



# The CROSS of CHRIST

Part 2 - Autumn 2016

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth  
7 Studies For Small Groups On The Cross



# The Cross of Christ

Discovering the glory of the atonement and rediscovering  
the basis of our faith

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# 8. The Revelation of God

A number of years ago I was interviewing candidates for a job at the charity I worked at in the Valleys of South Wales. One candidate had a sparkling C.V. with an amazing list of qualifications and experience. It was difficult to understand why they had been out of work for so long when you read their profile on the application form. However, when it came to interviews, the picture became a lot clearer! They arrived for the interview 20 minutes late looking as if they had literally just got out of bed. They were wearing a not very clean pair of jeans and a t-shirt, had not shaved and had unkempt hair. Their appearance was slovenly, but when we started asking questions it appeared that their attitude was as well. They may have had a long list of academic qualifications, but they seemed unable to string a coherent sentence together. Needless to say, they didn't get the job!

Sometimes our actions display more about our character than words ever could. However, when it comes to the cross we see that God's words and actions both tell us the same thing about his love for the world.

Because of what Jesus did at the cross, we received salvation. As we saw in the last study we are Sanctified (made holy, from the Latin word 'sanctus'), Reconciled (our relationship with God is restored), Redeemed (purchased or paid for), Justified (declared 'not guilty'), and Glorified (promised a future 'in glory'.) These are what is known as the SALVIC effects of the cross

However, as well as the cross being a salvic event, theologians also talk about it being a 'revelatory event.' In the cross God disclosed something about himself to us. God was not just 'doing' something but he was also 'demonstrating' something about himself. John Stott says that the cross was not only a 'work', but it was also a 'word' which tells us about God's character and love.

## Read John 17:1-25

- ✘ How many times does the word 'glory' or 'glorify' appear in this passage?
- ✘ Jesus says that the time has come for God to glorify the son (v.1), that the Son has brought glory to the father (v.4), and that Jesus has given his followers glory (v.22), but what do we actually mean by the word? What does the word 'glory' mean in this context?
- ✘ The cross was a horrible way to die. In what ways is the cross a demonstration of the glory of God?
- ✘ How many times does the word 'world' appear in this passage? There appears to be some link in Jesus' prayer between the glory of what was going on at the cross and what is going on in the world. What do you think that might be?
- ✘ In verse 6 Jesus says that he has 'revealed' the father to the disciples. What did Jesus reveal about the nature of the Father? What knowledge did he give the disciples about God? (see verse 7)

**Read 1 John 3:16 and 1 John 4:10-12.** Remember that the author of the Gospel of John is also the author of the letters of John. The same thinking and mind is behind John's Gospel and 1 John.

- ✘ John Stott writes, "If we are looking for a definition of love, we should not look in a dictionary but at Calvary." In what ways does the cross reveal the nature of true love?
- ✘ How do you know for certain that God loves you personally? Sometimes we find it easier to believe that God loves other people and God loves the world, but find it difficult to believe that God could actually love us personally. How do you know that God loves you as an individual? After trying to answer this question, read Romans 5:5 and 5:8 and try answering it again.
- ✘ Looking back to the passage from John's Gospel we read in 17:4 that Jesus brought glory to the Father by "completing the work you gave me to do." According to verse 6, what was that work which Jesus

completed?

- ✘ As followers of Jesus, our job is also to bring glory to the Father and to the Son. In view of what Jesus says he did, how might we do that?
- ✘ According to the second half of 1 John 3:16 and 1 John 4:11, what should we do? How does this reveal the Father to the world and give him glory? In missional terms, how important is loving one another in the body of Christ? How is the Father revealed and glorified when we do that?

# 9. The conquest of Evil

Many of you will know that I love words. I am interested in their meaning and their etymology (the history and origin of words). I love discovering new words and trying to use them. However, as I re-read John Stott's "The Cross of Christ" recently I came across a new word that I had never heard before which I am not sure I will ever use! It is the word '*Jejune*.' I don't know about you, but it was a new one on me! Stott writes, "It is impossible to read the New Testament without being impressed by the atmosphere of joyful confidence which pervades it, and often stands out in relief against the rather jejune religion which often passes for Christianity today."

Jejune means naïve, simplistic and superficial or something which is immature, uninteresting, dull and insipid. It also means lacking any nutritional value and comes to us from the Latin word 'jejuna' which means 'to fast.' The original sense was 'without food', hence it can mean, 'not intellectually nourishing'. That is quite a condemnation of modern Christianity from John Stott. He is saying that compared to the faith and practice of the early church, we can be dull and insipid, and our faith doesn't nourish us or equip us for the rigours of everyday life.

What Stott says in the introduction to Chapter 9 of his book on the cross is that those early disciples had seen first-hand the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and it completely changed the way they lived. They had seen the victory of Christ over the grave first hand, and so had no doubt about the victory of Christ in their own lives. They may have faced all sorts of suffering, adversity and danger but they knew that in Christ they were more than conquerors and were always being "led in a triumphal procession." They might face suffering persecution, imprisonment or death, but so did Christ... and look where his suffering eventually led! What looked like defeat at the cross actually turned out to be a victory, so they believed that apparent defeat and suffering in our lives would also result in amazing victories. That belief changed the way they lived and the way they handled

the hardships of life. No jejune religion for them! Here there is a further motif of the cross in addition to the ones we have looked at so far in this series. The cross looked like defeat of good by evil, but in the end actually secured the conquest of evil. The cross is a victory.

## **Read Colossians 2:1-15**

- ✘ 'Victory', 'conquest', 'captives', 'disarmed' and 'triumph' are all very militaristic words. Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of battles and war to describe what Christ did 'by the cross'?
- ✘ Who are the enemies in this war? Who is it that is seeking to take us captive? (Verse 8 - There is more than one enemy! Paul writes about the 'powers and authorities' in the plural. If you ever used the old Anglican Prayer Book, you might remember the three enemies which were described in the baptism service. Paul adds another enemy to those three in this passage from Colossians)
- ✘ What is the power or the personality behind all of these 'powers and authorities'? Who is the enemy who since the very beginning of the Bible story has been trying to separate us from God?
- ✘ We often either dismiss the enemy as a fiction or myth, or else dismiss him as powerless and not of any concern to us. How much power does the enemy actually have? Should we take him seriously? Did Jesus?

In 1995 there was a blockbuster movie made starring Kevin Costner called 'Waterworld.' At the time it was made, it was the most expensive movie ever to go into production and it was a huge, costly flop at the box office! However, as time has gone by, more and more people have come to like it and realise that maybe it wasn't all that bad after all. In the movie there is a scene where the main character decides to go fishing. The movie is set in a post-apocalyptic world which has been flooded because of global warming, and the waters are inhabited by massive fish and sea monsters. Costner's method of fishing is to tie a rope around himself, and jump off the back of the boat – he is human bait for the huge fish who are swimming in the sea



around his vessel. However, the moment one of these sea-monsters comes up to swallow him, Costner pulls out his gun and shoots the monster... from inside the fish. The fish swallows him whole, but from the inside Costner is able to kill the fish and turn it into supper! What couldn't be achieved from the outside because of the fish's' scaly armour was achieved from inside. When I saw that movie for the first time, I thought it was a brilliant illustration of how Jesus overcame the enemy! Just when Satan thought he had got Jesus where he wanted him, Jesus burst out into new life and destroyed all the enemies works from the inside.

- ✘ How does Paul describe the victory of the cross in Colossians? How was it achieved? What did it achieve?
- ✘ Some people think of the cross as a defeat and the resurrection as victory. The cross was unmitigated evil, which God rescued and redeemed by bringing Jesus back from the dead. Why is it wrong to think this? Was the cross a mistake or a defeat? Why or why not?
- ✘ Was the cross a surprise to Jesus (or the Father)? If it was not a surprise, then was it planned and prepared for?
- ✘ Jesus fought the good fight and won an amazing victory at the cross, but we are still in the battle whilst we live on earth. What wages war against us now? What kind of things do we have to battle?
- ✘ In what ways do you fight against these things? How can they and their masters be overcome?

# 10. The Community of Celebration.

I was led to the Lord in 1985 by my uncle, who himself had become a Christian in the 1960's during the height of the 'Jesus People' movement. This arose out of the large numbers of hippies being saved in the 1960's and 1970's, and whilst it started in California it soon spread across the rest of the globe. One of the key features of this hippie Jesus People movement was the setting up of Christian communes. Christians would come together to share all that they had and live together in shared houses or communities. 'Uncle Phil' and his family lived in one of these communities for a while in the 1970's, and later when I was converted (along with my girlfriend) we moved into a shared house with a group of believers in South London for 18 months.

The most famous of the Christian communes was called 'The Community of Celebration' and began in Houston, Texas, but by the 1970's they had houses across the USA and Europe. The first modern Iona community was planted by this group of people, and some of you might remember their worship group called "The Fisherfolk." Even if you have never heard of the Fisherfolk, you will probably have sung, "Brother, sister let me serve you" or "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" which were both written by that community. The Fisherfolk were the group which introduced modern choruses and songs to many people in the church and massively influenced the music we have today.

Perhaps you have found this study series and the presentation of the cross of Christ to be too individualistic and all about personal salvation, redemption and a personal relationship with God. If so, it should be balanced a bit in

this study as we start to think about the community which was formed out of the cross and resurrection, and what it means to be part of that community of celebration.

### **Read Acts 2:36-47 and 4:32-37**

- ✘ Directly out of Paul's preaching of the cross (verse 36), a new community of believers was formed. Each believer had to make a personal decision to accept Christ and be baptised (verse 38), but they expressed their faith in fellowship together. What were the key characteristics of their fellowship?
- ✘ Which of these characteristics do we still have today? Which are missing?
- ✘ Central to the church's life was the Lord's supper. Twice between verses 42 and 46 the breaking of bread (communion) is mentioned. Why is the Lord's supper central to their communal life? What is the relationship between the church breaking bread and the message of the cross?
- ✘ There is clearly a link between communion and Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In some traditions communion is described as a 'sacrifice.' This notion was firmly rejected by the sixteenth-century reformers who were involved in the starting of Baptist Churches. They were particularly suspicious of language which talked about "the sacrifice of the mass." Why?
- ✘ What sacrifices do Christians offer? Where do you find these sacrifices in scripture?
- ✘ Paul talks in Romans 12 about offering ourselves as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) Why is the phrase 'living sacrifice' an oxymoron? What does Paul mean?
- ✘ When the early Christian community came together and remembered the cross, they often expressed their faith and joy in song – even in hard times. John Stott writes, "... whenever Christian people come together it is impossible to stop them singing." Why is this?

- ✘ If sung worship and music, the breaking of bread and loving one another are such important expressions of being a community shaped by the cross, why do these things cause so much division and disagreement in the church? Why does communion/Eucharist/mass and music cause so many problems in the Christian community?
- ✘ What should we do about this in our church today?

# 11. Self-Understanding and Self-Giving

A number of years ago when I was working with homeless ex-offenders, I was the subject of a false allegation made against me by an ex-staff member at the charity. We had discovered that the staff member was in an inappropriate sexual relationship with one of the clients, and that drugs and money had changed hands between them. I had no choice but to sack the person in question, but within a few days the police called to say that they had received an anonymous tip-off about illegal activity at the charity. My boss and I were both questioned by the police and all the charities accounts and computers were removed from the office. It was an extremely stressful few months whilst the investigation went on. We were cleared of wrongdoing and the ex-staff member was arrested and charged with perverting the course of justice. It was during that time that I became ill with a stress related stomach complaint and ended up in hospital with a suspected bleeding ulcer. It was also the event which led to me talking with the hospital chaplain, being directed to Tabs and ending up attending a service in December 1999. The rest, as they say, is history, and I ended up becoming pastor. Clearly all things work for good for those who are in Christ Jesus, even horrible and unpleasant events!

When I returned to work after my stay in hospital the charity trustees informed me that they had arranged for me to see a counsellor. They were concerned that they hadn't protected me enough during the investigation, and that my subsequent illness might be a result of their negligence. I really didn't want to go, but actually found the 6 weekly sessions I had with a psychotherapist really interesting and helpful. We talked about my childhood and parents, my schooling and relationships, my experiences at work and my faith. The counsellor would invite me to express my feelings about all sorts of things, and remember events from my past in a fresh way. As we

talked under their professional guidance, I made all sorts of discoveries about myself and what I actually think about myself and other people. We got to the root of some of my low self-image issues, and gained a better self-understanding of why I react the way I do sometimes. It was truly revelatory!

The cross revolutionises our attitude about God and his love for us. However, it also changes the way we think about ourselves and our lives. As we stand in the shadow of the cross, we have a new self-understanding which should, if we understand it correctly, lead to a new lifestyle as well.

### **Read Romans 6:1-14**

- ✘ What causes people to have a low self-image? What is the world's response and solution to this?
- ✘ What is different in the Christian response and solution?
- ✘ Jesus told his followers to 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Some modern Christians have interpreted this to mean that we need to love ourselves more in order to be able to love others. Is this what Jesus meant? If not, what did he mean?
- ✘ In order to turn and follow Christ we need to be realistic about what kind of people we really are. Read Romans 3:23. How do most people react today if we talk about them being 'sinners'? What does the world have to say about sin?
- ✘ Why is acknowledging, confessing and turning away from our sin so important? Why is it necessary?
- ✘ The new image that God wants to give us about ourselves is that in Christ we are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come. Where once we were strangers to God, now we are called his children and heirs. The cross gives us a new attitude about ourselves because it tells us who we are in Christ. Paul tells us that this is because Christ died, rose again and became our advocate or representative. What does this mean?
- ✘ What does "being buried with Christ... into death in order that... we too might live a new life" (Romans 6:4) mean? What should be our

self-image and self-understanding of our old life without Christ be? What should we think about ourselves in our new recreated life?

- ✘ The New Testament talks a lot about denying ourselves and our desires and wishes. What does 'self-denial' mean?
- ✘ John Stott writes in "The cross of Christ" that, "Self-denial is not denying to ourselves luxuries such as chocolates, cakes, cigarettes and cocktails (though it may include this); it is actually denying or disowning ourselves, renouncing our supposed right to go our own way. To deny oneself is to turn away from the idolatry of self-centredness." Discuss. Does this fit in with ideas from modern philosophy or therapies?
- ✘ How can we resolve the Biblical tension between valuing ourselves and denying ourselves at the same time?
- ✘ John Stott says that being followers of Christ "gives us more to affirm about who we are, and more to deny about ourselves." What does this mean practically? What does a cross shaped Christian community look like which is both confident in who we are in Christ as well as realistic and humble about our failings ?

# 12: Loving Our enemies

When I was at University, and in the years which immediately followed, I used to play American Football to a reasonably high level. Our team was sponsored by Budweiser Beer, and we had a coach from New York. It was all very American in culture! In 1986 we got to our last game of the season undefeated, and were going to be playing our arch rivals... who had also gone all season without losing a game. The winner of the next match would be crowned as regional champions, and would go into the finals for the national title. Our team, The Thames Barriers, played in Woolwich (near to the Thames river flood defence barrier) and we would face off against a team from Essex. For two weeks before the game the coaching staff were trying to get us physically and mentally ready for the game. "You've got to hate them!" the head coach told us. "You've got to want to go out on the field and kill them! They are the enemy, and we are going to destroy them." As a brand new Christian I wasn't very comfortable with the hype.

During the first half of the game the Essex team tried a play called a 'wildcat' where the quarterback keeps the ball and instead of trying to pass it to a teammate, he runs with it himself. As he came around the corner of his own line, he was met head-on by one of our biggest and strongest players. There was a terrific crunch and both of them ended up in a heap on the floor. However, as our player got up from the grass, the opposition player didn't move an inch. At first I thought he was knocked out, but quickly realised that he had his eyes open and was talking – he had been paralysed and he couldn't feel anything from the chest down. The medical staff quickly got him stabilised and into an ambulance, and he was rushed to the nearest hospital. Over the next few hours he slowly got sensation back in his torso and legs, and he made a full recovery. However, it was a frightening moment.

What was interesting was the reaction of the rest of the players on both teams. We still had to finish the game and there was a big crowd who had



paid to come and see us. However, none of the players in either team really had much heart for further aggressive play. The coaches may have urged us to 'hate' and 'kill' the opposition before the game, but no-one felt much like playing full contact football anymore. In a split second, the enemy had become people we were concerned for as we shared our worries for the injured player. They had never really been our enemies in the true sense of the world, but it was interesting to see how opponents became allies in that moment.

### **Read Matthew 5:21 – 22 and 5:38-48**

- ✘ We sometimes use the words 'hate' and 'enemy' a little too freely. I hate marmite; Swansea football team are the enemy; I hate that dress. What does the word 'hate' actually mean? What about the word enemy? How should we apply them as Christians?
- ✘ As Christians, what should we hate? Who are our enemies?
- ✘ Sometimes people can get confused about the nature of love, and how we live it out as followers of Jesus. What is the difference between peace-making and appeasement? What is unsatisfactory about the latter?
- ✘ Stott writes that, "Justice without mercy is too strict, and mercy without judgment is too lenient." How should this apply to us as Christians? How does it apply in our home? In our church? In the workplace?
- ✘ God is revealed as a God of both mercy and justice. How do these two things hold together in the light of the cross? Where is the justice and where is the mercy of the cross to be found?
- ✘ How should you behave towards a brother or sister in Christ who is angry at you, treating you badly or being unfair? In the light of Matthew 5:46, how do we treat people outside the church differently? Should we?
- ✘ What should influence the way we think about other people who may live differently to us? The church has often had a lot to say about people who drink excessively; are homosexual; who live together

outside of marriage; who have been in prison. Thinking about the self-understanding we talked about in last week's study, how do we view others in the light of what we once were like ourselves?

- ✘ Is it ever loving to ignore another person's sin? If not, how do we love people who don't know Jesus yet, but still be honest about the problem of sin in their life?

# 13. Suffering and Glory

We have all seen the suffering of Christians in Syria and Iraq under the domination of ISIS in recent years on our TV's or in the paper. The extreme suffering of some of our brothers and sisters in Christ has been truly horrific. Followers of Jesus have been beheaded, crucified, tortured, had their children abducted to be brought up as Muslims, or been stoned to death or shot. Sadly, Christians are facing similar persecutions and sufferings in many other countries. 'Open Doors' report that conditions for Christians have deteriorated in 55 countries in the last year, and in 6 countries the deterioration is so significant as to give rise to a fear of martyrdom. Those 6 countries are Iraq, Syria, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sudan.

We talk about the increasing secularisation in our own country and the 'persecution' that Christians increasingly face in the UK. Court cases against bakers and hotel owners are shocking, but we also need to keep a sense of perspective. I was recently told that unless I was willing and able to fully accept the armies' policy on same-sex relationships and transsexuals, I would find it hard to get further promotion in the future. It is discrimination and it is concerning, but at least no-one is trying to kill me!

The New Testament closely links the concepts of suffering and glory. We are told that Christ's death on the cross led to him being glorified. We are also told that our present sufferings have to be seen in the light of future glory. As we continue to think about the cross, we are going to be thinking this week about suffering and glory.

## **Read 1 Peter 2:1-25**

- ✘ What does this passage teach us about the relationship between our sufferings and the sufferings of Christ?

- ✘ Suffering is terrible, but the Bible seems to say that suffering can have positive benefits. What are they?
- ✘ According to 1 Peter, what is the relationship between the love for our enemy that we looked at in the last study, our present sufferings and future glory?
- ✘ How did Jesus endure his sufferings without retaliating? He could have called down an army of angels to rescue him from his persecutors, but instead remained silent. How was he able to do this according to 1 Peter 2?
- ✘ Verse 24 links Christ's physical death on the cross to our death to sin. What does our death in this sense mean?
- ✘ In verse 25 we are described as sheep who have gone astray. How much of our suffering is caused by our own actions and faults? How much can we blame others for?
- ✘ What are the implications of verses 13-14 for Christians living in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan or Libya today? What are the implications for us living under our government in the UK? Is there a place for retaliation, resistance or even protest in the Christian life?
- ✘ How does suffering lead to glory? What is the link between the two in a) Jesus' life, b) our own lives and c) the church?
- ✘ What witness does it give to the world when we handle hardships and sufferings well? What is the missional dimension of suffering?

# 14. The Pervasive Influence of the Cross

Recently I was in a jeweller's shop in Cardiff. Sadly, I wasn't looking for jewellery for Claire, but was looking for a watch for myself! I was struck by the number of crosses that were available. There were crosses and crucifixes in gold, silver and plain metals. There were glass ones and even a few pottery ones. Some crosses were large, and some were tiny. I noticed that when the shop-assistant came over to ask if I needed any help, she too had a cross around her neck. That night I was watching a TV documentary which was following 2 people as they travelled around the USA experiencing extreme sports such as parachuting, cliff diving and bungee jumping. As far as I could tell from their language and attitude, neither person was a Christian, but both wore crosses around their neck.

We are told that we live in an increasingly secular and atheistic country. Only 60% of people overall now say they believe in God. If you narrow the sample down to only include people under 30, the statistic is just 30% of people say they believe in God... and yet, there are crosses everywhere! Rappers and pop-stars wear them; footballers and actors have them; fashion designers and high streets sell them. So why is the image of the cross so pervasive in our modern, secular society?

## **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

- ✘ Bob Geldof once said that he didn't believe in God, but he admired Jesus. Many other religions also admire Jesus and study his teaching, including Muslims and Hindus. Why do people who are not Christians still admire Jesus?
  
- ✘ Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "Jesus does not want admirers, but

disciples.” Is believing in Jesus, admiring him or even trying to follow his teachings enough? What does it mean to be a disciple?

- ✘ Many people may wear crosses, but Paul says that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. You would think that if people knew they were perishing, people would be glad of Good News. Why do they still think the message of the cross is foolishness?
- ✘ The message of the cross is the power of God for salvation. But if people think it is foolishness, how can we get them to listen to our message?
- ✘ Throughout the centuries many great philosophers, writers, thinkers and academics have tried to undermine the message of the cross. Famous atheists have written long books about ‘The God delusion’ and given lectures in universities and on the radio and TV. Yet the church is still here! Why is faith so persistent in the secular modern world? Why hasn’t Christianity died out?
- ✘ In some parts of the world Christianity is growing and expanding rapidly. Even in the UK the church is undergoing a massive revival in the south east through immigrant populations. What is different between ‘the West’ and ‘developing nations’ which means that the fortune of the church is so different in these two settings?
- ✘ You will almost certainly have non-believers in your family. Do you ever try to convince them of the truth of the Gospel? Do you talk about the cross and your faith? How?
- ✘ If your answer to the last question was, ‘no’, then why not? Receiving or rejecting Christ could have eternal consequences for them. Why is it so hard to share this important message with those we love most?
- ✘ The message of the cross is foolishness to many people today, just as it was in Paul’s day. How could we more effectively share our faith? What kind of things should we be doing to engage with people in order to allow us to tell them about Jesus?

- ✘ Pauls writes in verse 23 that “The Jews demand a sign and the Greeks look for wisdom.” What are people demanding and looking for today? Paul goes on to say, “But we preach Christ crucified.” How do we help people to be interested in something they are not looking for?
- ✘ In verse 26 Paul invites his readers to think about what they were like before they were called to be disciples. In what ways does it help our mission to remember what we were like before our salvation? What part does our testimony play in evangelism?
- ✘ If someone asked you today how you became a Christian and why, could you answer them clearly and succinctly? If you were speaking to someone with a quite short attention span, what would you say?

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