

I. Introduction

- A. Today is part 8 in a series looking at all the major events in the life of Christ. The series is called Christus Victor. This means Christ the Victor, Christ the conquering hero. Jesus Christ, the champion you need in the fight for your life.
- B. Today, we reach the lowest point in the entire trajectory of Christ's life. Really, it's the lowest, darkest, most consequential point in all of cosmic history.
- C. Today, we turn our attention to *The Cross of Christ*. The Crucifixion. The shedding of blood, and the outpouring of life, that is our great salvation. Without the Cross, there could be no salvation. Without the cross, there is no good news. The Cross is the heart of the gospel we declare.
- D. The Cross is the heart of everything.
 - 1. *The heart of Scripture is Christ.*
The heart of Christ is grace.
The heart of grace is the Cross.
- E. The followers of Christ had only one tune, and they sang it all the time.
 - a) *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)*
 - b) *For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, (1 Corinthians 1:22, 23)*
 - c) *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)*
- F. Jesus did many miracles and taught countless lessons. He healed, he preached, he fellowship, and he loved.
- G. But none of these things saved us.
- H. It was Calvary that washed us white as snow, and it was the resurrection that robed us in garments of righteousness. To preach Christ's life is to preach no gospel at all. To preach Christ's love is to preach no gospel at all. But to preach Christ crucified, to proclaim that blood-stained Cross, is to preach the only hope of a broken heart and the only salvation for sinners like you and me.
- I. The whole message of Christ can be summed up in five words. Five one-syllable words. So simple that a child can understand them. So profound, that not even the best minds on earth could ever uncover all their riches. Here are those five words:
 - 1. *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)*
- J. Christ died for our sins. Five monosyllables.
 - 1. *Christ died: that part is history.*
 - 2. *For our sins: that part is theology.*
- K. Christ died: history. If you have been there, you would have seen it happen with your own eyes.
- L. For our sins: theology. You would not have seen this part of it. You need this part explained to you.
- M. Christ died for our sins. This is our gospel. It is our only gospel. It is all our gospel. It is the good news that, when believed, saves.
- N. Normally, when I preach the Cross, I am aiming at unbelievers, so I only skim the surface. Today, I would like to aim at those who already know Jesus. I would like to go deeper. Please open your heart with me today, and think of Christ died—the history, and then “for our sins”—the theology of the Cross.

II. *The Events of the Cross*

- A. Pretty gold crosses dangling on shiny chains have a narcotic effect on our thoughts about the Cross. So do two thousand years and five thousand miles of distance. Our sanitized crosses fall far short of the gut-wrenching realities of crucifixion.
- B. What the Gospels say in four icy words, “and they crucified Him” (Mark 15:25), would have been emotionally devastating to behold, much less endure.
- C. What happened to a crucified person?
- D. Medical experts have reconstructed the physiological effects of this horrific Roman death by torture. Though they don't all agree on the precise cause of death, they all affirm agonies beyond comprehension.
- E. *The scourging*. Again, the Gospel writers assert the event in stark terms: “Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him” (John 19:1).
 - 1. To scourge means to skin alive with a whip. The beating was made worse by animal bones or lead weights embedded in the whip's tails. Sometimes the weights were pointed, a type of whip called scorpions. The naked victim would suffer intense pain on the chest, back, backside, and groin. Deep bruising would quickly turn to open lacerations and rib fractures often caused “bouts of vomiting, tremors, seizures, and fainting fits.”
- F. *The crown of thorns and other tortures*. The agony deepened.
 - 1. *They clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. (Mark 15:17–19)*

2. Most likely, the crown of thorns would have been shaped like a cap (not a circlet, as is often portrayed in paintings of the Crucifixion), with sharp spikes everywhere on the top of Jesus' head. Matthew explains that the soldiers "took the reed and struck Him on the head" (Matthew 27:30), in effect hammering the spikes into Christ's scalp. The pain would have been excruciating.
- G. Still think grace means leniency?
- H. This is the brutal reality of the Cross.
1. They also spit on him (Matthew 27:30), blindfolded him, took turns punching him in the face (Luke 22:64), and possibly tore out his beard (Isaiah 50:6).
 2. Next time you partake of that little piece of bread in the Lord's Supper that represents Christ's body "which is broken for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24), give some thought to the savage depths those words held for Jesus.
- I. *The nails.* The spikes were made of iron and about four and-a-half inches long. In 1968, archaeologists unearthed a gruesome death chamber: men, women, and children who died by violent means. One of the victims, whose name, Jehohanan, was etched onto his box of bones, clearly died by crucifixion.
1. An iron spike remained through his heel bone. The tip of the spike was bent, most likely from hitting a knot in the wood.
 2. The force used in driving the nails would have caused searing pain throughout the body. Given what Jesus had already endured, his body would fail quickly. Shock would be inevitable.
 - a) Crucifixion remains one of the most brutal tortures ever devised by depraved human hearts.
 - b) Zugibe states,
 - (1) Following these insults [i.e., the tortures preceding the cross], He was in a severely exhausted condition, experiencing ubiquitous pains, and in a state of increasing shock. The pains would have been unrelenting and brutal, causing severe burning sensations all over His body.
- J. This is the Cross.
1. "This is My body which was broken for you." Jesus wants us to look at that moment. To remember it. Contemplate it. Never forget it.
 2. "Broken."
 3. "For you."
- K. Scholars disagree on how the cross would have been stood upright. In any event, as soon as the body's full weight transferred to the nails through his hands and feet, Christ's already horrific pain would have been magnified to levels beyond words.
1. Yet, none of this compared to the spiritual pains about to come.
- L. *Breathing and breaking the legs.* Some experts suggest that breathing would have become an immediate problem, requiring a victim of crucifixion to push up on his nail-pierced feet in order to breathe. While this is debated, it is clear that breaking the victim's legs with clubs would easily hasten shock and death. When the Romans came to break Christ's legs, he had already died (John 19:33).
1. This is the Cross, the fountainhead of all grace. If you don't know the Cross of Christ, you don't know grace.
- M. *Death.* What was the ultimate cause of Christ's death?
- a) Medical experts offer various theories, including a ruptured heart, asphyxiation, or hypovolemic shock from loss of blood.
 - b) John, in his Gospel, offered his inspired theory.
 - (1) So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)
- N. Let's reserve the theology behind "It is finished!" for the next section, and zero in on the words He gave up his spirit.
- O. D. A. Carson links this statement with Christ's earlier in your-face announcement: "No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). The idea is that Christ died when he was good and ready. He relinquished his spirit. He gave up his life by choice.
- P. Gerald Borchert comments,
1. Jesus is portrayed as totally in control of the time of his dying, just as he had been pictured as in control of his arrest, his appearance before Annas, his trial before the spineless Pilate, and the carrying of his own cross. For his readers, John was illustrating in bold letters that even what seems to be tragedy was still not out of God's control.
- Q. Jesus was nobody's victim.
- R. He finished his work and dismissed his spirit.
- S. The two little words, "Christ died," pack enough punch to send the devil tumbling head over heels across the cosmos forever. The next time you partake of the Communion cup and bread, stop and take a breath. Bring your mind back to that awful day. Block everything out long enough to remember the Lord's brutal death.
- T. Especially block out insipid devotionals about something you should do for God, or any off-topic commentary diverting your attention from the horrible, brutal Old Rugged Cross.
- U. Christ died. That's history. What does it mean?

III. *The Meaning of the Cross*

- A. The physical sufferings were not the most painful part of Christ's death. Through them all, he didn't cry out, didn't scream, and didn't complain. "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).
- B. But then something happened so breathtakingly horrible that Jesus cried out. What could be more painful than the tortures, the beatings, the crown of thorns, and the nails through his hands and feet?
- C. Our sins.
- D. He began to cry out. I can hardly imagine this scene. The blood of it. The smell of it. The horror of seeing a man nailed to a cross, and of feeling every blow of the hammer. The mocking and jeering. It's unimaginable to me.
- E. But now that he is hanging from the cross, Jesus starts calling out. Scripture records seven statements from the Cross. They are called the Seven Words of Jesus, or the Seven Statements of Jesus. I am calling them the Seven Cries from the Cross.

1. *The Cry of Forgiveness*

- a) *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34)*
- b) From this deepest agony, he prays forgiveness on his tormentors. It is unthinkable. Truly amazing. You might forgive a slight or an offense or a minor insult. But to forgive the men who drove nails through his hands. To forgive the very men who were killing him unrighteously.
- c) No anger. No bitterness. No revenge. Father, forgive them. He understands their ignorance and weakness. They have no clue of the immense magnitude of their crime.
- d) There is a name for what happens here. It is the word Intercession. Jesus stands between the well-deserved wrath of God and the sinner.
- e) This is everything on our salvation. It is the first cry from the cross.

2. *The Cry of Salvation*

- a) *Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42, 43)*
- b) Jesus was crucified with criminals, one on his left and one on his right.
- c) This one, this thief on the cross, looks to Jesus for salvation. He prays, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.
- d) Jesus has taken in the insults and the torments of his trials before the chief priests, before the Council, and before Pilate, before Herod. He has absorbed the injustices. He has felt every physical blow.
- e) And now here, one thief insults him.
- f) But the other prays for salvation. He had done no good deeds in the end. No religious ritual. No baptism. No moral improvement.
- g) Just a look to the Cross of Christ, and a request for a future. The lowest of the low, and the highest of the high. It makes no difference. The Savior died for all, and will save all who come to him.
- h) Jesus promises him: today you will be with me in Paradise. Salvation. Life after death. Life eternal. Not some day, but this day.
- i) And look at his guarantee: Assuredly I say to you... His own word, based on his own authority, flowing from his own identity, and applying his own salvation purchased at so high a price.

3. *The Cry of Compassion*

- a) *When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:26, 27)*
- b) Jesus gives John to Mary and he gives Mary to John.
- c) In the deepest suffering humanly possible, he possesses strength to care for others.
- d) He sees his own mother at the foot of the Cross. He feels her pain. He understands her burden. The most horrific agony a mother can feel would be to see her son in the agony of the cross.
- e) And with hands and feet nailed to that cross, he does what he can to comfort her for those dark days he lays in the tomb.
- f) If Christ can love from the Cross, if he can show such love at the lowest, darkest, weakest, most painful spot humanly imaginable, then what kind of love can he bestow seated on the throne of the cosmos?

4. *The Cry of Dereliction*

- a) *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)*
- b) This word, dereliction, is used in its most ancient sense. It means to completely abandon and completely forsake.
- c) Jesus takes the words from the Old Testament - Psalm 22.
- d) There was darkness over the region. God the Father was pouring out the sin of the world on the Son of God. Though he knew no sin, he was made full of sin on our behalf for our great salvation.
- e) And when that outpouring was complete, God judged him. God condemned Jesus as if he had committed our sins, our crimes, our failures, our lies, our hatreds, our selfishnesses, our evils.

- f) Why did God forsake him?
- g) God was judging him for the sin of the world.
- h) This was the darkest moment. He had walked this journey for hours, and his work was almost finished. He cries this cry from the lowest pit of misery, from the awful despair of darkness.
- i) More painful than the beatings. More awful than the crown of thorns. More horrible than the nails. The greatest pain Jesus felt was the pain of our sins and the subsequent outpouring of the wrath of God upon himself for them.
- j) God punished Christ for our sins instead of punishing us.
- k) The price was this dereliction from the holiness of God.
- l) We cannot comprehend this breach in the divine fellowship. We cannot understand. We can only bow in silence and adore.
- m) This is the Cross. This is the price of our salvation.

5. *The Cry of Suffering*

- a) *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (John 19:28)*
- b) He is facing the cross as a human. He feels every blow. Every nerve ending is firing. Every pain signal is there. No magic to make the moment easier. No miracle to take away his pain.
- c) The thirst is real. It is a physical thirst.
- d) And it is a reminder of that deep thirst that every heart feels for God.
 - (1) Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee, O God.
- e) When Jesus gave us the Lord's supper, he said:
 - (1) *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)*
 - (a) COMMUNION
 - i) There is nothing else that matters in this moment. Not how you feel. Not your duties to God. Not anything. Just to bring your mind to this body that was broken for you—Christ died. And bring your mind to the reason why it was broken—for our sins and our salvation. The bread and the cup.
 - ii) In those last hours with his disciples, Jesus took bread, and broke it, and said this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.
 - iii) Likewise, he took the cup, and he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Drink ye all of it.

6. *The Cry of Triumph*

- a) *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)*
- b) The best words ever spoken on planet earth. Finished. Done. Complete.
- c) What was finished?
- d) Your salvation. Your forgiveness. Your pardon. Your cleansing. Your eternal life. Your washing white as snow. Your acceptance. Your eternal welcome. Your access. Your justification. Your satisfaction. Your victory. Your ascendancy. Your reconciliation. Your redemption. Your royalty. Your identity. Your power. Your love. Your grace.
- e) What was finished?
- f) Absolutely everything that matters.
- g) He triumphed over death. He broke the back of the grave. He shattered the gates of hell. He crushed the head of devil. He put to flight the armies of darkness.
- h) Nothing left to add. Once for all. Saved to the uttermost. No condemnation, not now...not ever.
- i) Thank God. Hallelujah. It is finished!
- j) And since it is finished, there is nothing left to do, but the seventh cry from the cross:

7. *The Cry of Reunion*

- a) *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit [dismiss] My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)*
- b) He bowed his head, and willed himself to die. No one took his life from him. He gave it up of his own accord.
- c) This is Christus Victor. The champion you need in the fight for your life.

IV. Conclusion

- A. You can search the world over and study every religion. Learn every philosophy. Explore every science. Acquire all wisdom and all truth.
- B. At the end of your journey will find two great wonders that outshine them all:
 - 1. Christ died for our sins...
 - a) so that we can say...
 - (1) Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.
- C. Thank God for this invincible, eternal, blood-bought, infinite, matchless, amazing grace of God.