

Sermon: The Cross and Experience

Text: Galatians 2:19-21

Gary L. Wackler

March 1, 2009

Introduction: In the time of Jesus, the Jews looked at death on the cross as a scandal, and the Gentiles viewed it as foolishness. Why would the Messiah die in a way that appeared weak?

I Corinthians 1:20 - 23 (NIV) ²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

When I hear talk of the cross I know it means I have been saved.

What I have noticed is under normal conditions no one likes to die. Also, talk of death is routinely avoided, because for many, it is too painful. Most people I have known did everything to stave off what is an inevitability for everyone.

Near the end of his life, Pulitzer Prize winner, William Saroyan placed a phone call to the Associated Press posing a question for the occasion of his death. He said, "Everybody has got to die. But I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?" - Reader's Digest, Dec. 1981, p. 136

I suppose it is the uncertainty of it all. Short of silliness like in the TV shows: *Ghost Whisperer* and *Medium*, though, interviews with those who have died are difficult. Yet the bible talks freely about death and even recommends it for everyone.

Our text today talks about this experience involving the cross.

Galatians 2:19-21 (NIV) ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

To benefit from Jesus' death on the cross, there is a relational process that must take place. Paul says:

I. I Must Die (Reality, vv. 19-20a, 21c).

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time--death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.” -Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 99

One of the reasons I must die is:

A. I am a lawbreaker.

This statement comes from Paul, a previous Pharisee, who had been a strict adherent of the Law. Paul thought for a while that he was doing pretty well with God.

Philippians 3:4b-6 (NIV) ⁴b If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

On the road to Damascus, Paul realizes his mistake of thinking he could earn his own salvation. He had been doing his best and at the same time opposing God and destroying God's own Son's body. And he said later:

Philippians 3:7-9 (NIV) ⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

“The Law demands, forbids, judges, condemns, but it cannot produce life!”
- Ridderbos, p. 104

And I don't know if you have noticed, but:

B. I am not perfect. - no one is!

No matter how hard I try I continue to “make mistakes” (sin). Paul understood finally.

Romans 7:12-13 (NIV) ¹²So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. ¹³Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

The Law is not defective, I am. Jesus’ way is not easier or lax, in fact, Christ’s demands actually exceed the righteousness prescribed by the Law.

A rich young ruler approached Jesus once and assured the Messiah that he had kept the law perfectly. Jesus insisted that he lacked something and asked him to sell his possessions and give to the poor and follow Him (**Matthew 19:16ff.**).

Q. Do you remember what the young man’s response was?

A. “He went away sad” (**19:22**).

Matthew 19:23-26 (NIV) ²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Jesus knew what the young man would give up, and what he would not. We can only die to self with God’s help. We cannot save ourselves. No one is that good!

The only good outcome for anyone is that they die:

C. With Christ.

If you die *without* Christ you are lost forever and eternally separated from God.

This death “with Christ” of course can not be physical one. We are nearly 2000 years removed from that historical reality. So that is impossible.

Q. So what does it mean to be crucified with Christ?

A. It seems to me it must have something to do with giving up all rights to your life.

It means that you will do whatever is necessary to demonstrate obedience to God and love for others.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV) ¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The Christian church is often wrongly accused of teaching that baptism saves you. The truth is: we have always believed that Jesus is the Savior, but it is in baptism that death to self can be both demonstrated and experienced.

Romans 6:3 (NIV) ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

When James Calvert went as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the captain of the ship sought to turn him back, crying out... "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages"

Calvert only replied, "We died before we came here." In short, James Calvert had appropriated and had put into practice the truth of **Galatians 2:20** and had identified with the Cross of Christ. He had relinquished his life, having died to James Calvert, to the world, to the flesh, and to the devil. [-www.preceptaustin.org](http://www.preceptaustin.org)

While most of us try to avoid death at all costs

II. Jesus Chose to Die (Remedy, v. 20c)

God is for us; He gave us his Son. Christ is for us; He gave us his life!

A. Jesus gave his life in my place. - insert your own name here...

This was a voluntary act on Jesus' part. He had submitted his will to that of the Father. Jesus never paints an easy life for those who would follow him.

"In Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, a young French aristocrat was condemned to die by the guillotine during the bloody French Revolution. His punishment was based solely on his forefathers' crimes against the peasantry. The hour before his execution he was visited by a young English friend who could have passed for his twin. After the guard left, the friend overpowered the doomed man with an anesthetic and exchanged clothes with him. Then, pretending to be the one condemned to die, he called the jailor and asked that his unconscious 'visitor,' supposedly overcome with grief, be removed and returned to his home. The nobleman was thus saved from death.

On his way to the guillotine, the young Englishmen spoke these final words: ‘It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done...’ And he comforted himself with these words: ...“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; - [John 11:25 \(NIV\)](#)”

Jesus’ death on the cross was the penalty for *our* sin. No deception here. He was *everyone’s* substitute. Jesus’ sacrifice at the cross was an historic moment for all of humanity. It is in that one glorious act that God provided redemption and reconciliation.

B. Because He and the Father love me.

If you were to ask a loving mother of a large family which child she would be willing to give up, I’m sure she would think your question was absurd. Susannah Wesley, for example, had 19 sons and daughters. Among them were John and Charles, who spearheaded the evangelical revival in 18th-century England. Yet if you were to read the letters she wrote to each of her children, you would marvel at her concern for their unique personalities and problems. It was as if each child was her one and only offspring.

That’s a picture of how much God cares about you. If you are ever tempted to wonder if He knows you exist or cares what happens to you, remember what Jesus did for you on the cross. That’s how much He loves you.—Vernon C. Grounds

“Not the nails, but His wondrous love for me, Kept my Lord on the cross of Calvary; Oh, what power could hold Him there—All my sin and shame to bear!” —Keller

III. I Can Live (Reward, [v. 20bc](#)).

A. By faith

Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God. This definition emphasizes that saving faith is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me... Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, the word “trust” is a better word to use in contemporary culture than the word “faith” or “belief.” The reason is that we can “believe” something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it. - Grudem, W. A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*

B. With Christ

If we are with Christ, in Christ, we are saved. No matter what happens in life we have a companion and friend, Someone who loves us more than His own life.

Now that we have died at our baptisms with Christ, it frees us to live a life like His-resurrected and no longer afraid of death.

In this miraculous transition from death to life we are “liberated from the curse as well as the power of sin.” -see Ridderbos, p. 106

The Spirit reveals Christ in us and through us. “His death on the cross is at stake” as we live our lives in this time and place.

We dare not belittle, ignore, or devalue what Christ has already accomplished on the cross by the way we live. We cannot save ourselves through being good, let alone being perfect. Only his sacrifice and grace are sufficient.

“Paul’s experience sets forth an either-or choice: either attempt to attain righteousness ‘through the law’ and so negate the value of Christ’s death ([Gal. 2:21](#)) or die to the Law by participation in the death of Christ and so live to God by the indwelling life of Christ.” -*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 331

Conclusion: You can say a lot of nice things about what Jesus both said and did, but what He did on the cross is incomparable. He gave himself up for you and me. No one else would ever do that. The cross made salvation possible for everyone. And for Christians, the cross provides an example of how we should live everyday. In a world that is filled with “takers,” there needs to be an infusion of “givers.”

Speaking of Jesus, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “His life on earth is not finished yet for he continues to live in the lives of his followers.” - *Cost of Discipleship*, p. 343

“The whole of Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men.” - J. Denney quoted by F. F. Bruce in NIGTC, p. 146

I know it sounds counter-intuitive, but if you are not already a follower of Jesus Christ, you must die so you can live. Time may be short; eternity is long. God calls for a decision to be made. Death or life is the choice.