago stumps some people. They don't quite understand what the significance of that is. They think that there must be more to it, when in reality, sometimes it's better to be simple-minded about it. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning in verse 18, Paul puts it this way.

He says, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those 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.
Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world. For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.
It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

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But to those who are called both Jew and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
[5:05] It's very interesting to me that if you look closely in the gospels at the ministry of Jesus, you will notice that in most of the ministry of Jesus, he often instructed people to be quiet about the fact that he was the expected Messiah. The whole concept of that secrecy that took place a lot in his ministry has been called the messianic secret. And Mark in the gospel of Mark emphasizes it a lot. You'll notice in the gospels that he taught the disciples separately most of the time. He would pull them away to talk to them. Not only that, he also asked several people whom he healed as well as the girl and his family that he brought that girl back to life, not to speak to anyone about that resurrection. He commanded demons that he cast out to be silent about his identity. Now, why was that?

It was all in an effort to allow his ministry on earth to be longer. Because if word got out too quickly about the significance and the impact that he would make, those who went after him in the end of his three and a half year ministry would go after him much earlier. And he was spending a lot of his time training the 12 to establish the church that we see in the book of Acts after Christ has ascended and is gone. But something different happens in Mark chapter eight. And I want you to see what happens in this transition beginning in verse 27. It says, and Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, who do people say that I am? And they told him, John the Baptist and others said Elijah and others, one of the prophets. And he asked them, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answered him, you are the Christ. Listen to this now.
And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.
And after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. You see a smooth transition here from one telling them not tell anybody about it. But then from that point he began to teach them and he said it plainly. That means that he spoke it openly. That means that he spoke it with great freedom. It means that he made no secret about it. Peter opposed the whole thing because he thought the Messiah was to be a potent revolutionary political leader. And when Jesus said he was going to die, Peter would have none of it.
And Jesus told him, get behind me, Satan. Now, I believe one of the reasons why he said that was because there was a temptation in the desert that the devil threw at the Lord in his days of preparation for ministry about ruling the whole world. And the reality is there was some that understood prophecy to be that Christ would come or the Messiah would come and rule the world. And he will one day. But it was not time for that. And so in reality, he is telling Peter that Satan's trying to throw me off track through you. That's basically what he means when he says, get behind me, Satan.
[8:48] Because it sounded a lot like that temptation that he faced in the desert. Then after he fed the 5,000, it says in John 6 verse 15 that the people even tried to make him king by force, pressuring the Lord Jesus. Jesus, however, had held off the revealing as Messiah in order to better prepare his disciples. And now that they were becoming aware, he was making it clear what was about to happen and that they could not conceive it. Mark chapter 9 verse 31 and 32 says this, he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, the son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him. And when he's killed after three days, he will rise. But they didn't understand the saying. And they were afraid to ask him. You know, the gospels speak of at least eight more times that he tried to clarify the matter. But in reality, they could not fathom it. Because their expectation of Messiah, their understanding of Old Testament prophecy, and their close proximity to his ministry just made it that much difficult. However, he knew he would meet a violent, what we would consider premature death, yet do that for greater purpose. Jesus knew it was inevitable.

And he knew it was inevitable for at least three reasons. He knew he would die because of the hostility of Jewish leaders. Not only was he attracting a lot of attention away from them who loved to be prominent, loved for people to see them. And Jesus refers to that a lot.
And the reality was that he was gaining a lot more attention than they were. They didn't like that. The light that he shed on their system of belief was overwhelming to them because they had misused the sacrificial system and the law in which God had laid down for them. His attitude toward

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the law made them mad. Christ knew that the law was established to point them to their need of the Savior. The law was never intended to be their salvation. The law was to show how much they needed salvation. His take on the Sabbath and particularly incensed them. The episode in Mark chapter 3 verse 1 through 6 explains it when it says, again he entered the synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand.
And they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, come here. And he said to him, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? Who likes to be put on the spot in here? Who can I put on the spot this morning? No, I'm kidding. But they didn't like being put on the spot. And that's exactly what he did.
He asked them a question about what he was about to do. And they stood there silent. They were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him how to destroy him.
[12:34] They began their work with the Roman government to find a way to do away with him. In Luke chapter 4, he reads Isaiah 61 about the Spirit of God being upon him and how God had put the Spirit of God upon him. And as he sets people free, and he was obviously including the Gentiles in this new understanding of salvation to them. And it was too much for the Jewish people to handle.

Luke chapter 4, verse 28 through 30 tells us of the aftermath of the reading. It said, When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town, brought him to the bow of the hill on which their town was built so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through the mist, he went away. But it was a close call.
The day was coming. Animosity was building. And he knew it. He knew he would die because of the hostility of the Jewish leaders. Not only that, but he also knew he would die because of the prophecy of Scripture. He said in Mark chapter 10, verse 45, for even the son of man who, that was his, the title that he loved to call himself more than anything else. For even the, which means the servant of humanity. That's what that means. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Isaiah 53 may give some of the clearest forecast of the sufferings of the Messiah. Christ knew the passage well. He understood that it spoke of him.
And knowing that, it directed his days. And I want you to listen to Isaiah chapter 53 in part. It says in verse 1, Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For he grew up before him, for he grew up before him like a young plant, like a root out of a dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him.
[14:45] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and he esteemed them not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. For he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that is before its shears is silent. So he opened not his mouth. And they made his grave with the wicked. And with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of God to crush him.
Jesus was born to die. He came to save. He knew he would die. He knew he would die because of the hostility of the Jewish leaders. He knew that he would die because of the prophecy of Scripture. He knew that he would die because of the choice to die. Jesus chose to die. He chose to die for your sin.
He chose to die for my sin. Luke chapter 9 verse 51, one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture. It says, when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.
[17:00] He knew what would happen when he went to Jerusalem. He set his face toward the task of the cross. In the same way that he tells us to live the Christian life, he put his hand to the plow and he never looked back.

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It would not be pleasant. He did not look forward to it. But it was something that had to be done. I want you to listen to how he describes it in Luke chapter 12 verse 50.
He said, I have a baptism to be baptized with. And how great is my distress until it's accomplished. Now let me explain what you mean by that. He's not talking about a baptism in a baptism of water. Instead, he's talking about how he would be immersed into the crucifixion as he bore my sin. As he bore your sin. When it speaks of distress in that passage, that word can also be constrained or even hemmed in.
In other words, he knew that he must die and he chose to do it. It was not that he was simply a helpless victim of evil.
[18:06] That somehow forces had joined together against him. Or it was not some prophesied inflexible fate that had been decreed upon him.

No, it was a pursuit and a passion and a purpose that he willingly and freely embraced for the purposes of the Father and for the salvation for sinners just like you and me.
Now, why do I share all that? For a couple of reasons. One is, I believe you need to know the agony of the cross to understand the victory of the empty tomb.
You need to get the whole picture. And too often our lives reflect that we haven't considered either one of them very adequately. The second reason is this.
The cross of Christ is more than a bloody slaughter of a Savior. No, in fact, before the foundation of the earth, our sovereign God knew of our desperate need of salvation.
[19:15] And he formed a plan to send his son to live and to die and to rise again for the redemption of all who would submit their lives to him and who would trust him as Savior and Lord.

If all of what I said is true today, if that's the case, then it sounds to me like all of human history is woven around the redemptive plan of God and the salvation of humanity.
If all of God's energies are focused more than anything else around our opportunity for salvation, if that be the case, and I believe it is, then I believe that all of our lives must be woven around the privilege of salvation.
Not only knowing salvation, not only living salvation, not only sharing salvation, but also resting in it for all of eternity.
It is to be the central matter, not just in our devotional life. It is to be the central matter, not just in our church life. It is to be the central matter in every part of the fiber of our being.
[20:37] We are to be consumed with the cross of Christ at the center of our life. It is the priority. Our lives are changed by this.

Not just the salvation of our souls. Not just our Sunday schedule. Not even just our morning devotions. But our lives.
All of it. Lock, stock, and barrel. I want you to listen to the resolute nature in which Paul tells us how we are to respond to the cross.
In 1 Corinthians 2 verse 2 he says, For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Why?
Because in verse 5 he says, So that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Paul didn't waste his time talking about everything going on in the world.
[21:38] Paul spent his time talking about the Lord. He hits it again later in that letter. When he says in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 1 and 2, Now I would remind you brothers of the gospel that I preached to you which you received.

In which you stand. And by which you are being saved. It's not enough that Jesus is Lord. And that he died for you. And that he died for me.
And to be a part of his church. And to be a Christian. I'm afraid that many may be shocked in eternity when they find out that their family connections, their noble civic service, their biblical knowledge, even their church attendance, was not enough for their salvation.
No, the reality is because Christ did what Christ did for us on the cross of Jesus Christ. We have to submit our lives.
The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6, 19 and 20, that you are not your own. You were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.
[22:58] Let me put it another way. We have to surrender our lives to him. We're no longer in charge. He is.

We don't have the answers. He does. We don't rule our world. He does.

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There's no need to fight that. We need to surrender to that. And lastly, I believe we have to stand and declare that our lives are for him.
Quit believing that our church appearances say enough for us about where we stand for God. Our lives have to reflect that. Quit believing that our mouths say enough about where we stand for God. If our lives don't reflect that, our mouths lie and everybody knows it. Let's let our lives declare a sole allegiance to the one that died so that we can have the opportunity to live.
[24:17] And as Christ put it, to live more abundantly. If you're truly a child of God, if we're truly children of God, there ought to be a family resemblance.

Christ and his role as the sacrificial lamb is more than merely occupying the center of the stage of our salvation history and our worship.
I want to be clear about something. And I'll close with this. He will have the central place when history ends and when the curtain rises on eternity.
I want to read Revelation chapter 5, beginning in verse 6. Puts it all in perspective. And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain.
With seven horns, that speaks of total power. With seven eyes, that speaks of seeing all things. Which are the seven spirits, it speaks of how God and his spirit worked in all the seven churches that Revelation was written to.
[25:43] Which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the world. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lord, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song. Saying, Worthy are you to take the scroll to open its seals. For you were slain. And by your blood you ransomed people from God from every tribe and language and people and nation.
And you made them a kingdom and priest to our God that they shall reign on the earth. Then I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.
And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them say to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb by blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.
[27:13] My friend, the cross is clearly the only hope we have. And not only does it need to be the front of the stage, but it needs to be the front of the stage of our life, at the center of our lives from now on until eternity.

So let's start today. Let's start today. If you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, man, you're missing out.
Don't wait too late. Don't think you have another day. I got a call this morning from an old friend. I didn't get a call from him.
I got a call from his friend. I said he died last night, suddenly. Wasn't expecting to do that. But he went just like that.
We never know. That's not a threat. It's just reality. But the question is, have you ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ? Why are you missing out on God's very best for your life by doing it your way when all you have to do is surrender who you are to him?
[28:29] And if you've never done that, we're going to stand and we're going to sing in just a few moments. And as we do, I encourage you to come. I'll be happy to guide you in what it means to give your heart and life to the Lord.

Maybe you're here and you have done that. You've done it privately, but you've never done it publicly. You've never let it show. The way Christ told us to do it, by his example and by his commission, to be baptized as a believer.
You've never done that. God's leading you to do that. I encourage you to come. Be obedient to his call. Maybe you're here and God's drawing you to be a part of this church.
You feel like this is where you belong. We can invest in your lives. You can invest in our church. We can grow together in the Lord Jesus. If that be the case, I encourage you to come.

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But maybe, maybe there's folks here today who know they're Christians and who know they're not quite living it out as the center of their life.
[29:37] That's really not dictating your life like it ought to, like it should. Why don't we lay that down at the foot of the cross?

Why don't we lay that down on ourselves? I often say, not many of us will probably be asked to die for our faith.
But all of us are asked to live for our faith. And so let's live that out. Let's make a commitment. A week before we approach the celebration of his resurrection, that God, I'm going to give you my all. I want you to use me. I want to be obedient to follow you. I want to lay down my hangups, my strongholds, my difficulties. I want to lay them at your feet. Because you went to the cross and died for me, you changed my eternity, and you can change my life today, and I'll lay it down.
You can do that where you are. You can do it at this altar. I'll be happy to pray for you. I just want us right before we leave this place. Why go out wrong when we can go out right?
[30:45] With every head bowed and every eye closed, Lord Jesus, I ask that you'll move and you'll work in our midst right now, Lord. Just help us to be obedient. Nothing more, nothing less. Help us quit being satisfied for second best.

Help us only to do God's best for our lives, Father, I pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

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