

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

Sunday, March 4, 2018

SERMON SERIES: COME TO THE CROSS

Part 2 – The Old Rugged Cross – 1 Corinthians 1:18

... for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

OPENING

Illustration 1

Years ago, a young girl was growing up at First Baptist Church in Arlington. She lived near the church, and she was constantly in trouble, because she was rather mischievous. A creek behind her house was off-limits, but somehow she found herself in it again and again. Her dad didn't go to church much in the early years, but her mom did, and always took her there. She was fidgety, and wasn't the best listener, so she often played with various things to get through church. One Sunday, this young girl found a piece of jewelry and was rolling it back and forth in her hands when the preacher actually stopped the service, because she was flashing a reflected light into his eyes in a way where he couldn't actually preach.

First Baptist Church had burned down due to fire, and the church was temporarily meeting in the old Arlington High School, now the current Social Work building for UTA. In a morning worship service, this young girl looked up at the cross hanging behind the preacher. As she looked at the cross, the thought crossed her heart – no her soul – that Christianity was real – Jesus had really died for her, and she gave her heart to Christ that day. She saw Christ in the cross. That young girl was Tillie Lester, who became Tillie Burgin, my mom. Some say she is just as mischievous today. ☺

Illustration 2

The “New Mexico Junior College” in Hobbs, New Mexico took down crosses from across their campuses this week after the “Freedom from Religion” foundation, based in Wisconsin, complained in a letter to Kelvin Sharp, the college's President, and the crosses were removed. This is the same group which sued Presidents Obama and Bush for hosting a “National Day of Prayer,” sued to remove the Ground Zero Cross at the 9/11 memorial museum, claiming their members experience symptoms of depression, headaches, anxiety, mental pain and anguish at the sight of the cross. The FFRF uses the legitimate issues surrounding the separation of church & state to disguise their antipathy towards the faith. One of their slogans is “Nothing Fails Like Prayer.”¹

¹ Summarized from an article published in the Christian Post - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/atheist-group-forces-new-mexico-college-remove-crosses-displayed-on-campus-215530/>

CONTEXT OF OUR PASSAGE FOR TODAY

1. The Lord used Paul to plant the church in Corinth, then he moved on to start another church in Ephesus.
2. As the church grew, it started experiencing conflict internally. They didn't know what to do, so they wrote Paul. There were two basic concerns Paul addresses in this letter:
 - a. The church wasn't in the world, so much as the world had flooded into the church. The City of Corinth was what one author calls "a polluted city, filled with every kind of vice and worldly pleasure." One of the worst things you could say of a person back then was that they were a "Corinthian." The church at Corinth was defiled by some of its members who were guilty of sexual immorality, drunkenness, and those who constantly excused their sin, proclaiming God's grace as a cover.²
 - b. The city of Corinth was also a city proud of its traveling philosophers, skeptics, and proponents of secular wisdom which set itself apart from and above normal people. In verse 23, Paul says that Christ crucified on the cross is:
 - i. A "stumbling block" to the Jews – The New Testament word *skandalon*, which has come into English today as "scandal." So, the Jews viewed the cross as scandalous, a scandal, as if Christians had done something morally reprehensible.³
 - ii. "Foolishness" to the Gentiles – The New Testament word *morion* is translated into our English today as moron, moronic, dumb.
 - iii. So, the worldly critics of the church considered believers to be morally bankrupt and/or simpletons not worthy of anyone's time.
3. To this, Paul helps the believers understand that the message of the cross is alive and strong, but that it is also much like a two way mirror which for some only reflects their own image, and all they can see standing before the mirror is a fool. For others, however, when the light is just right, the mirror becomes a window into another world.
4. I would say to you that believers today live in a world very similar to the culture surrounding the New Testament church in Corinth when Paul originally wrote this letter.
5. So, what is the message for us?

² Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, Vol. 1: Matthew – Galatians, p. 568.

³ WA Criswell, Sermon titled "Christ the Power of God" from 1 Corinthians 1:18-20 preached on March 13th, 1955. Transcript: <https://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1955/christ-the-power-of-god/>

THE CROSS OFFENDS

1. Who does it offend? Paul says it offends those who are perishing. Those who haven't believed yet.
2. Why does the message of the cross offend?
 - a. The message of the cross is revealed – not reasoned. The religion of this world is based on works, and it goes from bottom to top. We work our way into heaven by being good. In this world, you fight fire with fire. You watch out for #1, and the way to God is to work your way to the top. It is a relationship, not a religion.
 - b. The message is for everyone – It's for the everybody's, and not just the elites. It is for the outcasts and not just the insiders, and that offends this world. Jim Bakker, a former televangelist who defrauded followers and was imprisoned for it, tells of a special visit when he was in prison, and his entire life was defined by cleaning toilets. That visitor was Billy Graham who walked into Jim's prison cell, threw his arms around the disgraced man, and said "Jim, I love you." When Baker was released from prison, Ruth Graham invited him to spend time in their home, and she went to church with him.⁴
 - c. The message is God based and not human centered – It calls you to a life which is led from above, not driven from below. NY Times opinion writer David Brooks in his book on character says that the same message from popular culture is everywhere – "You are special." Trust yourself."
 - i. Movies from Pixar and Disney constantly tell children how wonderful they are.
 - ii. Commencement speeches are larded with the same clichés: Follow your passion. Don't accept limits. Chart your own course. Follow your passion. Don't accept limits. Chart your own course. You have a responsibility to do great things, because you are so great.
 - iii. In her mega-selling book Eat, Pray, Love, Elizabeth Gilbert writes that "God manifests himself through "my own voice from within my own self . . . God dwells within you as you yourself, exactly the way you are."⁵
 - d. The message of the cross confronts the sinner. Years ago, a family our church had befriended and loved, came to me with a problem with the Arlington public schools. Their daughter had been accused of defacing a couple of school desks. The parents were furious, and on the move to right a wrong perpetrated by the

⁴ The Christian Post, "Billy Graham Loved, Hugged Me in Prison When I was Cleaning Toilets'. Jim Bakker. By Stoyan Zaimov. Link: <https://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1955/christ-the-power-of-god/>. Accessed March 3rd, 2018.

⁵ David Brooks, The Road to Character. New York: Random House, 2015, p 7.

school system and the horrible teacher against their beloved daughter. At this point, I made a critical mistake with my pastoring skills. I asked a question. Did she do it? Whew, that was the wrong question to ask. Even when the young lady finally admitted she did it, it was too late. The cat was out of the bag, so to speak. The message of the cross comes to each of us individually and invites us to see ourselves as sinners. Whew again.

- e. Finally, the message of the cross is narrow. You have to kneel to enter heaven's gates. No exceptions are made to the rule. David Hollinger, professor emeritus of history at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of several well-received works of history, critiqued Billy Graham this week for being too narrow. Graham missed his opportunity, says Hollinger when he focused on "salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone." Hollinger scolds Graham for being too parochial. Graham, he says, should have revised traditional Protestantism in light of modern science and scholarship. He wishes Graham would have promoted "less conversion-centered modes of interaction with the peoples of the globe."

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

1. For people who are being saved, it is the power of God.
2. Power to cleanse even the darkest sin – Isaiah 1:18 – though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as White as Snow. Charles Spurgeon explained this passage this way – though your sins are double-dyed into you, ingrained deeply, the blood of Jesus Christ can cleans.
3. Power to transform the most hardened sinner - conversion is a phenomenon which many of us could testify to today. Charles Spurgeon says it like this: "The unbelievers become devout, the immoral become pure, the dishonest become upright, the blasphemous become gracious, and the unchaste become holy."⁶
4. It is the victory of love over power – The world operates by power. The gospel operates by love. J.K. Rowling, in her Harry Potter books demonstrates this clearly when her arch Villain Voldemort cannot stand to be touched by Harry Potter, the Hero of the series, because Harry had been died for. Power could not stand in love's presence. At the cross, the evil one thought he had won.
5. The cross sets us free – once for all, we have been died for. Christ paid our debt on that cross, and we are free.

⁶ Charles Spurgeon, Sermon from 1 Corinthians 1:18 titled "The Word of the Cross": No. 1611." Preached July 31, 1881. Link: <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols25-27/chs1611.pdf>. Accessed March 3, 2018.

CONCLUSION

1. Chris Tomlin's "At the Cross" – There's a place where mercy reigns and never dies. There's a place where streams of grace flow deep and wide. / Where all the love I've ever found, comes like a flood, comes flowing down. / There's a place where sin and shame are powerless, where my heart has peace with God and forgiveness, where all the love I've ever found, comes like a flood, comes flowing down./ At the cross, at the cross, I surrender my life. I owe all to you. I owe all to you. Where your love ran red, and my sin washed white, I owe all to you. I owe all to you.
2. On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame, / and I love that old Cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain. So I'll cherish the old rugged Cross, till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it some day for a crown
3. When you look at the cross, what do you see? Old, rugged, or unimaginable beauty?

INVITATION