

## THE CROSS

***For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”1 Corinthians 1:18***

Beloved in the Lord,

The Cross is the most widely recognised symbol of the Christian faith. This is understandable, because the central message of Christianity is the message of the Cross. Irrespective of denomination. the message of the Cross is the centre of any true Christian Church. If you take the word of the cross out of the message, then you are not left with very much at all – at best some nice ethical teaching.

The truth of the matter is that without the Cross, there is no salvation. The Cross is the very centre. If Jesus had not died on the cross, then we would have nothing to rejoice about. We would have to live life without hope and we would still be under condemnation for our sins.

The cross is an extremely powerful symbol and it has one of two effects – it either draws us to God and binds us to other Christians, or it judges us. The cross is the dividing line for all people. That is why worldly people do not like and even despise the cross.

People can follow all sorts of religions, have all sorts of strange ideas and beliefs and nobody gets too excited; but bring them face to face with the word of the cross and there is a reaction.

It is a very sad fact that in the USA, UK, Europe and yes even here in Australia many Churches have taken down the cross from their buildings because it offends people. Many Churches have watered down God’s Word to make it more palatable and acceptable. The truth is watered down to a lie that the message of God’s love is that in His love He will not punish anybody. In the end all will be accepted, irrespective of how they live and what they believe because after all, all religions pray to the same god.

This is a blatant lie. Take away the cross and you are left with nothing.

All religions do not lead to God. Only Jesus does.

Yes, God is love and it is exactly because He is love that we have the cross and we preach the word of the cross.

***Jesus taught: <sup>14</sup> As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; <sup>15</sup> so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.***

***<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup> He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup> This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But he***

***who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."***

***John 3:14-21***

I quoted this entire passage of Scripture, because in essence it is the core truth of our faith. Precisely because God is love, He placed the punishment due to us for our sins upon His Son Jesus. When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He took upon Himself all sin – that is yours and mine. He suffered the punishment; He died in our place. He did it so that we would never have to bear the awful punishment for sin.

That is God's love. Jesus who knew no sin; Jesus who was perfect and totally sinless, took our punishment in order that we may be free.

He suffered all of God's wrath poured out against sin, in our place. Why? Because He is love, and He loved and loves us so very much. He did it, because He knew how awful eternity without God is. He knew how awful hell is. To be in total and utter darkness with no hope, in solitary confinement in torment forever.

Last Sunday I said that we have to make many decisions in life and that some of these may have eternal consequences. How we react to the cross, and what we decide about it is one of those decisions that have eternal consequences. The cross divides between believers and unbelievers. The cross either saves or condemns us. We cannot and must not ignore the cross. Somebody once coined the phrase: "Jesus is the man you cannot ignore."

One day each one of us will stand before Him in judgement. On that day He will either be our Saviour or our condemnation.

If you have humbled yourself and knelt at the foot of the cross, have confessed your sin and asked and received forgiveness on the basis of Jesus blood as your atonement, then you will stand with Jesus as your Saviour.

But, if you have rejected Him, have not confessed your sin, and have not opened your heart to Him in faith, then He will be your judge and you will be condemned to a dark eternity.

Please understand that God does not desire to condemn anybody, but desires for all men to be saved. God takes no pleasure in sending someone to eternal hell. But please understand that God is Righteous and Just. He is Holy. His laws are immutable. His law says that the wages of sin is death and that without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins.

Only the blood of Jesus can wash away sin and save us. When He died on the cross, He shed His Holy and precious blood for you and me, in order to pay the wages of our sin. It is not important what you have done, how bad you have been – His blood is full payment. All we need to do is accept His gift.

In John's first letter we read: ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** 1 John 1:9

This was so clearly demonstrated on Good Friday. We read in the Gospel accounts that Jesus was crucified between two criminals. Both these men had earned their crucifixion. They had caused

insurrection and risen up against the Roman government. At first both riled Jesus and joined in with the jeering crowd. But after a while, one of them had a change of heart. Having heard that Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, something touched inside of his hardened heart. We read in Luke's account:

***“One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”<sup>40</sup> But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”<sup>41</sup> And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”<sup>43</sup> And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” Luke 23:39-43***

Two criminals – one on either side of Jesus. Both died at the same time that afternoon. One went straight to paradise to be with Jesus and the other to outer darkness – eternal hell. What was the difference? The cross of Jesus! The difference was how they responded to Jesus.

One rejected Him – the other prayed to Him. It is that simple.

That is why Paul writes that the word of the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing. Many by virtue of relying upon their intellect say – it is foolishness. That is too easy. Man's pride and self righteousness wants to earn salvation by good works.

But no – the work has already been done by Jesus. Salvation is a free gift to them that receive it in faith.

So the cross is the dividing line – the separator between believers and unbelievers.

The cross is also a unifier. Every single person that has humbled themselves at the foot of the cross and been washed in the blood of Jesus is a brother or sister to all others who are saved. It does not matter what Church you go to. It does not matter what traditions you observe. It does not matter if you have liturgy or don't. It doesn't matter if the minister wears a black cassock or a white alb or no vestments at all. They are all peripheral matters that have little consequence or significance.

The important thing is that in Christ we are one. If only we can grasp this truth then we are blessed. Paul wrote to the Galatians: ***“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>27</sup> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26-28***

If there ever was a time that we need to hear and heed this truth it is now. It is time for Christians to unite around the Cross of Christ. We need to keep the cross at the very centre of our lives, our preaching, our Churches.

The cross is the power of God.

***Amen.***

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.