

# THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

by

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**SERMON FOUR**

**“THE DEATH OF THE CROSS”**

Text: Philippians 2:8. **“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”**

In the New Testament the death of Christ is directly mentioned 175 times. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John devote more than one-fifth of the writing in these four books of the Bible to an account of the death of Christ.

I thought, what a contrast with the writings about other men. Even in the histories of the greatest men of the world, the writers devote all their time to relating the life of man and usually one brief paragraph to his death.

But here we have four writers, writing a life story of the Christ and they take up more than one-fifth of all their writings in telling about His death. Now why is that true? Why that emphasis on the death of Christ?

There are multiplied thousands of people today who call themselves Christians that put no emphasis on the death of Christ — no more than on the death of any other man, yet the Holy Spirit, inspiring those gospel writers, sees such importance in the death of Christ that He is led to so emphasize that death even in spite of the fact that John says that, if all the things which Christ taught and said and did were written, **“I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”**

Yet the writers take one-fifth of their writings and devote it to the death of this man. It is because the death of Jesus Christ is the most important event that ever took place in time or eternity. The death of the cross is far more important in God’s scheme of redemption than the beautiful life that Christ lived. For men are not saved by imitating the beautiful life of Christ, however beautiful that life is and it is the most wonderful life about which anybody ever read.

If you tell me, as a sinner, that my only hope of salvation, as some try to tell me, is in imitating the life of Christ, and I look into that life with all of its beauty and sinlessness and all of its perfection, and you tell me that I must live like that in order to be saved, you hold out to me no hope whatever of salvation. You only increase the depths of my despair and hopelessness. For when I behold that life and then take a look into my sinful life, I must say I cannot attain unto it.

But, when the Holy Spirit points me to a cross and tells me there is a fountain for sin and uncleanness being opened there, and that in His death “**He tasted death for every man**”, then my poor heart cries,

“Lead me to that fountain,  
That I may be cleansed from my sins!  
For God knows  
That is what I need.”

And a hope wells up within my soul when He tells me that in His death there is a death that means the end of sin — that means the “**end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.**”

The reason the writers give so much space to His death is because it means death to sin that has barred the way of man back into fellowship with God, it is also death to him who has the power of death. In the death of the cross Christ destroyed him who had the power of death.

I shall never forget how I used to feel as a lad when I would go to that little country cemetery by the side of that little country church and see them take a casket out there. Then they buried in pine boxes, and hauled them to the cemetery in wagons. Men would come and take that pine box out of the wagon and carry it with slow steps while the rest followed behind.

We stood there and watched while they took wagon lines and let that box down into that new-made grave, then we would stand there while the neighbors shoveled the dirt into the grave on top of that wooden box. The rumble of those clods on top of that box sent a chill into my soul as a little boy, and had a nameless horror to me somehow. But one day Christ came into my heart, and from that day until this the fear of death has been gone.

An illustration from experience: I went into a hospital in Little Rock some time ago, and met a lady walking down the corridor. She said, “Brother Hankins, I am so glad to see you. There is an unsaved young woman here who, I believe, is going to die. We called for a preacher and he came to see her and talked with her, but he didn’t tell her how to be saved. I know you know how to tell the way of salvation.”

I went to the room and as I stood by the bed and held that little woman by the hand, I told her about Jesus. There I led her step by step to the cross, and when I left the hospital room that dying young woman looked into my face and said, “Thank you for coming”

I said, “How is it?” Is it all right now?”

She said, “Yes, it is all right.” I went out there a day or two later and she was under an oxygen tent — so near death that the death rattle was in her throat and a hoarseness in her voice that you could hardly understand what she said, I asked, “How is it now?”

She said, “O, Brother Hankins, before you came that day, I was so afraid to die, but now I’m not afraid.”

That was what Paul meant when he said, “**O death where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**”

Jesus Christ in His death on the cross plucked the sting out of death and it is gone forever. That is the reason why the writers of the gospel have so much to say about the death of the cross.

There are four things I want to say about the death of the cross.

### **I. It Was A Shameful Death.**

History tells us that Roman slaves were the only class of people that the Roman government ever subjected to death by crucifixion.

If a Roman slave was guilty of murder or some other heinous crime he was stripped naked before the gazing eyes of the public and put to death on a cross. And they took my Lord, the Lord of glory and stripped Him naked and exposed Him to the gazing eyes of the sinning world and to the shameful death of the cross in order that I might be saved. But, blessed be God, He says, in His Word that Jesus “**endured the cross despising the shame for the joy that was set out before Him.**”

For the joy that was set out before Him, the shame of the cross was as nothing before Him. There are only two things in the Bible mentioned as bringing joy to the heart of Christ, and this is one of them. That as He went to the cross even with all the shame of it, there was a joy in the heart of the Son of God that was so great that it made the death of the cross disdainful in His sight:—made its shame as nothing to Him. What was that joy? It was the joy of breaking the power of Satan in human lives, the joy of putting His heel in the serpent’s head.

The greatest expression of joy and victory in all the Word of God and in all time fell from the lips of the Son of God in His last words on the cross.

When he had bled the last drop of His blood away; when He had completed the expiation for sin; when He had paid the debt of sin in full; when He had paid the penalty for my redemption and yours; when He had opened heaven’s door and brought the mercy seat down to every soul; when He had descended into hell itself — Yes, He dipped His soul into the very dregs of hell and was abandoned of God while He tasted death for every man; in that hour when God had turned His back on Jesus, He “**who knew no sin**” dipped His soul into hell, and was made to be sin for our sins, “**that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.**”

When it was all over; when the price had been paid and He had gone down into hell and come up again, “**He cried with a loud voice**” — words in which you can feel the very throb of joy and victory — “**IT IS FINISHED.**”

It wasn't the cry of a dying martyr. It was the shout of a victor, "**For the joy that was set out before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame.**"

## II. It Was A Voluntary Death

Hear Him as He says, "**Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me but I lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received from my Father.**"

When Jesus Christ went to the cross it was a voluntary act.

- It wasn't the power of eternal love.
- It wasn't the chains of Roman soldiers and Roman legions that bound His hands.
- It wasn't the nails of Roman soldiers driven with a hammer that fastened His hands and feet to the cross.

It was the constraining love of a divine compassion for souls paying the price of redemption of a lost and sinning race. Jesus said as He faced the cross. "**What shall I say? Father save me from this hour.**" Then He said, in the next breath, "**But for this cause came I unto this hour.**"

**"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."**

Jesus' going to the cross explains the MUST in John 3:14. Because there was no other way by which man might be saved. And so, since there was no other way, since sin was so exceedingly sinful, since it had caused such a gulf between God and man, Jesus voluntarily went to the cross.

You remember when He said to Peter that night, "**Put up your sword**"? Then He turned to His disciples and said, "**Even now I could summon twelve legions of angels.**"

How powerful an angel is I don't know. But I do know that a legion was six thousand, and twelve legions would be seventy two thousand.

I know that one angel came one night in answer to a king's prayer and went into the camp of Sennacherib and the next morning one hundred and eighty-five thousand lay dead in that camp.

I know that an angel went into the lion's den with Daniel and the next morning Daniel said, "**O King, live forever. God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths.**"

An angel of the Lord walked into the fiery furnace with the Hebrew Children—that furnace which was made seven times hot—so hot that the men cast them in were slain by the heat of it—and those three Hebrew children came out of that furnace without even the smell of smoke on them. Jesus said He had the power to summon twelve legions of angels to His defense. What did He mean? He meant that there were not enough armies in all the empires of the earth to take Him to the cross. But the Son of God laid down his life that we might live.

### III. It Was A Foreordained Death

It was not only a shameful and a voluntary death, but it was a foreordained death. I mean by that that God had planned it.

O friend, listen tonight, your redemption and mine is no afterthought with God, it is no experiment with God.

I once heard a preacher say that when God created man He put him in the garden of Eden in innocency, and when he fell God put him under the law of conscience. When he failed in this God destroyed the race with the flood and started man over under human government. Then when he failed God tried him again under the law.

God called a council in heaven and said, "What will we do? Man has failed in the garden, failed under conscience, failed under human government, failed under the law. Now what are we to do?"

This one and that proposed a remedy and a solution to the problem. "After a while," said the preacher, "Jesus the Son of God stepped up and said, "I tell you what I will do. I will go down and die on the cross in man's place. I will take the penalty of man's sin upon myself!"

Now the trouble with that is that there is not a word of gospel truth in it.

O friends, before man was ever created the Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world. Peter said on Pentecost, "**Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ye have — crucified and slain.**"

He meant by "**determinate counsel of God**" that it had been deliberately planned by the wisdom of God, and, as far as God's eternal purpose was concerned He was slain before the foundation of the world.

God, foreseeing and foreknowing all things, knew that man would sin and would need a Saviour. God knew that sin would ruin, wreck and damn his life and separate him from God. God knew that man would be helpless and hopeless. So, before God ever laid the foundation of the earth, or created the stars, moon, or sun, He made a plan of salvation, and in the purpose and plan of God, Jesus went to the cross then and there.

Listen to me friend, you who are saved as well as you who are not, the price that was paid for our redemption was not just six hours of suffering on the cross. For the face of the Son of God was set toward the cross from all eternity. And since God sees not in piecemeal—for there is no such thing as time to God—it is all the eternal now—the eternal present — seeing the end and the beginning at the same time; seeing from eternity all the way to the cross, in anticipation of the cross God and the Son were suffering for man's redemption from eternity.

There is no greater suffering than by anticipation. The heart of God was broken by the cross before the foundation of the world.

O the price that Jesus, the Son of God, paid for the redemption of my soul!

No wonder Paul said, **“Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”**

Are you under any obligation to God? Yes, if you are saved today, you owe God everything, when I think of what I might have been had it not been for Jesus—had it not been that Jesus saved my precious mother and father and gave me the privilege of being born in a Christian home and taught from the Book of God from infancy, and led to the cross in childhood, O what I owe God—what I owe Christ!

#### **IV. It Was A Substitutionary Death**

They told the truth when they said, **“He saved others, himself he cannot save.”** For if He saves himself He cannot save others.

**“For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

On the cross He is tasting death for every man. **“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.”**

I can’t understand it, but that day in those hours of darkness, all the sin in the world was gathered into one awful bundle and piled upon the Son of God. Yes, more than that, it pressed upon His soul until He Himself was made sin. It focused its awful stain, it’s awful curse, it’s awful blackness upon the Son of God, while all the powers of hell gathered around the cross and the Son of God was made a curse for us. **“For it is written, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”**

He took my place. God had said, **“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”** God had said, **“The wages of sin is death.”**

- No wonder the sun went out in the sky. It refused to look upon its creator when He became sin.
- No wonder the thick darkness gathered around the cross. It is the outer darkness of hell.
- No wonder this earth reeled and rocked on its axis like a drunk man.

The Son of God is dipping His soul into hell. His soul is made an offering for sin. For it is written, **“He had done no violence, neither had any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; he hath put him to grief; then thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”**

He tasted death for every man. **“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.”**

He took my place, and by the grace of God, I have the privilege of taking His place, who, from all eternity, was the only begotten in the bosom of the Father; who, from all eternity, was the firstborn of every creature.

In the death of the cross He offers to exchange places with me.

Here I sit in the place of death. For **“he that believeth not the Son is condemned already.”** The sentence is already passed—the death sentence is hanging over my soul, because **“all have sinned and come short of glory of God.”** I sit in the place of death, a condemned soul, for **“He that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”**

And here I am waiting for the death sentence to be executed —waiting for the hour when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon my soul that shall be forever banished from God; waiting to hear Him say, **“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”**

And there He sits at the right hand of God, beloved of the Father, and He says to me, **“I will take your place, the place of death and condemnation. I will bare my heart to the wrath of God.”**

And that day on Calvary all the demands of divine justice and divine wrath against sin focused upon His soul. **“He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied, for he shall bear their iniquities.”**

And friends, this is God’s way of salvation. By faith I accept Christ and all that He has done for me and take His place at the right hand of the Father as a son of God—**“Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ,”**—never to know condemnation any more. **“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”**

In the death of the cross He did more than that, He transferred to me all His righteousness. He clothed my poor soul in His own perfect righteousness. He did for me what the old father did for the prodigal son. He took off my rags of filth and shame, my rags of self-righteousness and sin, took off the filthy rags of the far-county, and put on the best robe He had—the robe of His own blessed righteousness.

And now God says in the words of David, **“Blessed is the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works . . . Blessed are they whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”**

In the word **“impute”** there is the figure of a man who takes a coat off his own body and puts it on the body of another. And when I am redeemed, washed in His blood, I am then clothed in linen pure and white which, God says, is the righteousness of the saints —not their own righteousness, but, bless God, **“the righteousness of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”**—justified before God and my sins covered.

No wonder Paul said, **“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”**

I have taken His place as a son of God. He has taken my place of condemnation and death. He has taken my rags of sin upon himself. My garment of sin has been laid upon Him, and I have received the garment of His spotless righteousness.

The old Preacher was right when, upon being asked if there was anything that God couldn't do, he replied, "Yes, there is one thing God can't do—He can't see my sin no more since I been clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, my Lord."

That is the reason David said, "**As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.**" And again. "**Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.**" My sins have been covered by the righteousness of Christ which God had lain on me and it comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

It is the same righteousness that God reckoned unto Abraham when it was said of him, "**Abraham believeth God and his faith was reckoned for righteousness.**"

This is what Paul meant when he said, "**By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it being dead yet speaketh.**" Abel brought his blood offering and looked away by faith to Calvary.

God led Abraham out one night under the stars and said, "**In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.**"

Paul said that God preached the gospel to Abraham that night in that He said, "**Seed as of one and not seeds as of many.**" God told him about Christ that night, and Abraham believed God and put his hand in God's hand and his trust in the coming Christ. And God's Word says that Abraham was justified by faith and that his faith was counted for righteousness.

God offers the same to you by faith in the cross. Will you receive it?

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