

Title: Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross

Text: Ephesians 1, 3

Theme: Earth and Heaven are focused on the cross

Series: Living the Cross-Centered Life (conclusion) #10

Prop Stmt. We never get over the cross, but live daily before it.

Your grid is the system by which you view and interpret your life and your world. That grid is your religion. That grid is what you use to either answer or attempt to answer the ultimate questions of life.

The purpose of our study is to see how the gospel is not just the means by which we become a follower of Christ, but the gospel is also the means by which we live as followers of Christ. The gospel of the kingdom, which is based on the cross, is the God truth-grid through which we are to filter all of life; every single drop. For most of us, that approach goes against the grain. Therefore, in order to live the gospel, we need to think the gospel. In order to think the gospel, we need to study, meditate and pray the gospel and if need be preach the gospel to ourselves.

This truth is the most important truth that you can get the arms of your mind around. God sent His Son to the cross to bear His wrath for sinners like you and me. There, on the cross, God poured out upon His own Son, all of the immeasurable righteous judgment that you and I deserved to have poured out upon us because of our sin. Instead, of pouring that out on us, God poured that out upon His Son, so that having His justice satisfied, God, could pour out upon us all of the favor and the joy and the love that His own Son deserved to have lavished on him.

A true Cross Centered Life will be evidenced in humility because the cross reminds me of how much my sin costs. The enormous price was paid because of my enormous guilt. But, a true Cross Centered life will also be evidenced in a Christ-driven joy and confidence. The bearing of my wrath is an important part of the gospel, but the offering of a perfectly righteous life that satisfied God is also an important part as well. This perfectly righteous life that was offered is the reason why I can be credited with a righteousness that is not my own. We know that the offering of Christ on the cross was perfectly accepted by the Father because He raised Christ from the dead, and raised Christ on High to sit at His right hand and will send Him back to rule from David's throne.

That is why, everything that we are and everything that we do, has to be centered upon the cross of Christ and the throne of Christ. The cross and the crown are one in the same, because since He humbled himself, God exalted him to the highest place (Phil. 2).

When considering these foundational matters of God, Sin, revelation, Christ, and the gospel, the question that you need to consistently ask yourself is NOT – What do I feel about this? **The question is – Do I believe it?** There are days in which I do not feel saved! That does not mean that I am not saved.

We are all tempted to allow subjective emotions and changing circumstances to determine our attitude and view of ourselves. When we do, we get things out of whack. Emotions matter, they are just not the final authority. Circumstances are the settings in which our lives are lived. Of course they matter. But circumstances themselves are not the basis upon which we live. Even more personal matters of our own health and relational concerns affect us deeply, but are not in and of themselves the final judge on what is right and wrong, or true or false for us. God's Word is. The question is not, how do I feel? Or how do I feel about my life right now, but do I believe it?

Behind the cross was the decision of the Father, to treat His Son as you and I deserved to be treated. God made a trade. God made an exchange. He traded the life of His Son, for your life, and took His death in place of yours. He would have been just in taking your death as the consequence of your sin. He could send the entire world to hell and be perfectly just and not compromise His character in any way. He provided a perfect environment, with clear instructions on what to do and not do, and our human race blew it! We chose to rebel against God's Infinite Word which was a reflection of God's infinitely holy and righteous standard and because God's Infinite Word was broken, God's infinite punishment had to be levied. But finite persons cannot satisfy an infinite debt. So, the infinite God Himself, died in order to satisfy the infinite debt, so that God would not in any way compromise His own justice. And with his justice satisfied, God is free to make it eternally clear, that He is not just a God of justice, He is also a God of Love and Grace and Mercy. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: He keeps me from getting the flu? He makes my neighbor's sump pump work? He keeps anything bad from happening to my kids? NO, NO, NO, God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

You cannot understand God apart from the gospel. It is in the gospel that character of God is so clearly set on display. It is not God's delight to damn. It is God's unbridled and infinite joy to save. And God is extremely serious about His joy. When His means of saving is rejected and His Son's life and excruciating death is scorned, even though this God delights to be known as Savior, He will be known as Judge.

Sin, brings consequences and they are eternally severe because the stakes are so infinitely high because it is God's law that has been broken, not finite man's. in the ultimate sense, we are saved from God. We are saved from the wrath of God. That is the point that Sproul was making when he said, **“The one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us.”**

That is why the gospel is the greatest news you could ever hear. **“Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”** John Stott. God is the sum total of his attributes. He can never compromise who and what He is. The only way we could be saved was if the righteous wrath of God against our sin was appeased by an infinitely righteous sacrifice. Only God could satisfy His own law. But how could God do that for us? Sin was committed by the human race and therefore the human race had to be one the one to pay for it. Since God was the only one who could satisfy his own law, and since we could obviously not become God, God, the Son, without in anyway

ceasing to be what He is, added human nature to His divine nature, and took upon himself the form of His own creation, so that He could live a perfectly righteous life as one of us. This qualified Him as both Priest and offering. He was the Priest who offered up the eternal sacrifice and He was the infinitely righteous sacrifice that was made. No one took his life; he laid it down of His own free will.

Far from being the God who goes around damning people, we had already damned ourselves by our sin. God is the God who came to earth and lived in our place, and took upon Himself our sorrows, our sins, so he could take upon Himself our punishment, so that He could pour out upon us His grace and mercy and love and forgiveness. What love is this, that I, the guilty should go free?

The wrath of the Father was not just perceived, it was real. Christ did not appease Him by calming Him down with gifts, the wrath of the Father against our sin was poured out fully upon His own Son and it was completely absorbed by Christ. God exhausted his storehouse of wrath against our sin by using it up completely upon Christ. God wore out His wrath upon His Son, instead of upon us. Christ took that cup of wrath, that cup of suffering, so we could share in the cup of fellowship.

That hour in the garden seems to be as dark as any. I grant that there was never any doubt that Christ was going to take the cup, and of course He did. But, what we see in the garden is that this was not a mindless exercise that he simply gutted his way through. Christ fully entered into this. He was emotional. He was extremely emotional. He was as emotional as He has ever been in the garden. His soul is so troubled, he nearly dies! Christ is depressed because He feels the weight of all that is taking place. You can be depressed and not sin. The cares of this world and the battles of our hearts, and the sins of others weigh us down. Depression is not always a sign of failure, or disbelief. Sometimes it is a sign of being human. Christ was human, but He was also God. And in this condition he shows us what to do with our emotions. He prays, He admits, He asks, and He obeys! He does not surrender what He knows to be true about the Father, to the intense feelings that He is under at the moment. What that means is that you and I have a high priest who has fully entered in to our humanity. We have no basis to ever, ever, ever accuse God of not knowing or not caring about what we are going through in life. He knows more than we will ever know about being under the crushing weight of sin. To accuse Him of not knowing, and not caring is to denigrate, nay, it is to mock Him in the garden.

The heart of legalism is pride. Pride is what drives the fear of man. The fear of man makes us approval junkies. We are so easily driven by that, and we figure it will work on others, so we manipulate our relationships with it. The garden, the cup and the cross destroy pride. I have nothing to bring to the table. I cannot impress God. I have nothing to impress you with. My only hope is the cross. The cross absolutely takes all of the wind out of my lungs if I am trying to blow my own sails. But on the other hand, the cross fills up my lungs with exhilarating oxygen of grace that enables me to sing with passion and live with hope and forgive and love and worship!

The heart of condemnation is ignorance and unbelief. Look at the cup, it is empty. He drank it all. There is nothing left for you to drink. If your heart is condemning you, if Satan is accusing you, there is probably some truth to it, but your heart and Satan will not tell you the entire story. The truth is, I am guilty, but I am also forgiven because Christ took all of my condemnation upon Himself and left nothing for me, which is why since He took all of the blame, He gets all of the glory.

He was God, forsaken by God. His faith was not faltering. He was not experiencing a weakened moment of doubt. He was now forsaken, abandoned by God. Going back to last week, we saw that Christ trembled before accepting the cup of God's wrath in the garden. He knew what that meant. But, once he accepted it, he accepted it and all that came with it. The accusations now that were made against him had a measure of truth to them. The Pharisees who jeered that he who trusted in God – so much, let's see if God saves him now were saying that God couldn't save him or wouldn't save him. The truth is, God could not save him from this death and save us from our sin. God had made the decision to save us by not sparing His Son. Christ made the decision to become sin for us, who knew no sin and to experience the wrath of God and the judgment of God for our sin.

In that sense Christ went through hell for us. Hell is a literal place of torment, but even worse than that, hell is a place of abandonment of the care of God. After Christ died, he did not go to hell in order to complete the suffering necessary for our sin. That payment was made in full and complete on the cross. But, Christ did experience that aspect of hell, in that he experienced the abandonment of the Father, (and I would suggest that of the Spirit as well). Could this be why My God is repeated? Is it more than just a statement for emphasis? This was more than just physical darkness. He was alone as no one has ever experienced aloneness on this earth. He was utterly forsaken by God. This was a torment of his soul that made the torment to his body pale in comparison.

The cup of wrath and the cry of the damned are eternally, all-powerful statements of the uncompromising commitment that God makes to His own. I do not always feel forgiven, but my forgiveness is not hinged to my feelings. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.

When my own condemns me and wonders if God has not condemned me too, I go back to the cross and listen again to the cry of the cursed, and believe it again, it was for me. When legalistic voices and disapproving looks doubt my motives and sting me with sharpened accusations designed to cut my soul and bleed joy from my spirit, I look again and try to see how deep the Father's love is, how vast beyond all measure, and realize that I can't see that far down, and realize again – it is enough.

It was enough. The Father was satisfied and on the third day, He proved it to the entire world.

The way Christ was treated on the cross is what I deserve. Being on the cross would be justice for me. Dying and going to hell would be fair. People spitting in my face, and stealing my car, and turfing my yard, and speaking lies behind my back, are all in one sense, much better than I deserve, I deserve the cross and I deserve hell. But, Christ took my hell. He took my cross because He took my sin.

I have nothing to parade before God and offer to him as a payment for the debt my sin caused. I am undone, empty, completely spent of all righteousness and hope that I could in any way contribute to my spiritual bank account. Every day that I live, I sin and apart from the cross would only add to my condemnation and judgment.

God did something about this horrific problem. He sent Christ to pay the full penalty for my sin. He sent Christ to live a perfectly righteous life so that when I trust in Christ as the only Savior for my soul, he takes the credit for my sin and gives me the credit for his righteousness. He takes my hell and gives me heaven. He takes my aloneness and gives me a Heavenly Father, an older brother, the Holy Spirit and thousands of brothers and sisters who though broken and wounded like me, are also being trained to live in and rule in the coming kingdom of King Jesus. Since the full aspect of the kingdom of Christ is not here, yet, we still live with the residual affects of the curse and presence of sin. This world is still a violent and dangerous place to live. Sickness and problems abound and they affect us. But, I know that they are temporary. I know that one day, they will be gone. My goal is no longer to find as much comfort and convenience in this world, it is to spread abroad the honor and fame of Jesus Christ, so that people can be prepared for his coming kingdom. I am assured that no matter what problem I face and sorrow I experience, that nothing can be compared to what Christ experienced for me. He took the greatest injustice for me. Any injustice I face, while real and hurtful is not done to destroy me, but is part of God's sovereign plan to bring about the kingdom of His Son on the earth.

If God calls you to go through difficult days, do not think that something strange is happening to you, that suffering and sorrow are in some ways inconsistent with Christianity, because, the Hero of our faith, the Champion of the Church died on a cross for us. And we are called to follow Him. Should we not expect the winds of this world to blow in our face? YES!! And they do, but they don't blow that hard everyday. Some days more so than others. And on the days when the winds of adversity are not as strong, we are doing better than we deserve because we are not abandoned, forsaken, and left alone without hope. And on the days when the winds of adversity are stronger, we are still better than we deserve because we are not abandoned, forsaken and left alone without a Savior and High Priest who is unmoved by our experiences, but who faced the ultimate tornado of adversity all by Himself and knows deeper than we will ever know.

The cross therefore, replaces fear, with the true basis for faith. No condemnation results in no separation, even if there is some suffering in between.

What is the goal? Living with Christ in His kingdom! What is God doing now? Preparing me for that! How is He doing that? By helping me rid myself of my pride and

self-reliance and to find my eternal joy and satisfaction in Him. The implications of the cross – humility, Christ-reliance, repentance, full pardon and the eternal satisfaction of God are the truths that help me rid myself of pride and self-reliance and see that if God is eternally satisfied with God, and God is eternally satisfied with the payment for my sin, I can rest and truly relax in His wise and Sovereign and nail-scarred hands.

I believe this so strongly when I am reading this in the Word, when I am singing this in church, when I am counseling and encouraging others. How do I believe it all the time?

If you expect a hurricane, you will make preparations. (explain)

A storm is coming this week. That is why we must:

- 1) Memorize the gospel (Romans 5, 8; Eph. 2.1-10; 2 Cor. 5.21, etc.)
- 2) Pray the gospel
- 3) Sing the gospel
- 4) Review the gospel
- 5) Study the gospel

Never move away from the foot of the cross (humility and love). It really changes everything.