

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

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SERMON SEVEN

THE PIVOTAL POINT AND FACT OF CHRISTIANITY

By

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“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

There are certain great fundamental facts which embody both the theological and practical truths of Christianity. All these facts center in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The theological terms that set forth these facts are: the Incarnation, or the miraculous conception and Virgin Birth of Jesus; the Crucifixion, or the atoning death of Jesus; the Resurrection, or the Bodily coming forth from the grave of Jesus; the Ascension and Exaltation, or the going home of Jesus. All of these facts, which are well authenticated, form the foundation upon which the superstructure of the Christian religion is built.

These facts are all vitally related to each other and are interdependent upon each other. Take any one of them away and you undermine the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Among this quartet of glorious facts, there is one that is pivotal. It is the Crucifixion, or the Cross of Christ. The Cross symbolizes the Death of Jesus Christ, which is the pivotal truth of Christianity, its very heart, its life blood. Without it, there would be no Christianity.

We, of course, understand that the Resurrection is God’s “Amen” to the atonement Jesus made in His death upon the Cross. The worth of Jesus lay not in the life He lived, but in the death He died.

“The Son of God died. This astounding fact is the moral center of the universe. Bygone eternity knew no other future; an eternity to come shall know no other past. That death was this world’s crisis. It was the most stupendous event in the history of man, the only event in the history of God.”

The Crucifixion was the noon hour, not only of time, but of eternity; it was the pivotal hour in the life both of heaven and earth. Around this fact, all the truth of the Christian religion revolves.

The theme of the Bible is: “**The Lamb Slain from the Foundation of the World.**” Someone has said, “Cut the Bible anywhere and it bleeds; it is red with redemption truth.” The Heart of the Bible is the Cross of Christ, and at the Heart of the Cross of Christ you have the very Heart of God Himself. At the Cross we see revealed the gracious provision of God for the spiritual redemption of the human race.

The nature of man’s need for salvation and the nature of God who provided the needed salvation, made the Cross necessary. A salvation that will save man from his sin and reconcile him unto God must be:

- A salvation that God can accept as wholly, sufficient and satisfactory unto Himself.
- A salvation that deals effectually with sin and all its consequences.
- A salvation that carries out the God imposed sentence of death on the sinner.
- A salvation that accomplishes the defeat, dethronement and destruction of Satan.
- A salvation that will ultimately be consummated by bringing the saved sinner to the heavenly home in his resurrection and glorified body.

No man in any age, past, present or future, could ever accomplish such salvation. It could be produced by God only, and God could produce it only through the sacrificial atoning death of Jesus Christ upon the Cross. God’s Holiness demands that He condemn sin and command the sinner to depart. His love must open its arms to the sinner and bid him come. A Holy God could not tolerate sin; a loving God could not turn away from the sinner. God’s Holiness and Love are melted together at the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Respectable sinners will flock to churches to hear preachers preach on the Life of Jesus—His teaching, His Ethics, His Ministry of Mercy, His Perfect Life. Some will listen occasionally to a sermon on the Death of Christ, provided that Death is preached only as an example of sacrificial love or as a culminating event in the life of obedience, or as an act of martyrdom in a good cause.

The Death of Jesus, presented as an atonement for sin, is repulsive to many in the pew and the pulpit today, and yet, this was the chief theme of the Apostles, and to them the sufferings and Death of Christ were vital in the sinner’s salvation because of their expiatory nature.

Self-righteous humanity feels no need for a Saviour. A college young man recently was pressed to accept Jesus as his Saviour. He said, “Why do I need anyone to die for me? I do not want anyone’s blood shed for me.” The root of this sentiment is self-righteousness, and it is because man in his self-righteousness feels no need for salvation that the Cross becomes repellant.

The Incarnation, to which we have already referred was not an end, but a means to an end. In itself, it had no redemptive value, but it paved the way for His Death, which alone has redemptive value. It could never make an end of sin, but it did give to the world a Saviour.

Our Lord Himself and every New Testament writer set forth the Death of Christ as the goal of Incarnation. He was born not merely a man, but a Saviour. He came not only to live, but to save, and to save He must die. All of this makes the Cross the pivotal fact of the Christian religion.

From a study of what the Bible teaches about the Cross, and facing the Cross as the pivotal fact in God's redemptive work, the following great truths which center in the Cross suggest themselves to us:

I. The Cross of Christ Is the Great Spiritual Divide for the Human Race

The Cross of Christ makes a clean-cut cleavage between two spheres; the sphere of death, darkness and disorder, and the sphere of life, light and liberty, and challenges sinners to decide in which they purpose to live. The Cross is the battlefield on which the conflict between Satan and God over the sovereignty of human lives is being waged, and it compels men to take sides, either for or against God.

The Cross marks the boundary line between the Kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God, and it calls subjects in the one to come out and become subjects of the other. The Cross finds men living on the plane of the spiritual, and then appeals to them to enter the Open Door. The Cross of Christ is the Great Divide. It separates men into two classes, the unsaved and the saved.

“For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

II. The Cross of Christ Makes a Double Exposure

At the Cross, as nowhere else, is revealed the hatred of man for God and the Love of God for man. Sin is seen at its worst, and love is seen at its best in the Cross. Man's sin and God's Love both reach a climax on Calvary. The hideousness of one and the glory of the other are brought out into sharpest relief.

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2: 23).

The desperate, despicable wickedness of the human heart is uncovered at Calvary. All the rebellion, self-will and enmity of the natural man found vent in this one act.

In the Crucifixion of the Holy One, sin came out in the open and disclosed its inwardness. Sin nailed the Saviour to the Cross and by doing so exposed to the world its fearful hideousness. Sinners stained their hands with the Blood of their Saviour and thereby revealed the length, the height and depth of the infamy of sin. However, sin could not outstrip the Love of God.

The Cross of Christ is the Heart of God, broken by sin.

- It tells us that God, who must punish sin, also loves and will forgive and save the sinner.
- It discovers to us the unfathomable depths of God's Love. Christ, in the laying down of His Sinless Life in Death as the sinner's substitute.
- It sets forth the perfect outshining of His infinite limitless love.

With the most perfect comprehension of what the sin of man was on the one hand, and of what the mind of God toward sin was on the other, there went up from the depths of the Heart of Christ a perfect “Amen” to the righteous judgment of God against sin, and a willingness to bear that judgment.

“For God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5: 8).

III. The Cross of Christ Is the Point and Place of Victory

Sin is the big problem in God’s universe. All other problems, of whatever nature, emit from this one. The sweat of grinding toil, the suffering of broken hearts, the sorrow of the world’s maladjustment all find their source and beginning in sin. God had but one enemy in His Universe—Satan. All other enmities, whether among angels or men, have ultimate source in Satan. To regain His rightful sovereignty over the world in the human race, God must win a double victory, salvation from sin and all its consequences, and deliverance from Satan and all his allies. This victory was won through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Sin brought upon man four terrible consequences, for which Christ assumed responsibility and over which He got the victory.

The first is Guilt: Sin made the whole world guilty before God.

“That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19)

The whole man is defiled and depraved. That this guilt may be removed, Christ **“became sin”** and God treated Him as sin.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

The second is death: The sentence of death rested upon the whole human race.

As the last Adam, Jesus Christ assumed all responsibility for the first Adam’s sin and its consequences; therefore, He executed the death sentence upon the sinner by giving His own life.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5: 6)

The third consequence of sin is the curse: Sin is lawlessness and the penalty for broken law is the curse. Jesus Christ acknowledged the justice of God’s judgment upon sin, and voluntarily offered to assume even this responsibility on the sinner’s behalf.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: For it is written, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13)

The fourth consequence of sin is the wrath of God: God's Holiness demanded that He take some action against it.

God was compelled to decree that sin would bar sinners from His presence through time and eternity. Here, again, Jesus Christ assumed responsibility for the presence of sin in men, and on the Cross of Calvary bore the full force of God's wrath against it, even to the point of conscious separation from His Father's presence. In becoming the sin-bearer, Jesus fully met and solved the problem of sin. "In His death everything was made His, that sin had made ours. Everything in sin except its sinfulness."

The Cross is the culminating point of victory, over not only the consequences of sin in man, but Satan also. The victory over the devil, commenced in the wilderness, continued in Gethsemane and culminated on Calvary. Christ's cry of victory from Calvary's Cross, "**It is Finished**," was Satan's death knell.

This victory is vouchsafed unto us through the Death of Christ.

IV. The Cross Is the Divinely Provided Meeting Place

Sin made all mankind unrighteous in the sight of God and created a chasm between a Righteous God and unrighteous sinners.

Sin also totally disqualified man for doing anything to bridge this chasm; therefore, if any man is to have access to God, then God must provide a meeting place between Himself and the sinner.

There is a word that is unspeakably precious which carries the thought expressed with reference to this meeting place. That word is "**propitiation**." It means "*Mercy Seat*" or "*Covering*," a divinely provided meeting place.

In the Old Testament, the Great High Priest took the Blood of the Sacrificial Lamb into the Holy of Holies and with it sprinkled the "**Mercy Seat**." The blood-sprinkled "**Mercy Seat**" provided a meeting place between God and the sinner where the guilty could come to God without remembrance of his offenses and without fear of judgment, and where a Holy One could receive the sinner without compromise and yet without condemnation.

This is a place where "a Holy God could righteously meet a sinful man and a sinful man could fearlessly meet a Holy God."

God sent forth His Well Beloved Son to be such a "**propitiation**" for all the guilty sinners in the world. Through the shedding of the Precious Blood of the Lamb of God on the Cross of Calvary, such a covering for sin and for broken law was provided. In His Death.

Jesus Christ honors God's Holy Law by bearing in full the punishment meted out to the sinner for breaking it. Thus, in the Crucified Lord, the sinner finds a meeting place with God and a way of access into His favor.

V. The Cross Is a Divinely Prepared Turning Point

Sin has caused man to be offended toward God as truly as it has caused God to be offended toward man. The Cross of Christ shall have failed to deal adequately with sin, if it only removes the cause of offense in its Godward aspect and does not equally remove it in its manward aspect, and this is exactly what the Cross of Christ has done.

The Son of God endured the sufferings and shame of the Cross that He might tell a world of sinners who have turned their backs on God that God loves them with an everlasting love.

The Cross is a demonstration of that love.

When the sinner sees the Saviour suffering, the just for the unjust; when he sees Christ crucified by his sin, dying his death, enduring his punishment, then his heart is melted; his rebellion is removed; his whole attitude toward God is changed from enmity to love; from estrangement to fellowship; from indifference to devotion; from fear to faith; from shame to peace. **“We love Him because He first loved us.”**

It is when the sinner reaches this point that he finds the turning place in his life. Thus the Cross becomes the divinely prepared turning point for the sinner.

VI. The Cross of Christ Means the End of an Old Creation and the Beginning of a New

The natural man is a slave **“sold under sin”**; but **“where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”** God’s boundless grace was undaunted by the sinner’s helpless, hopeless condition. God’s right to proprietorship through creation still remained, but it had been lost to Him through man’s surrender of himself to the sovereignty of another.

God would Himself go down unto the slave market of sin and buy back that which was His Own. He would take the sinner out of the sphere of Satan, out of the slave market of sin and set him free in the glorious liberty of a new life in Christ. Such redemption demanded a ransom. It required a life for a life. To redeem the race from the bondage of sin involved paying of a price which was nothing less than the Precious Blood of the Spotless Lamb of God.

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the Precious Blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Peter 1:18, 19).

In the Cross of Christ, God rejected the old order of fallen, sinful humanity **“sold under sin”** through the first Adam’s disobedience that He might raise up a new order of Holy Heavenly beings redeemed from sin through the last Adam’s obedience. The Death of Christ upon the Cross not only redeems us, but it recreates; it not only provides complete emancipation from the old life, but an abundant entrance into a new life. **“And if any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature”** (II Corinthians 5:17).

VII. The Cross of Christ Is the Place of Decision That Determines Destiny

The Bible is clear beyond debate that there are two eternal destinies to which men go after the earthly human life is over, Heaven and Hell. Heaven for the saved and Hell for the unsaved, and it is at the cross, and about the cross, the human will makes the decision that determines destiny.

“The Cross of Christ has measured out the moral distance between God and man and has left them as far asunder as the Throne of Heaven and the gates of Hell.”

It is equally true, praise God, that the Cross of Christ has measured out the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of God in the gift of the Redeemer who closed the gates of Hell and opened the gates of Heaven for all who will believe. In tenderest compassion, God broods over every sinner and bleeds for his sins. His great yearning heart of love reaches to the uttermost corner of His universe and seeks to draw each heart unto Himself through His Son. God invites all sinners to come to Him and promises eternal life to all who believe and receive His Son.

Countless sinners, through the ages, have refused the grace of God manifested in His salvation and have rejected Christ the Saviour, but the Death of Christ on the Cross of Calvary opened a way back to God for all men everywhere.

“No man is lost for want of an atonement, or because there is any barrier in the way of his salvation, other than his own most free and wicked will.”

All sinners facing the cross of Christ must make a decision. There is no possibility for neutrality at the Cross. All men must take some position with reference to the Cross, they are compelled to be for or against Christ. The decision one makes here will determine destiny. Jesus said, “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.” The decision men make with their free will determines destiny. Oh that every lost sinner would cease “**halting between two opinions**” and at Calvary embrace the Christ of the Cross by a decision that will mean salvation now, and the Heavenly home by and by.

“I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
He fixed his languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.

“Sure, never, till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look:
It seemed to charge me with His death
Though not a word He spoke.

“My conscience felt and owned the guilt,
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt
And helped to nail Him there.

“Alas! I knew not what I did,—
But now my tears are vain:
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord had slain.

“A second look He gave, which said,
‘I freely all forgive:
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I died that thou mayest live.’”

Dr. Ira Luther Yearby was born at Raleigh, N. C, Nov. 12, 1890. Pastorates: Hico, Tex., 1920-23; Tarboro, N. C, 1923-28; Earle St., Greenville, S. C, 1928-32; El Paso, Tex., April 1, 1932 to date.

First Baptist Church, El Paso, has 1,678 members. Since Apr. 1, 1932, under Dr. Yearby's ministry, there have been 1,148 additions. Total contributions have been \$194,850. Their record S. S. attendance is 1,020. Total value of all church property is \$206,500 (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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