

The Cross - Part 1

by Henry Blackaby

The cross is the central event of the Christian faith, representing the depth of God's love and the cost of our salvation.

Topics: "The Cross", "Atonement"

Description

Henry Blackaby delves into the profound significance of the cross in the Christian's life, emphasizing that the cross is not just about the physical death of Jesus but the deep spiritual dimensions of His sacrifice. He explores the concept of death beyond the physical body, highlighting the eternal separation and abandonment that sin brings, which Jesus bore on the cross for humanity. Blackaby challenges believers to grasp the gravity of their sin that necessitated such a sacrifice, leading to a deep sense of repentance, gratitude, and overwhelming love for the Savior.

Transcript

ow our time with you we have chosen to take some moments and look at the cross. The cross is at the very heart of the Christians life. The cross is the heart beat of the whole our of faith. There is nothing more central than the cross in the Christians life. And so tonight were going to take a very simple look at an orientation to one aspect of the Cross.

Now when we talk about the cross, we are not just talking about the wood, and the nails, and the crucifixion of Jesus. We talking about that whole event as God sees it, not just as we see it. And you will see the contrast there a little tonight.

But the scripture I want to use is just a very simple scripture. And it comes from I Corinthians 15, and here is the apostle writing to the church at Corinth. I Corinthians 15:1, every word seems to be charged with eternity. Charge with the presence of God; "Moreover brethren I declare to you the Gospel," now again over the years of our Christian life we have a tendency to give a quick, slick definition of eternity that is found in the words of our scripture. And if I were to ask you, "What is the gospel?" you would say, "Good News". And you would be right but you would be very, very limited in what your where saying, it is far more than that. It is a huge announcement of the greatness God's salvation. And we will try to fill in some of that. But Paul says "I have been opening to you and I have been declaring and making clear to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand. By which also you are saved. If you hold fast that word which I preached to you. Unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I received." Now's here is the number one truth of the gospel, here is the

heartbeat of the whole relationship to God. "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures." Now let me just read the rest of this, that is the phrase, I want to touch tonight. Christ died for our sins. But he goes on to say, "and that he was buried and that he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures and that he was seen by Cephas or Peter then by the twelve after that he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once. Of whom the greater part remained to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then by all the apostles and last of all he was seen by me also as by one born out of due time."

That phrase, "Christ died for us." Now a key question, "If you are looking at a understand of the cross, or the death of Christ" is to ask the question what does it mean to die? Now if you were to go across America and ask that simple question, "What does it mean to die?" Ninety-nine point nine percent of the people would say, "It means that this physical body ceases to live." And we think of death in terms of the physical body. But I want to introduce to a dimension of a understanding of the death of Christ for our sins with a different dimension.

You remember there was a moment of Jesus ministry when a ruler had a daughter who had died and Jesus went to the home. And the people were grieving because life had gone out of the body. And they had the mourners there, and the family was were there, and they had the house filled. And in the minds of the people she had died. But that was not what Jesus called what she did, what did Jesus say? "She sleeps." And all of a sudden you are coming into a whole different understanding. When Jesus sees that this physical life is over he calls it sleep. He just simple said she is sleeping. And you remember when he came to the grave of Lazarus, they were mourning and all of the sadness was there and the despair was there. What did Jesus say that Lazarus was doing? He said he sleeps. And all of a sudden your sensing that Jesus perceives two kinds of death. And the bodily death is not the primary death. It is by far the secondary use of a term.

Death has much more awful appalling and unspeakable dimensions. When Jesus said, when the body ceases to live there is sleep, but the scripture reserves the use of the term death to a far more significant experience. And you have to almost set aside that word and say I am going to reserve it, until I understand what happened when Jesus died for the sin of the world. Galatians 1:4 says, "He gave himself for our sins." I Peter 3:18, "For Christ suffered for our sins once, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God." And he does talk about his suffering but when it comes to the term death, you coming far, far more significant that just the ending of the physical life. Jesus said, he came to save us from what he calls death. In John 8:51-52, Jesus said, "if a person keeps My word he will never see death." But, I took my fathers body and we had a funeral service when I was twenty six years of age. And we took my fathers body out to the cemetery and we buried him. Now, how could that be possible when Jesus said if a person keeps my word he will never see death? Well there is no question in my mind, that my fathers body maybe buried but he did not experience death! His body we laid aside, but what Jesus did for us on the cross made it possible for us never to experience what the Bible says Jesus experienced. He experienced death, so that we would not have to experience it. But then you are asking "what did my Savior do in connection with death?" My dad slept but he didn't die. Now you're saying, "Wait a minute Henry you are using terminology here that is confusing me." No, our problem is, we imposed our thinking on the scripture. Instead of letting the scripture help us to understand what Jesus did on the cross to deal with death. Jesus died, so we wouldn't have to. I going to share that.

Now we also in John 6:50 says; "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, if a mans eats this bread he shall not die (or shall never die). For in that experience in the eleventh chapter of John, "I am the

resurrection and the life, if a person believe in me he shall never die." Now our problem is we look at death in terms of the physical body, but when you look at what Jesus did when he died for our sin you are looking at something completely different. It was not His physical death because if He called what Lazarus did, sleep, then when his body ceased to have life he also was experiencing sleep except that the scripture says that the cross indicates that it was in the death of Christ that we are free. So we have to look a farther. Christ died for the sin of the world. He did not just fall asleep.

What then was our Saviour's death? What do we mean when we speak of our Saviour's death? At times because I have placed my heart and mind over the scriptures to try and understand the death of Christ for our sins. When I hear someone almost out of rote, out of memory, stand in a worship service and just rattle off the phrase, "and I thank you Lord that you died for our sins." I know in my mind he is thinking only that He physically died on the cross. The physical death of Jesus was not the entire picture of the death that was required for our sin. Let me put it another way, we are going to come to it in another moment.

As I have been a student of history I have been astounded when I read of how the martyrs died. When the martyrs died, they almost welcomed death. They taunted the flames when they were burned at the stake. And the martyrs were so convinced of what was about to take place, death held no fear for them. And they would often go to their death singing. And often to this day, those who are martyrs in our own death will go to death singing. Now when you find our Saviour in Gethsemane, and He is crying out "Oh, Father deliver Me from this cup," He was not talking about physical death. I cannot imagine when go through Gethsemane and hear, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," that He would go meet death that way when the martyrs when to death singing. But Jesus was facing something far more significant than what the martyrs ever faced. As a matter of fact because Jesus faced death in its biggest dimensions than the martyrs were certain they didn't have to. Because there was someone else who had faced eternal death so they wouldn't have to. So when they faced physical death they could go through that with singing and shouts of victory. But not so our Saviour. When he faced death, when he faced the cross, it was completely different. Over the soul of our Saviour was gathering the deepest midnight of darkness and desolation that ever went over the soul of anybody.

I want you to think for a moment about Gethsemane. In Gethsemane he says, "My soul is sorrowful and deeply distressed," the word sorrowful carries with it grief of utter desolation. It is not just a minor sadness. It is the sense of incredible grief when utter desolation beings to sweep over his soul and the term to be heavy or distressed, carries with it the idea of homelessness. Being taken out of the familiar becoming utterly desolate and homeless. And in the garden I believe that our Lord began to experience something of the beginning of the meaning of death for the sin of a world. And that idea and that word carries with it, homelessness, and carries and intensity about it, because in John 14 it just talked about, "In my Fathers home there are many other homes" and he spoke about it with a great sense of joy. But now, as you watch Gethsemane you almost sense the Fathers house is becoming deem. And the feelings and chills of homeless desolation began to sweep over his soul. And he realized that he was in the beginning of the experiencing of death for the sin of a world.

As you move farther from Gethsemane the desolation that ended in death all of a sudden the word takes on a completely different meaning. His soul began to gather in a deepening midnight of darkness and desolation. To which no other name can be given to that experience except the name, death. Not the ending of his physical life but the coming over his soul that which would be required for him to carry the sin of a whole world, on his own life. A desolation, a darkness, an experiencing over the soul of our Saviour what God said would happen to those who would not believe. They would be cast into outer darkness.

Utterly, Utterly devoid of light and life. And I believe our Lord as he approached the cross, was going to experience death, for every man, so that no man need to experience it himself. He was to do for us, what will inevitably be for the one who does not believe and receive. And you can gather up all the New Testament pictures a great gulf fixed over which no one can go. Outer darkness with weeping and wailing and gashing of teeth. Our Saviour trod that path in its utterness so that we would not have to pass that way. He passed that way in our place. But it was utterly real. And the only word that I know you can put over that experience that went through the life of our Saviour is the term death. Not sleep as Jesus described it.

When he saw the ending of life in the body he called it sleep, we are not talking sleep, were talking about death! And as you move with him through the cross, you find him coming to that black midnight of the soul, where he cries out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!," that's the death he died for every man. The horror of a great darkness, exceeding desolation, and abandonment. The agonizing consuming, loneliness where he who knew no sin became sin for us! That we could be made the righteousness of God in Him. That agony of consuming loneliness where the sin of a world was placed on the son of God. Is an understanding in just a small measure of what Paul meant when he said the "wages of sin is death," no just the sleeping of our body, but eternal forever, utter darkness, separation and abandonment. The end result of our sin is death, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." He walked into the experience of death for us. Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for our sins. The scriptures have constantly understand what it means when he died. And my prayer would be that we would see that death for a sin of a world that far exceeded the physical death. It was that death the scripture talks about that is the end result of sin. The scripture says apart from my relationship to Jesus Christ I am under the law of sin and death. If I had no relationship to Jesus Christ then I am under a law that is inevitable, that sin and death reign in my life. And that's not just the physical death. That is what the New Testament and the Old Testament talks about the death that came about because of sin. Utter abandonment and utter darkness. Death, separated from any source of Life. Sin brings an abandonment, it brings a homelessness, there is no place you can call home. It is the terrible night that falls over a life eternally. It is an utter separation, that is what sin does.

But Christ had another Law that worked in his life. The Law of life. The way of utter darkness will never more be known to the ones who put their faith in Jesus Christ. For Christ himself he trod that way and he took upon himself all that would have been ours so that we would not have to. It was not, I say again, the physical, it was that which sin did. Which separates, which abandons, which takes on out into utter darkness. That way, was the way of our Saviour. And I believe that from Gethsemane you begin to sense that he was experiencing the oncoming in his life that death, and what had been his began to fade and all that would have been ours began to be his by experience. The physical death we would say was horrible, but it doesn't hold a candle to the son compared to what the Bible says that death that he experienced so that life could be ours. All that we should have experienced he went there for us. Not just to the cross, but into the outer darkness that sin requires. He trod that way, he did bear into his body our sins, that's true, but it was not only the strips but it was all that happened when God dealt with sin in his most thoroughness that only God could deal with. It is that death that paid for our sin. And so when we say, "I thank you Lord for dying for my sin" I pray that we would never, ever understand that simply in term of the physical death of our Lord, as awful as that was. But it is that death that is talked about "the wages of sin is death," and that fell on our dear Saviour. And when Christ died for the ungodly and for our sin. The scripture says it was so that we would ourselves never again have to go that way for ourselves, the way of outer darkness will not be known by those who put their faith in Christ. For he went that way that there would be no more

death. Let me review, In John 8:51-52, "If a man keeps my saying, he will never see death." We are not talking about he shall never sleep, but rather he will never know the outer darkness of the separation and abandonment that sins brings. For in union with Christ Jesus there was someone else who took that experience into himself so that you and I would never have to go that way.

So when we enter into a union with Christ Jesus the life that was purchased becomes ours. But the death that we deserved fell on him. More than a physical cessation of life, but all that sin required fell on him. Then remember in John 6, "If a person eats of this bread that comes down from heaven he shall never die." He shall never have to experience the utter desolation that sin brings. The glory of the gospel, the good news, is that in Jesus Christ the sinner has life. He exchanges the death that should have been his because of his sin, for the life that comes through Jesus Christ. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." We are going to walk with you through with you the deeper dimensions of the cross, tonight I wanted you to understand at least, to begin to. Then when it says, "first Christ died for our sin," it means a awful lot more than that he slept when the life of the body went from him. He experienced death the fullness of death caused by sin. That desolation, and abandonment, that came over his soul, as the sin of a world, your sin and mine, was placed on him. So he looks at me and says, "Henry, I experienced death for you, I took into my life your sin. And I expended my life, so that you could live. But Henry you got to place your faith and trust and commitment in what I have accomplished for you. And when you do and you turn your sin radically over to me." And we will talk about that in another message.

How could we possibly live in sin knowing that our sin caused the death of the Son of God in it's deepest dimension, who could we? How could we indifferent to sin in any form in our life? We talk about holiness but many times we don't think in terms of the awfulness of sin. Matter of fact our generation doesn't want to talk about sin, and the ones who want to talk about least are God's people. Because somehow we have forgotten what it cost our Saviour in his deepest dimensions. What was it that he experienced in his death? It was more than the physical, it was a death that is hard to describe. Where language fails, where the mind senses its inconceivable. Where when you think of that utter desolation of soul and spirit that blackness of homelessness that come over our Saviour because of our sin. That creates and intensity against sin in our life. And where there is an intensity of our heart against sin in our life there is holiness that is produced in the way that we live.

It is not an doctrine, it is an experience and I feel that the apostle Paul somehow in the ways of God, when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ." I somehow feel that it was not just a positional doctrine. And I at times, I guess I'm been a pastor and walking with the broken, and I hear the theologians arguing and discussing about whether this is positional, and I said no to me it was absolutely real. It is doctrine to be discussed it is a fact! And I don't understand what God did with Paul, but I somehow believe that God let Paul understand the deeps of what happened when Christ died for our sin. He didn't sleep for our sin, folks he died for our sin. And I believe the Father let Paul know that and he never got over it. But somehow his mind and his heart was expanded and that he was with his Lord and understood it and had a radical transformation of his life. And there was a response of his life that was the only kind of response that was worth of one who had paid such a price. In the depth of want sin had done to the Saviour. Way beyond what we could imagine or conceive. And it brings from our hearts also a huge sense of trembling response to the Savior.

What is it that he did for you so that you would not have to go through that? What was it that he experienced that should have been yours? Take its worse scenario, take ever image that is given in the

scriptures, every word and sentence that God used to try to help us understand what happens to one who sins and does not enter into a relationship with Christ, take it all and you only got a picture of the reality, is far in excess of any picture than can be given. And all of that fell on the Saviour. That why I believe he said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful and heavy, my soul is in dark desolation, and hopeless," and then when he went to the cross it fell. But out of that the Father brought life to you and me. What an awesome response there must be from our heart. So the cross stands at the heart of a Christians life. It was there, it was there Jesus paid it all. That song which we sang,

"Jesus paid it all,

all to him I owe,

Sin had left a crimson stain,

He washed it white as snow."

I want us to take a moment of quite prayer and meditation for a moment, and even a fraction of what that meant. Have you been taking it lightly? Is there sufficient gratitude in your heart to match what your Saviour really did? Have you been living casually instead of intensely? Have you been shouting from the housetops the good news? Christ paid the penalty of eternal death so that we could have eternal life. Is there a special response of overwhelming love to your Savior? It needs to come from your heart tonight. Not a casual expressing of clichés but a deep heart wrenching gratitude. Yielded. Is there any sin that you need to yield to him?

---- Pause and reflect-----

Ending Prayer: Father Only Your Spirit through the scriptures can ever open our mind and our heart to the truth. I pray through these days that your Word would become a sharp two edged sword. That with the Word in our life we will never be indifferent to our sin. That we will have an ever enlarging sense of being overwhelmed at the utter nature of the death that Jesus died, for us that we might live with him. Only your Spirit can open that understanding, but we yield our minds and hearts to do it. In every message, and every direction would we seek to go. That our life would ever be an increasing reflection of what you have done in us concerning our sin. And what you have brought to us in the life in Christ. To the end that you may be exceeding glorified in the way we respond and live to Christ having died for our sins. Pray that truth maybe manifest to a watching world by how that we live. And it is in the name of our Saviour who loved us and literally gave himself for us. In his name we pray, Amen & Amen.

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