

EASTER SERMON

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

April 1st, 2018 - John 19: 30
Come to the Cross – “The Empty Cross”
“It is Finished”

Opening

Welcome to those just kicking the tires of Christianity and to those who cut your teeth on a church pew.

Jesus' Last Word on the Cross – “It is finished”

1. His last words demonstrated his deity; “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they do; Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise; Woman behold your son, Son Behold your mother; My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. I thirst. It is finished. Into thy hands I commit my spirit.
2. It is finished – in the original Greek, this is only 1 word, but to translate it into English we have to use 3 words.
3. There is a depth and a height to this saying that makes this a river of life. I want to show you today how this one word illustrates, highlights for us an empty cross.

How did Jesus speak from the cross at all?

1. Jesus was flogged and then crucified. This kind of torture tends to decompose the mind.
2. It is nearly impossible for a dying man to collect his thoughts, and if he could, even more difficult to express them so that the words could be understood by someone else.
3. No wonder they call Him the Savior

What was finished?

1. His permission for their control/submission to their power. Much like he slipped the grasp of an angry crowd earlier, he now slips the bonds of the nails, and he dismisses His Spirit. The Centurion said “Surely this was the son of God, and we believe it was because he saw the character of Jesus as He suffered – His selfless love, lack of hate. But what if it was something else? Who dismisses their spirit? Only a God can. I wonder if there was a flash from the cross when he said this.
2. Death itself – the last enemy to be defeated. Jesus could see from the cross to the open door of an empty tomb. He was speaking prophetically.
3. The Devil – he is going to be thrown into a bottomless pit. His defeat is sure.
4. The bridge between God and Man – John 14:6. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.
5. The Atonement for our sins – the wrath of God satisfied. His separation from His Father over; His full obedience to the Father’s will.
6. The unending search for lost children - Luke 15 – the story of the prodigal Son as the seeking Father.

Illustration: Dan Mazzeo’s tells the story of his first-generation Italian American father called “Pop,” who was struggling with metastatic liver and lung cancer. When doctors gave him less than a year, Pop bravely said he wasn’t afraid to die. His wife was already in heaven, and his children grown. But then he learned that his only son, Dan, was going to be a father. When Pop heard the news, he sat up and resolved, “I’m gonna make that.”

The chemo tortured his systems. Some days it was all he could do to mumble, “Bad day,” to those who phoned. But when his granddaughter was born, he insisted on going to the hospital. The 90 minute ride tormented him. Dan wheeled him to the maternity ward. Pop’s arms were too weak, so Dan had to hold the baby for him. But Pop did what he came to do. He leaned over, kissed her, and said, “Sheila Mary, Grandpa loves you very much.” Within seconds, Pop dozed off. Within an hour he was back in the car. Within days he was dead.

What is this love that endures decades, passes on sleep, and resists death to give one kiss? Call it agape love, a love that bears a semblance of God’s. But only a semblance, mind you, never a replica. Our finest love is a preschool watercolor to God’s Rembrandt. His love, says best-selling author Max Lucado, “stands sequoia strong; our best attempts bend like “weeping willows.”¹

7. It’s a call to his bride – I gave my life for you. The wedding supper of the lamb is certain.

What does this Mean?

1. We are loved. What else would/could anyone do to prove their love? Scholar & pastor Henri Nouwen describes the Christian walk as the “life of the beloved. It occurred to Him in the story of Jesus’ baptism, when the Father sends the Spirit and proclaims – You are my son, the beloved; my favor rests on you.”
 - a. The greatest trap in life isn’t success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power are indeed great temptations, but only because we think we need them to be ok. If someone criticizes us, we tend to blame ourselves not for what I did, but for who I am. If you think your problem is arrogance, recognize that arrogance is often our attempt to act in a way, so that no one finds out how weak we think we are.²
 - b. But with Christ’s declaration “It is finished,” you never have to search for love ever again.
2. We are forgiven – our sin has been paid for.
3. We are never alone
4. We have hope – purpose, future, home.

Conclusion

1. When we typically say “the cross is empty” we mean that Jesus isn’t on it anymore, contrasted with the crucifix which depicts Christ still on the cross. The empty cross symbol, for us, is the same as saying “the empty tomb.” He is alive. Yes, he suffered and died on the cross, but he is no longer there.
2. But there is more –
 - a. When we recognize that the cross is empty, we are saying that it was an empty threat.
 - b. When we say the cross is empty, we are saying that it had no power to hold him.
 - c. The empty cross is a reminder that Christ was victorious. Death and the devil have been defeated.
3. What does this mean for those of us in Christ?
 - a. Death has no power over the loved ones you’ve lost, because He didn’t lose him. If they were in Christ, then they are not dead. They live even now.
 - b. Death holds no fear for us now?
 - c. Our sin, as deeply stained as we have become – is washed as white as snow. The power of God wipes away all of our tears, and cures the cancerous effects of sin.

¹ From Max Lucado’s 3:16. Nashville, Thomas Nelson Press, 2007, p. 38.

² Henri J.M. Nouwen, “Life of the Beloved.” New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1992, pp. 30-2.

- d. The empty cross means we have power and purpose in this life too.

Invitation

1. The first recorded description of “Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressive” (FOP) came from French physician Guy Patin in 1692. He said “I saw a woman today who finally became hard as wood all over.”
 - a. He unknowingly introduced the world to a cryptic disease that slowly, irreversibly turns its victims into a mass of solid bone. Healthy skeletal systems are hinged together with ligaments and tendons. FOP hardens the soft tissues, like muscles and tendons, rendering the body an ossified suit of armor.
 - b. But there is a disease which is worse than this – not the calcification of the body, but of the will. Mount Rushmore is more pliable. An anvil is more tender.³
2. Karen Hill is the executive assistant to Max Lucado. She once saw such stubbornness in a cow. The cow stuck her nose into a paint can and couldn’t shake it off. Can-nosed cows can’t breathe well, and they can’t drink or eat at all. Karen and her family tried to help, but when they got close, the cow ran for pasture. They chased the cow for 3 days. Finally, using pickup trucks and ropes, they cornered and de-canned the cow. Seen any ca-nosed people lately? Malnourished souls? Dehydrated hearts? People who can’t take a deep breath? All because they stuck their noses where they shouldn’t and when God came to help, they ran away.⁴
3. Invitation to Salvation
4. Invitation to rededication
5. Invitation to row the boat to join the Kingdom team. To use your gifts.

³ Lucado., 25-26.

⁴ Lucado., 28-9.