

# A feature of the Cross few truly comprehend

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon delves into the profound significance of the cross, emphasizing how it is the gateway to a deeper experience of Christ's presence within us. It explores the historical and spiritual implications of the cross, highlighting the offense it poses to the world and even some believers. The message underscores the transformative power of embracing the death to self that the cross demands, leading to a new life where Christ lives in us. The sermon encourages a surrender to God for Christ to be fully revealed in and through our lives.*

**Scripture:** Galatians 2:20, John 12:24, Colossians 1:27, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Romans 10:17, Galatians 1:15, Galatians 5:24, Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:19

**Topics:** "The Significance of the Cross", "Embracing Death to Self"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Well, thank you very much indeed. This is a great privilege for me and a joy to be able to share something with you all. In this session, I want to highlight to you a feature of the cross that I sense that few truly comprehend.

I want to show you how it is the key to experiencing a deeper reality of Christ's indwelling. Perhaps it's best described as his presence in one's life, being recast from that of a guest to that of the host. And frankly, I believe that failure to truly discover this and experience this in our lives is to suffer an immeasurable loss as we journey on through in this world.

Father, I pray that you will aid me to share this, Lord, that is your business, it's your word, and it's entirely for you to speak it and to minister it and to enact it. And I pray, Father, that you will move upon the lives of those who are listening and enable them to have ears to hear and a heart and a will that is ready to respond to what you say. For your name's sake, I pray, Lord Jesus.

Amen. Amen. The subject of the cross is the central message of the entire Bible.

It stands, as it were, between the two testaments, the two covenants. The cross casts a long shadow back through the Old Testament period, and you will know this from your own reading of Scripture, but the cross is symbolised in so many different ways, in so many different situations that are accounted in the Old Testament. I'm thinking, just for a few examples, I'm thinking of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden.

I'm thinking of the serpent's fatal wound that is referred to. I'm thinking of man's nakedness being covered as the result of bloodshed. I'm thinking of that great 22nd chapter of Genesis, where Abraham is called upon to take his son Isaac and offer him upon one of the mountains that God would show him.

Without recounting that story, just to draw your attention to that one moment in the unfolding story, where Isaac says, well, here's the wood and we've got the fire, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Do you remember how Abraham answered? He said, my son, God will provide himself a lamb for the offering. I'm thinking also in the Old Testament of the rock smitten and the life or the water flowing freely from that smitten rock. I'm thinking about the various animal sacrifices, each one portraying Christ and the cross in various ways.

I'm thinking of the Passover lamb, of course, supremely. I'm thinking also of the brazen serpent in the wilderness. I'm thinking of Isaiah's suffering servant and so on.

The cross casts its shadow clear and crisp over the centuries back through the Old Testament period. Of course, not only does it have its shadow seen in the Old Testament, but the cross standing there between the two testaments or between the two covenants, it stands in my mind like a sign post pointing forwards and pointing into the New Covenant, pointing into the New Testament. Even more specifically, the cross standing in that particular position presents the key that opens the way for men and women to know and to experience the mystery which Paul says was hidden from the ages, which is, he went on to say, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

To set the scene for where I want to go, perhaps we could consider just briefly the event of the cross. So much could and should and needs to be said about it, but let me just be quite brief in just a few remarks here. As we think back to the event of the cross, and I think as evangelical Christians or believers in the gospel, to varying degrees, we understand this aspect of the cross, the history of the cross, and we know that as the story of the scriptures unfold, humanity was in trouble before holy God, and God who is the God of all justice would demand a payment to be made.

I'm wondering just which words to choose to abbreviate these thoughts, but the payment that he required to be paid to restore that fellowship and to bring in all that he had in his heart for men and women would be a payment that would be impossible for any man or any woman to pay. You know, redemption at its root is a legal issue, and justice has no place for mercy. But in the unfolding of God's great heart and his eternal purpose, mercy was introduced into the equation, as I might refer to it, when another, a capital A, you can capitalise every letter in the word, when another came and paid our debt.

And the payment that he made was such that it completely and fully satisfied the righteousness of God. And we know that at the cross of Calvary, the power of Satan, the power of the devil was destroyed. But let's remind ourselves that Calvary was not, it was not a war zone.

It wasn't a setting where there was a hand-to-hand conflict between the Lord Jesus and the devil. That didn't take place there. And while we can only imagine the fierceness of the satanic opposition that would come against or come toward the men on the central cross on that occasion, nevertheless, the actual

thing that was taking place, the actual event, was not a scene or a zone of combat, but it was, I've never heard anyone say this before, but it was, as it were, more like the finance department of a law court.

In other words, it was the place where a transcendent debt was paid. And so far as the other aspects of God's dealings with Satan, that's another story for another occasion. But the fact is that's what Jesus was accomplishing there at that time upon the cross.

And he paid, as I have already said, that debt that we cannot begin to estimate or understand. It was indeed transcendent and he paid it. He paid it fully and completely.

And in doing so, of course, we know that he fulfilled as the antitype the price that is referred to in so many earlier scriptures in the Old Testament. I'm tempted to go back there, but I mustn't do that. But as the result of that legal act and it being a total and utter success upon the cross, Jesus destroyed the power of the devil, that's the wonderful thing, and created a just and a righteous basis for God to liberate those who were captives in the devil's kingdom.

The Apostle Paul refers to this in a way in Romans chapter 1 and verse 16 of that chapter speaks about the gospel that Paul said he was not ashamed of because it was the power of God unto deliverance unto everyone that believeth to the Jew first and also to the Greek. And then 17th verse starts off by him saying that in this, by this, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. To put it into different words, what Jesus accomplished at the cross was done with such attention to the legal detail, as it were, that there would never be an opportunity where God could be justifiably accused of acting in a manner that was inconsistent with his justice and with his righteousness.

Amen. And you can read some more about that in Colossians chapter 1 and I believe verse 20 for another occasion. But the fact of the matter is, in the mind of God, one man had opened the door to Satan, to the whole human race, and again in the mind and heart of God, there had to be a second man who would close that door and restore the situation.

And frankly, I don't know that anyone expressed this that I'm trying to describe here more perfectly than Charles Wesley himself. Who else? In one of the verses of a great hymn, he says, "'Tis finished. All the debt is paid.

Justice divine is satisfied. The grand and full atonement made. God for a guilty world has died." Amen.

That's an aspect of the cross and that which took place at the cross, which at least sets a basis for us in our thinking here in this session. But let's just pause for a moment. It will appear that I'm digressing, but I'm going to the words of the Apostle Paul, where in the fifth chapter of Galatians, verse 11, we find this phrase, the offense of the cross.

I'm just isolating that phrase for a moment here. The offense of the cross. And when I was rereading it just a day or so ago, the thought that rose in my own heart was, it was very spontaneous.

It wasn't a thought through thing. But I remember this occurring to me. What could possibly be offensive about this transcendent enactment of the grace of God? What could be offensive about it? Well, of course, we do know how the story unfolded and continues to unfold.

I'm thinking of what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians chapter one. I'm just standing there as I'm talking to you. And verse 21 reads, I'm breaking into it, but excuse me for that.

For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. And then he goes on to say in verse 22, for the Jews require a sign. Well, we know that the whole concept of the cross, of God becoming a man and living among them as he did, and that man being Jesus, was completely offensive.

And in particular, they were so well aware of the text of scripture from the Old Testament, which stated that cursed is everyone that hangs upon a tree. And everything about the unfolding story of Jesus was to their blinded minds, nothing short of blasphemous. One of the words translated here in this reading is scandalous.

It was scandalous that God would be thought of being, I don't know, so low and to hang on a cross. And you're telling us that this is how the Messiah has come and providing redemption for men and women. It was nothing short of blasphemous in their blinded minds.

This text here I've read to you goes on to say, and the Greeks, you know, these were the people who, on a very human level, they believed in perfection, they believed in power. And the Greek word in this context here is Maria. It would only be a moron, we could say, that would believe that from that crucifixion of that man on that hill called Calvary, there's redemption for mankind from their sin and we need to believe in him.

It just didn't make any sense at all. It was just absurd to them. Added to that, of course, we know very, very well from our own day and the cultural climate in which we live today, that the claims of the gospel are so completely unacceptable.

I mean, the cultures claiming, in our part of the world, at least here in the West, they're claiming to be tolerant, but it's a pseudo-tolerance and it's supposed to be an accepting sort of posture that culture's got itself into. Nothing could be more wrong. The thing is, we know that whatever the world claims along these lines, there is a powerful rejection of the Christian gospel.

And right at the core of the Christian message is the statement and the idea of the exclusivity of the gospel, that there's no other name under heaven given among men whereby they can be saved. And that in today's society is a message it's just anathema. And we know that very, very well.

Some of us have bumped into it in our connections and conversations with people in the world. But, you know, there's an aspect of the Christian gospel. There's an aspect of the message of the gospel itself, which poses a problem, at least.

I wanted to say something stronger than that. But it's an aspect which the average, I'm daring to go into, I'm walking on thin ice here, I know, but it seems to me that to the average evangelical today, they are either blithely ignorant of this, or they find this aspect of truth just too uncomfortable to face and to deal with. And I think that statement, I believe it's completely true.

If you were tempted to agree with me, then you'll realize that's a big thing to say. I'm talking about a huge portion of the evangelical church. I'm not talking about other groups or brands.

But those who claim to believe the whole Bible, that's how I was raised. That was one of the first things I ever said to anybody. And I said it to a young fellow, I'll tell you more about him sometime.

I was probably 10 years of age. His name was Dougie Brown. And I wanted to make sure that he knew that we believe the entire Bible from cover to cover to be the Word of God.

Because that's generally true for all decent evangelicals. But I'm suggesting to you that there's an aspect of truth that a large segment of the evangelical community have a real problem with and resist and turn away from in so many cases. You know, there are those aspects of the message that are commonly practiced in that kind of community.

I'm thinking of the fact that such persons give, at the very least, a kind of universal assent to the justifying feature of Christ's death that I alluded to a little earlier. The fact that Jesus died to become our Savior. And there's encouragement, of course, for people to respond to that message and put their trust in that redeeming work that took place in history.

And perhaps to just pray. And this is not uncommon, of course. In fact, the term sinner's prayer, which never appears in the Bible, of course, but has become a very common term.

We all understand what that means. And where someone agrees to pray along with that kind of prayer, then they're encouraged to believe, well, now, you know, now you're a Christian, now you're a child of God. And now they perhaps wouldn't put it into these words, but it's implied.

Now you've just received your free pass to heaven when you leave this scene. And then it's a message which we're told is a message of the grace of God that everything has been done and there's nothing else that can be done or needs to be done for salvation. Now, there's a lot of what I've just said that I agree with 100%.

But I think there's a danger that that becomes such a sort of routine and a reduced presentation of truth. It's as though it's been reduced to the common denominator in order to communicate what is believed to be the most important thing. But I believe that we can give our assent to all of that and embrace it fully, and yet still be missing something that is so important.

Am I suggesting that there's something that we have to do that is necessary to be added to what Jesus did on the cross? No, I'm not saying that at all. His work was a finished work. He did everything that was necessary.

I've already stressed to you, he paid the full price of our redemption. There's nothing that we could ever have paid and there's certainly nothing that needs to be added to what he did. Not for a moment am I saying that.

But you know, we use the expression commonly and we've got some scriptural basis for course that was saved by faith, was saved by putting our trust, our whole trust in that work of the cross, which a preacher in one form or another, where someone has informed us about. That reminds me then that Paul said in Romans chapter 10 that faith, that faith comes by hearing the word of God. In other words, we can't put our faith in something that we're not exposed to, we've not heard.

It's not that our little minds are going to be able to comprehend everything that we've been told or there is to be told, but we require a degree of information. Either we find it all alone on our own from reading in scripture or someone kindly shares with us the message of the gospel. One way or the other there's some information involved, which all things being equal is the truth, and we find faith quickened in our hearts by that word of God that's ministered.

But in so many cases the whole truth is not ministered. I've illustrated this many times over the years in different ways and I'm not going into detail with this, but I've said in many cases I can think of it being like a pie, I mean a good pie, and preacher A comes into our lives and he presents to us a slice of that pie. It's true, it's right, but it's not the whole.

And in many cases there's a preacher B and a preacher C and so on, who knows, we won't go down that road. But the fact is we need that the Holy Spirit in one way or another increases our understanding of what God has made possible through that complete redemptive work of Christ, and only then are we able to find faith quickened in our hearts by that word of truth and then are we able to exercise it and as a result experience it. And I hope and pray to God that, and I said this at the outset, that I'm able to just highlight to your understanding something that whether you've heard it and you've backed away from it or whether you've never heard it before or whether you just put it to one side for the time being, I don't know, I don't know what goes on in your life, but I pray that God will enlarge your understanding and your heart toward that which God has made possible for us.

Let me remind you again that God's purpose, and this could be analysed more than I am doing at the moment, but God's purpose in Jesus coming and him paying that price at the cross, it has a potential that reaches out into eternity. I know that, I know it well, but in this time of my life here, in your life here, I can say to you that his purpose is to redeem you to himself with a view that Christ might live in you. The Apostle Paul in Galatians chapter 1, he says, but when he pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heath and immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood and the rest of the chapter continues to unfold.

Amen. You know, I was raised in Sunday school. Some of you will have heard me say before, I was actually four years of age when I prayed that simple prayer that we call the sinner's prayer following my father's lead.

It's one of my very earliest memories and I wrote something in the front of a Bible I had at that point, which I don't have anymore, but it was to the effect that I was saved on that particular date and that time. And in those days, I can still see my uncle in the assembly that we went to and he's still alive today, but he's very old, but he has always played his accordion and I can still remember him playing on his accordion. That chorus, some of you will know, since Jesus came into my heart and I can repeat it all, but I won't do that.

But in our efforts to simplify truth as my father sought to do so to me and my uncle did to the youth group that he was leading in those days, we select what are determined or believed to be the basic essential feature or features. But there's more, there's more, and that is what we're talking about here. And I think that more can be really brought together and realised more fully when we think in terms of this statement of Paul's, that he, God, might reveal his Son in me, that he might live in me.

So very well, Jesus lives in my heart, we can say it in a trite way, but what does it mean that he might live in me? Well, we understand at least we're giving a cent to that and saying, yeah, well, we believe that certainly. But here, right here lies, I think, a sticking point that frankly, I think few really want to hear and even less deal with. And I think, frankly, it's at this point where someone teaching the Gospel as truly and faithfully as we can discover it in Scripture will tend to lose his or her audience.

I know myself that if I keep preaching what I'm sharing with you today, I'll never be a popular YouTube preacher, I know that. But then again, I'm in good company because I'm reminding myself that Jesus

himself, he lost his audience on a number of occasions and on one occasion in particular, when the people started just immediately to walk away, he says to his disciples, are you going to go away also? I've already quoted Paul writing to the Galatians and he said, if this and this take place then, or as a product of it, he said, the offence of the Gospel will cease. To the Apostle Paul, clearly, he grasped the idea that the offence of the Gospel was a very, very legitimate thing.

He understood that when the true Gospel is preached, there will be those who will find it offensive. And we understand that when we think about the world, the Jews, the Greeks, the world, our culture, we understand that. There's no surprises there.

What is a surprise, what is a shame, is when those who call themselves believers in the Gospel are in that same company. Let me remind you that Jesus has this reputation for overturning tables and the Holy Spirit speaking in these days, if we could really hear him speaking to us, could it be true that really he's attempting to speak to such believers that I've been referring to? And could it be that he's trying to reveal to them that watching the kind of material on the television that they've been watching is completely offensive to God? They're being entertained by iniquity and the Scriptures tell me that concerning Jesus, he's a lover of righteousness. He loves it and he's a hater of iniquity and here are those who are calling themselves by his name and they're happily being entertained by iniquity and Jesus said he hates it.

Could it, I put it to you, this is not legal as I'm asking you a question, could it be that the Holy Spirit is attempting to get through to his people who are calling themselves by his name and saying, you know so much about the current sports people and the sports and the movie people but you spend a minimal time with my people? You know, you entertain yourself with your computer and with your games and trivial things. Could it be that the Holy Spirit is seeking to get our attention? Could it be that he's saying, I know that you spent five minutes you know in the morning with your daily reading book, with your daily portion, you think that's okay but it's not okay? Or maybe he's saying, do you not realize that week after week you're not even opening the Bible itself and receiving its benefits? Frankly I think that that is the kind of thing the Holy Spirit would be saying because what happens when God's Son lives in you? Do you not think it will transform every aspect of your life and all of your priorities so that you know it's so easy that we can glibly quote texts and sort of half believe that they apply to us? Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, well this one thing I do, says the Apostle, he's focused, he's pressing forward to know God in an ever deeper way. Amen.

You know, the redemptive power of the cross of history is, as we do know, the key to our acceptance by Holy God. We also know, if we're faithfully reading the text, we know that the scriptures teach that when Christ died, we died as believers in him. What does that mean? Well it means if all things have been done properly, it means that I die then to my Adamic heritage, the record that places me in opposition to God and at odds with God, and that as we've been seeing already, when Jesus died on the cross, he dealt with this, it was, if you like it, what Jesus accomplished on the cross was kind of a technical atonement whereby men could be justified and brought into acceptance by God.

We understand that. But think of this, right now we're thinking not about that aspect which is so valid and so vital, it's the foundation of everything, but what about my actual life? What about your actual life in the here and now? And I believe that if you and I are to embody Christ's indwelling life, then something in you and in me must die. And I believe that that something is the idol which is referred to as self, or the flesh.

It's that aspect of our being that we've inherited through our first birth that needs to be impacted by the power of the cross. He's sorted out all the paperwork in heaven, he's made the provision for us to be accepted in the beloved. By giving his Holy Spirit, he's given unto us all that is necessary for living a godly life, says the Apostle Peter.

It's been given to us for our actual life. This is what we're talking about this morning, we're talking about our actual lives today and what it means to have the life of the Son of God by the person of the Holy Spirit living within us, living within us day by day. Amen.

So the Holy Spirit has been given, and we talked about the Holy Spirit in a particular way in the last session, but the Holy Spirit today is commissioned to come into the world and to approach the lives of men and women, to approach you and me even today. And he's carrying, as it were, the whole benefit and product of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross of Calvary. And I believe here lies the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit of God.

We can talk about other aspects, we can talk about the gifts of the Spirit and so forth and the benefits that the Scriptures speak about, but I believe with all my heart that the most important thing, the primary thing today, is to recognize that he is carrying the power of the cross with him. And he's seeking to impact the lives of those who are calling themselves his with the power of the cross, as Paul refers to it in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. The power of the cross. Amen.

You know, the cross is a slaying instrument. I heard someone on one occasion say, and please don't go too far down this road, but he said to think about the cross and its purpose, imagine that it's not a cross but it's the electric chair. I mean, be careful with that.

But the fact is that the cross was a slaying instrument. It was designed to be a slaying instrument. When we read about the cross, that's how we think about it, certainly.

And what we're learning here is that God's intent is that via the person of the Holy Spirit touching your life and mine and speaking to you and me today, his primary purpose is to impact each of our lives afresh with the power of this slaying instrument, the cross, which is directly linked from and the result of what took place on the central cross of Calvary those years ago. And his plan is to apply this principle of death to our fallen nature, to our self-life, that aspect of us that must die in order for the life of the Son of God to shine through our lives and find the expression in our lives that God intends it to have. And this is not going to be a once-in-a-moment experience.

This is how we're to live because his plan is, having provided the provision to slay the old Adam in us, is to maintain that posture of death in order that the freshness of the life may be manifest continually in our beings. Amen. Paul talks about this in different terms when he's talking about the flesh and the spirit, but we've digressed to go there in this session, but that's exactly the same thing.

Amen. Now then, although we've touched it already, let me emphasise this, that as we embrace that work of the Spirit of God, this power of the cross, this slaying instrument, we discover something else that's wonderful and that is this, that this vehicle of slaying, it contains in itself a life-giving power. The slaying power somehow is able to birth in us new life.

Amen. To embrace the death of the cross is to experience the life that sprang from the finished work of the cross of Christ in history. Amen.

A dear woman in our church in Liverpool, I know there are a few people from Liverpool listening to me right now who know exactly who I'm speaking about and what, but on an occasion many, many years ago now, she wrote a song. I haven't got all of the words before me. I think I'd remember them, but I'm not going to try in case I stumble somewhere, but the line that started is, Jesus thy cross is sweet to me, a gift unspeakably great.

And then she goes on to say, here where all earthly hopes debase, the new creation springs. This is the wonder of the power of the cross. It has a slaying feature to it, which is so necessary for us to experience and to continue to experience.

But thanks be to God, it also carries this life feature, this feature that causes the new creation to spring forth even in our now redeemed hearts. Amen. And to put it just a different way, the cross, which is the key to this death that God has ordained us to experience, is also that which gives birth to the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and dispensations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Amen. This just highlights a common principle to us, remember, Jesus in his teaching, he said, except the corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.

Amen. The demand is for the death factor to work. And as the result of the death factor working low and behold, life springs forth.

That is true in the natural world, it's true equally in the spiritual world, but on a much higher level altogether. The verse of scripture that really brings all of this together, I think, is in Galatians, and it's the 20th verse of chapter 2, 2 and 20. He says, I am crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, amen, not I, but Christ, not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. The death factor in that verse is no longer I. The life factor is Christ liveth. Christ liveth, he liveth in me.

You know, perhaps this message might offend some, but you know, it's the secret of true fellowship with Jesus. It's the true secret to victory over sin. It's true secret to victory over self.

It's the true secret to victory over the world. Let me just ask you a question. Have you ever in your posture and in your heart before God said to the Lord, Lord, I understand now more fully this great truth, and here I'm giving myself to you, Lord, in order that your Son may be revealed more fully in me and through my life.

Charles Wesley said this, and I'm drawing to a close. He said, Now, Jesus, listen to this. Now, Jesus, let thy powerful death into my being come.

Slay the old Adam with thy breath. The man of sin consume. And he goes on.

Then shall I live, and yet not I, but Christ shall live in me. That's the gospel. I trust God will use that as I've sought to highlight this great truth to you.

May God open your heart to it. Do pray that God will do exactly this in you. I'm thinking just now of C.T. Studd on one occasion, obviously many, many years ago, and I won't need to tell you who he was or tell you any stories about him, but a man called F.B. Mayer, a wonderful, godly man.

But at this stage, he was challenged by this kind of aspect of the Word of God, and he went to C.T. Studd, and he was seeking help, and Charlie Studd said to Mayer, he said, Mayer, have you ever given yourself to Christ for Christ to fill you? And he said, no, no, I haven't. And he went home with that. But then God illuminated that truth and that challenge to his heart, and he did exactly that.

May that be true in your life, whoever you are. Can I just say, if this that I've shared with you has been helpful, maybe you'll want to visit our website, which is [mckenziefellowship.com](http://mckenziefellowship.com), or the YouTube channel, Turns of the Scriptures with Fred Tomlinson. If you go there, do press the subscribe button or whatever it's called.

It just lets us know that we're journeying together, we're not alone, and that's a blessing for us, certainly. I hope all this is a blessing for you also. So God bless you.

Amen.

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