

Centrality of the Cross

by Dennis Kinlaw

The centrality of the cross is the key to being filled with the Spirit and living a life of freedom and fruitfulness.

Duration: 36:22

Scripture: Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:23, John 3:14-15, John 6:53-54, John 10:11, John 12:24

Topics: "Cross of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of publicly declaring one's faith in Christ. They emphasize that becoming a Christian means a complete change in lifestyle and a willingness to be identified as a follower of Christ. The speaker also highlights the sacrificial nature of Jesus' mission, as he willingly laid down his life for his sheep. They encourage the audience to consider their own commitment to Christ and to take up their cross, reminding them that the only regret they will have is if they fail to do so.

Transcript

The first public word ever pronounced about Jesus was, here he is, you've made your sacrifices and killed your lambs, now God is ready to kill his. So his presentation to Israel was the sentence of death. Shadow was always there.

You will remember that from things like, uh, when Nicodemus came to see him in the night and he said, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up. This he spoke of his death. To the feeding of the five thousand where he said, you've missed the point, it's not the bread and fish that I give you that's important, it's my body and my blood, and except you drink my blood and eat my body, you can have no part in me, and this he spoke of his death.

Or whether it was his discourse on the good shepherd where he said, I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The shadow was always there. He knew that for which he came, and he would not be talked out of it, nor would he let anybody else deny or dispute the purpose of his coming.

When Peter, in that moment of great and glorious insight, saw the nature and the real personage of Jesus and cried out, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God, you will remember that Jesus turned and said, yes, and now we go to Jerusalem, there I will be sacrificed at the hands of evil men, and Peter said, not so, Lord. The Christ is to reign and to be triumphant, and Jesus said, get thee behind me, Satan, that's the

thing for which I came. The church has always been ready to accept the Christ, divorced from the cross, but Jesus said the two can't be separated.

If he's to be the Christ, he has to take a cross, and if there is to be Christianity, there must be a cross. So there it is, from the beginning to end in the life of Jesus, until those last moments when he cried out, it is finished, and his spirit departed until the end, that was the central fact of his existence. Now if that's what Jesus' life was all about, as he came and as he died for our sins and provided a way for our redemption, it's interesting that Jesus also said that that was to be the way of the follower of Jesus.

Now most of us are like Peter, we glory in the insight that he's the Christ, but when he says, oh, by the way, there's a cross connected with the Christ, we say, not so, Lord. But you will remember that when Jesus spoke to those who were to follow him, he said, take up your cross, your cross, and follow me. And again and again he said, except a man give up his life, he cannot save it.

If you save your life, you will lose it. You remember in that passage in John 12 where he said, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone, but if it dies, it will bring forth much fruit, and so with you, except you forfeit your life for me, it will be sterile, but if you do come to that cross and forfeit your life for me, it will be fruitful. Jesus very clearly said, yes, there was a cross for me and there's to be one for you.

You will remember he said about Peter, your end will be one that you do not want, but they will take you and lead you where you do not want to go. And this he spoke, John said about his death, and you remember tradition tells us that they crucified Peter upside down, and Paul caught the thrust of this so that when he was talking about salvation, he said concerning himself, when he came to a point of justification, he said, I am crucified with Christ. And interestingly enough, he coined a new word.

He made up a Greek word when he said that. It is found nowhere else in Greek literature, but here he took the preposition with and hooked it on to the word crucified and said there is something about the essence of being a Christian, yet that can only be described in terms of an identification on the part of the believer with the Christ who is crucified, whereby the believer enters in in some mysterious way to that same experience, and he says, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

Now, it's interesting that this is to be the character of your life and mine, if we're to be Christians, the same way it was to be the character of Jesus' life. Why is it that we don't come to grips with it? And why do we try to paint it in any other way? And Christians were dying for Christ in communist China, and the communists could not understand their courage, and so they, in their ignorance, slit their chests open to find out what it was that gave them that courage. And one missionary that was there told me, she said, if they had had eyes to see, they would have found the cross.

That's what makes a Christian, isn't it? You say, what do you mean? All right, let me illustrate. I believe the Christian life begins, as far as this life is concerned, and ends somewhere adjacent to the cross. I don't believe that any man ever comes to Christ without having come by way of the cross, not just Christ's sacrifice for him, but also his sacrifice for Christ.

Christ died for my sins, and the scripture indicates that I should die to my sins for Christ. Christ gave up his life for me on that cross somewhere. If I am to be his, I have to give up my life for him.

You know, I read the New Testament for decades before I saw that the text, Galatians 2.20, is in a justification by faith passage. I always thought that the crucified life was the deeper life, but the interesting thing is, Galatians 2.20 is in the middle of a passage that talks about how to find peace with God, how to find forgiveness of sin, and that's where it starts, and I don't believe there's any other way. Because what is the Christian? The Christian is a person who has turned from his way to Christ's way, and to do that, something has to die.

We have in our town an old fellow by the name of Dr. E. A. Seamans who's one of this generation's saints, and one of the stories that I've always loved out of his experiences in India is that of the Hindu merchant who came to him one day and said that he wanted to become a Christian. So, he said, we gave him instructions so that we knew that he understood what the Christian faith was, and then after we were sure that he knew the Christian faith and was a Christian, we talked to him about baptism, and he said, yes, I'd like to be baptized next Sunday morning in church. Dr. E. A. Seamans said, you know, I don't believe that's where you ought to be baptized.

And he said, oh, where should I be baptized then? Well, he said, you're a merchant. Everybody in town knows you as a merchant. Next Tuesday's market day.

All the Hindus in this part of India will be here next Tuesday. Do you know that pool in front of your marketplace? I'd like to baptize you on market day in that pool in the middle of the town square. So, the Hindu's eyes popped out and said, man, I'll starve to death if we do that.

Dr. Seamans looked back at him and said, what do you mean? He said, why? Every Hindu in this part of the country will know that I've become a Christian if we do that, and then they won't trade with me. And he said, oh, are you going to keep it a secret if you're becoming a Christian? He said, well, no, I wouldn't want to do that. Well, he said, why don't we just get it known all over all at once? So, he said, let's have the baptism next Tuesday on market day down in the town square in front of your place of business.

And the guy said, that'll kill me. D.A. Seaman said, yeah, that's right. But when you die, he begins to live within you.

You know, I believe that's the reason that Billy Graham uses a public invitation. And I believe that that's the reason that the public invitation was established out, grew out of the American camp meeting. Because it was in the American camp meeting that multitudes of people came to know Christ, and the invitation was given to publicly identify themselves that they were turning from their ways to Christ and let the world know whose side they were on.

And you know, that's hard. Never easy. I sat and talked with a man and his wife not too long ago who had just been awakened to the fact that they were not Christians.

He was a preacher's son. It was interesting to watch the two of them as they came to a very clear understanding of what they had to do. And they said, if we become Christians, we'll have to let it be known, won't we? She looked over at me and said, what gets me is this public stuff.

She said, why do you have to weep and cry around a bit? I said, well, the weeping and the crying, be it isn't what isn't what's important, but the public thing, that's another matter. You've got to go on record to where you know and the world knows that you belong to Christ. And what that means is that one way of life has stopped and another has begun.

And there's a bit of the cross in that. I dare say there's somebody in this crowd who's never really come to know Christ. Or maybe you've known Christ and you've turned away.

And your life now is not characterized by the things that Christians life should be characterized by. If you are to be redeemed, there has to be a cross. You've got to pick it up.

You've got to go. And something dies when you do. Now, the beauty, of course, is something comes alive.

Now, if that's true of conversion, it is also true of something deeper. And this is the reason we speak about the crucified life is the deeper life, the sanctified life. And, you know, really, I believe that this is at the heart of being spirit filled.

You know, I do not believe that you can be spirit filled without a death to sell. Because, you see, if I'm filled with his spirit, my spirit has been replaced. And, you know, there's something about my spirit that doesn't like to die easily.

And one of the things a man finds after he becomes a Christian is that there's a bit of warfare within. The old nature within does not capitulate easily. And so there is that warfare within the Christian's life, that conflict within the Christian's life.

And that's the reason that in practically every effective Christian leader's biography that I have ever read, there is the story about how after his conversion he came to a place of the cross. In which he died to his own self-interest and his own rights to himself and his own way and let Christ crucify that old self within him to where Christ could reign supreme within. Because, you see, if you're to be filled with the spirit of Christ, the old spirit's got to go.

Now, this is the most important thing, I think, that a Christian has to come to grips with. Because all of your growth and all of your fruitfulness will hang here. If you've never read much Christian biography, that's too bad.

You ought to find the lives of some of the greats, like Hudson Taylor. Read his *Spiritual Secrets*. The life of Samuel Brangholtz.

Read that story. Read the life of Jonathan Goforth or of Jonathan Goforth's wife, Rosalind. You will find in their lives how after they became Christians that conflict focused at a point where they came to the cross and there was a death within.

Norman Grubb said that he was who wrote *The Life of C.T. Studd*, magnificent thing. He said he had been a missionary in Africa for a number of years. He said he was riding a dugout canoe down a river, his heart hungry.

Christian? Of course he was a Christian. He had given up a position. His brother was the Lord Mayor of London.

Another brother was Commanding Officer of the Dragoon Guard. Those fellows with the big hats that guard the Queen and so forth. He now was in the midst of Africa with all of its bugs and disease and heat and everything else.

Of course he was a Christian. But he said there was defeat and despair within me. He said I finally pulled that dugout canoe over to the bank of the river, pulled it up on the shore, got out on my face before God

and said, oh God, there is a need for me to come to an end and you to have total possession and control.

He said to seal it I found the only thing I could find. I had a postcard in my pocket. He said I pulled out the postcard and drew a tombstone on it and put Norman Grubb and the date and said died here today.

He said at that point Christ God pulled. You look at his life. See the influence that it has had, the impact that it has made.

Jesus said yes there's a cross for me and it means the end of my life. So that yours can begin. And he said there's a cross for you which means the end of yours so that mine and you can begin.

Now what happens when this takes place? I want to just run down very quickly just a few things that make a world of difference. You know when you come to that place of inner death to your own way, then you find that you don't have to have your own way. And that fetish is gone and you're never free until you get to that place.

I appreciated what Paul Leaning said this morning about people who'd rather be right than righteous. You're never free until you can give up your own way. Never forget the girl sat across the aisle from me in French class.

Most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. All my family were dirty blondes and she was a magnificent brunette. French class is a good place for that kind of thing.

Good clean kid. Greatest passion of my life. Lord said yes but she's not a Christian.

I said Lord just give me her and you can have anything. You can have everything. He said we don't bargain.

If it's going to be my life I'm going to run it. And that's one you can't have. And I died.

She became an artist model. And none of these young people will look at me and believe that. You never know though when you look at the outside of some of these old fellows.

I remember I went with Elsie after we started courting shopping one day and she went to buy a coat and we went in a dress shop and there on the manager's desk were 16 pictures of the girl that I took to the junior senior banquet. After we got married two of my sisters one of whom is in the crowd here sent us a box of candy with her picture on the cover of it. My wife didn't think that was funny at all.

I said Lord just give me her and you can have everything. He said we don't play it that way. If it's going to be my life I run it.

So I had to say all right Lord. You know I wouldn't trade Elsie for a million of the other kind. Because Elsie was the right one for me and God knew that and he was waiting.

But I would have missed if I had had my way. You're never safe until you've given up your way. You don't have to always look good.

Have you ever thought what a relief it is to get to the place where you don't have to always come out of everything looking good? Think of how much sweat most of us live with keeping up a front. If I'd had to look good I'd have never been a preacher. I'd never I would have never preached the first sermon.

I was so scared as a kid I walked the back streets keeping bumping into people. Because if I bumped into them I'd have to speak to them. I became extremely friendly you know.

Not because I like people but I found that dogs that wag their tails didn't get kicked as often. I remember when I was a senior in high school we commemorated the 200th anniversary of the conversion of John Wesley and I had a part in the program. I was an exalted high school senior.

My home church which was a county seat home church you know the largest Methodist church in the area. Plenty of pride. My father was a lawyer.

I had a poem I had to walk all the way down the middle aisle to carry a candle. Walk up in the pulpit and say my piece. And walk over and put the candle in a candelabra.

I started down the aisle and as I got down the aisle that thing began to do this. The farther I went the worse it got. And when I got into the pulpit I looked down at that thing.

And I started in on the second line instead of the first. Backed up and tried to find the first and couldn't get it and looked for the third and it was gone. And I walked over and put it down in the candelabra and walked off in total humiliation.

The Lord said I want you to preach. I said you made a mistake. I said there's no point in humiliating you like that.

And he said Dennis I don't think it's my humiliation that you're concerned about. Are you willing to be humiliated? I said wait a minute Lord I want to glorify your name. But how can you get glory out of something like this? And he said do you love me enough that you're willing to stand there and shake and be embarrassed and be a failure? Will you let me make a failure out of you? You're never free till you can fail.

Go right ahead. Bud Robinson said he came out of the service and he said one person turned to him and said what a great service. As he walked out he heard two ladies talking.

One of them said did you ever hear anything as bad as that? He walked off he said thank you Lord I didn't get puffed up when I heard the first one. No need to get puffed down on the second one. You're never free until you're out of that business.

You've laid your reputation your status on the line. You can fail. You don't have to come out looking good.

You don't have to have the last word. Paul got to that this morning so I don't need to develop it. What a slave the person who has to have the last word.

I pity the woman whose husband has to have the last word. The only person I pity as much is the wife or the husband whose wife has to have the last word. Or what about a father who has to have the last word? Or what about a son who has to have it? It's wonderful when you can get to the place where you're involved in bigger things than that.

Where you don't have to defend yourself. My what a massive amount of mental energy is saved when you don't have to always be defending yourself. Just put that in the Lord's hands and forget.

If you don't have to come out looking good you won't defend yourself. You can give all that to God. You don't have to please the crowd.

You're free now in the spirit of Christ and in his power to be different. You're not free until you can do it. But let me say something more.

You don't have to flaunt your difference after you become different. Did you ever see people who could flaunt their difference? You see you can just leave all that to God because you've died to your way. And your interest is not how you're going to look coming out of this.

But whether you've done the will of Christ. When you come to that place of crucifixion where that's true then you're ready to live. Now that usually that comes I think in that fullness of the spirit.

Where that sanctifying spirit comes in a second crisis in a person's life and cleanses. And the mark and the proof is not anything external. And here is one of the places where we must be very careful.

No gift is an evidence of the fullness of the spirit. Let me remind you that the Corinthians were not spirit filled but they were the ones with the gift. You can have the gift but not be spirit filled.

But you know the thing about it is you'll use the gifts for false purposes unless you want. So don't say I have the gifts of the spirit or some gift of the spirit. Therefore I know I'm spirit filled.

The gifts are never an evidence. You see it's that depth itself where your spirit has come to an end and his spirit has filled. Now you know I believe that should be not just the character of our lives in conversion and in that deeper experience.

I think it should be the characteristic of our obedience and of our service to him. Because if he calls you he'll call you to follow the way of the cross. You don't think it was easy for David Livingston to leave England and go to black Africa do you? You don't think it was easy for his wife to follow him through black Africa do you? You don't think it was easy for Robert Morrison to go to China and spend most of his life before he ever saw a single convert.

The man who went to the Patagonian starved. The ship that was supposed to bring him food from England his friends back home had forgotten him. Two weeks after he died the food came.

It wasn't easy. When they found him he was sitting at his table. He'd been writing.

You know what his last words were before the pen trailed off the page? Oh the goodness of God to me. The last words. Because you see he prayed whether by life or by death he might win those Patagonians.

His life was already on the line. And what he hadn't been able to do in his life was done through his death. And all of England was challenged by it.

And the work advanced more in his death than could have ever happened in his life. You give your life to Christ he may call he will call you to go on the way of the cross. You say well now wait a minute that sounds horrible.

You mean it's a bloody painful thing. Well Jesus felt it was a little rough. You know I always thought that Jesus was so good that all his father had to do was say Jesus this is what I want you to do and he'd jump and run do it.

That was true of everything except the cross. When it came to the cross he went and got out on his face and sweat as it were drops of blood and said father if it's possible let this one pass from me. I don't want it.

But if there's no other way I'll take it. Took him three times to do that. When the Greeks came and reminded him of where he was going he said what shall I say father.

Save me from this hour. No. Much as I'd like to pray that this is the thing for which I've come.

But you see the salvation of the world came out. Do you think he has any regret? The glory of heaven is going to be the fruit that he has out of the cross. Let me ask you something.

Do you think you'll ever have a regret if you take up your cross and fall across? The only regret you will ever have is if you fail. Because you see when you take the way of the cross you find that it is the fruitful. Meaningful life.

One of the books that influenced me the most was the life of Samuel Brangle. Brangle was a graduate of DePauw University. Went to Boston University School of Theology when very few preachers had theology degrees.

While he was at Boston University he heard William Booth. He listened to Daniel Steele and he began to sense that he had never really been filled with spirit. So he began to seek.

He was a great actor. He began to surrender. He came to his voice.

God said yes that's the big thing. Can I make you stutter? He said stutter? I want to be a preacher. The Lord said I thought you wanted to be what I wanted you to be.

If I want to make you stutter is that all right? Stammer? He said well Lord that's the one big gift I have to give to you. I'm a good speaker. That's the one big gift I have to give.

And the Lord said well why don't you give it to me? You see most of us when we say I want to give to God mean we want to keep it and use it for us. The death in his life was at that point. He said I came to the place where yes I said Lord if you want me to stammer and if I never speak correctly again that you'll listen.

God came in glorious power and filled him with the Holy Ghost. You know what he did with him after he filled him? Sent him to England to join the Salvation Army. When he got there you know what General Booth did with him? He was the only man in the Salvation Army with two degrees.

I assume he was the only man in the Salvation Army with one. Converted bums, prostitutes, embezzlers, the rest. General Booth said we'll find out what's in him.

He made him the boot black for the Salvation Army camp. Bringle found himself in an unfinished basement half covered with water cleaning boots. A people that couldn't read or write, no education, butchered the king's England.

They were sent out to preach while he the brilliant orator was in the basement shining their boots. Said you know a voice came to him and said Bringle if I ever saw a fool I'm looking at one now. He said oh God give you a great gift and you buried it.

You know what God does with people that bury their gifts? He said you know a bit of hell swept over me and I looked up and said God did I make a mistake? He said a second voice came and said Bringle don't you worry. I shined, I washed their feet. You're not too good to shine their shoes are you? And he said suddenly the presence of the divine Christ was there and he said that's as close as I've ever been to heaven.

His friends thought he'd buried himself. Salvation Army? How could you ever influence the world there? I sat in a Princeton theological seminary classroom listening to a man with two PhDs former atheist who had been converted brilliant philosopher say gentlemen I want to read you a testimony that has influenced and transformed my life. And Amiel Kaye pulled out Samuel Bringle's testimony and read it and said this is one of the profound influences on my life gentlemen this can happen to you.

You know the wonderful thing is that when God buries you there's such nice resurrections that take place. But you know when you back off from the tomb you find a living dead. But when you say Lord if that's where you want to take me it'll take eternity to find the good things that'll come out.

Now what I want to know is are you in the way of the cross tonight? Or has he brought you up to something that you've backtalked from? I want to tell you there is no future of any hope or joy or fruitfulness except as you reach out and take the cross he has for you.

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