

## Doctrine - The Work of Christ - Pt. 1

Sign Title: The Work of Christ

October 17, 2010

Good morning! If you are new, I would like to welcome you. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. We are in the 5th week of a teaching series called, "Doctrine - What do we believe?" The purpose of this series is to review the basics of our faith. Last week, we looked at *the person of Christ*. This week, we are looking at *the work of Christ*. There are two important things Jesus did. One is die on the cross for our sin, the other is rise from the grave to conquer death and give us eternal life. Today, we are only focusing on what Jesus did for us on the cross. We will cover Christ's resurrection at our Easter service this spring.

When Christianity was in its infancy, shortly after the church began, there were discussions about what symbol would identify Christians. Some wanted fish and loaves as a remembrance of the feeding of the 5,000. Others proposed a dove, in remembrance of Christ's baptism. Ultimately, the symbol that won out was the cross. Beginning with the early church father Tertullian, Christians began making the sign of the cross at the end of their letters, in their homes, and around their necks. The cross started showing up everywhere.

The cross persevered as a symbol for Christians and today it permeates our culture to the point that crosses are fashionable. Madonna, concluded each of her *Confession* tour concerts by laying on a cross. People wear crosses for jewelry. Many well meaning Christians say, "Jesus loves you and died on the

cross for your sin." but they have no idea the significance of they are saying.

This morning, I want to begin by explaining to you the significance of crucifixion.

### What is crucifixion?

Crucifixion was invented by the Persians 500 years before the birth of Christ but it was perfected by the Romans in the days of Jesus until the Roman Emperor, Constantine, outlawed it in 300 AD.

Crucifixion was designed to be the most barbarian, shameful and painful way that man could create, for another man to die. The Jewish historian, Josephus, called it, "The most wretched of the deaths." The Greek philosopher Cicero said decent Roman citizens shouldn't even speak of the cross because that kind of death was unfit to even ponder. It was such a horrific way to die that Romans citizens weren't allowed to die that way. It was reserved only for foreigners or those guilty of high treason. There was even a new word invented to describe the level of pain that was experienced by those who died on a cross. That word has come over to us in the english. It is called *excruciating pain*. Literally meaning the pain of the cross.

A few years ago there was a CSI episode called *Double Cross* where a girl was murdered by crucifixion in a church. Gil Grissom, the lead investigator, went into a lengthy and accurate explanation of what happens in death by crucifixion. He rightly noted that ultimately, death is by asphyxiation. As the victim slouches forward the pull on the arms makes it difficult to inhale, so the victim uses their feet to take the weight off their chest and gasp another breath to extend their life.

Victims pass in and out of consciousness for hours or days while they bake in the heat of the sun and freeze in the cool of the night.

Sometimes, seeking to die as quickly as possible, victims would slouch forward in an effort to hasten their death. This is debated, some archaeologist say there is evidence that a seat was placed under the buttocks to keep victims from slouching forward and expediting their death. It is also debated, but some archaeologists say there is evidence that in an effort to keep men from sliding off the seat and expediting their death, an additional nail was pounded through the a man's fastening it to the seat so he could not slide off it. The whole point is to make a body suffer as long as it could possibly endure and make death on the cross the slowest, most painful and shameful way someone could die.

Perhaps most remarkable is that none of this was done in private. Crucifixion took place in the most public of places. It would be the equivalent of crucifying people in front of our local Wal-mart. As you can imagine, the worst kind of people enjoyed gathering for that kind of thing to mock and spit on the victims. While crucifixion was often done on a tall cross, which allowed everyone to see the victim, it was also done on a short cross, that put the victim at eye level with his accusers. This allowed them to look the victim right in the eye to insult and abuse him. It also allowed the wild animals and birds easier access to begin consuming the live flesh.

I tell you this not to gross you out but to give you a reality check. One of the greatest errors among Christians is to wear a cross and not understand what it is. To not appreciate what Christ endured as he was made sin *for us* is to tear

the heart out of Christ's work, especially when we remember what we learned last week. As God, Christ humbled himself voluntarily to the will of the Father and in love for us.

### How did Jesus die?

The crucifixion we just described, is what Jesus endured. But before Jesus died, he also endured something called *scourging*. Scourging is so painful that many men died from the it and never made it to their crucifixion. In scourging, a man is stripped naked. His hands are tied above his head, usually around a pole. An executioner used something called a *cat 'o nine tails*. This was a short stick that had strips of leather attached to the end of it. To the end of the leather strips were attached either a metal ball or steel hooks. The metal balls would tenderize the flesh, like you would a steak. The hooks would sink into the flesh of the back, buttocks and legs. The executioner would then tear the cat 'o nine tails across the back ripping off chunks of flesh. History records that sometimes these hooks sunk so deep ribs would come flying off the body as the cat 'o nine tales torn across a back.

Folks, this is what Jesus went through. This is the son of God, who created everything, who voluntarily humbled himself to become a man. Not just to become a man, but to die a death he didn't deserve. Not just an ordinary death but *death on the cross*.

700 years before this, Isaiah prophesied about what Jesus would look like after his scourging.

his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind... Isaiah 52:14 (ESV)

In other words, if you knew Jesus before his scourging, he was so abused after it you couldn't recognize him. Then he had a crown of thorns pressed into his scalp, so blood and sweat ran down his face and into his eyes. He was forced to carry his own cross-bar. Typically this would weigh around 100 lbs. Ultimately his body collapsed under the weight of that beam.

Upon arriving at the place of his crucifixion, nails were driven through his hands and feet, some of the most densely packed nerve centers of his body. The cross was raised and dropped into a hole. At this point, he is in excruciating pain. His eyes gaze upon a crowd of those who falsely accuse him. His disciples have abandoned or betrayed him. He hears the mocking around him, "What kind of God are you? You can't even save yourself."

Unlike so many other men, Jesus did not retaliate. He said things like, "Father, forgive them." To the thief who hung beside him he said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

### **Why did Jesus die?**

The crucifixion of Christ is a horrifying, gut wrenching reality. I hope you don't look at a cross the same again. Something that may be a little weird to you is that as Christians, we celebrate Jesus' death on the cross every Good Friday and every month with communion. Why do we do that? There are two reasons why Christians worship the Christ who was crucified, one is a bad reason, and it comes from history, the other is a good reason, and it comes from the Bible.

The answer from history is most shockingly summarized by a second century Roman painting. In the painting, Christ is being crucified on the cross,

but rather than Christ's head, the painting shows the head of a jackass. Beneath the crucified Christ is a man worshipping this jackass-man with his hands raised. The caption on the painting reads, "Alexa manos worships his God." So the first option as to why Christ died is that he is a loser. He was a pretender and the Christians who worship him are a bunch of fools worshipping a jackass.

The other answer why people worship Jesus is because he is who he claimed to be and his death on the cross was for our sin. Let's look at what the Bible says about the death of Christ. Let's begin 700 years before it took place in the book of Isaiah.

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)

who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:24 (ESV)

...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 (ESV)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God... 1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

Here is why the cross of Jesus is good news for us. On the cross took place something called *penal substitutionary atonement*. I know that is a big word. Don't freak out on me. This is something you need to know. There is no right understanding of the gospel, there is no forgiveness of sin apart from *penal substitutionary atonement*. It is something we need to understand. Let me explain it to you. We are going to take one word at a time.

**Penal** - That means there is a penalty for sin. In Genesis, God told our parents, if you sin, you will die. That's the penalty. Paul said, the wages of sin is death. That is spiritual death, our relationship with God is cut off; physical death, our

bodies die; eternal death with eternal, conscious, never-ending punishment.

When Jesus died on the cross, he did so to pay our penalty. *He suffered and died in our place for our sins.*

**Substitutionary** - That means Jesus went as our substitute. He went in our place. Jesus endured what we should endure. Jesus died *in my place*. He was my substitute. I love Jesus because of this. He endured what I deserved.

**Atonement** - Atonement is a word we start hearing in the Old Testament. God's people were told to celebrate Yom Kippur, also known as, the Day of Atonement. The point is that sin separates us from God. The Day of Atonement was a day when the people came together to individually and collectively deal with their sins through the Old Testament sacrificial system. The book of Hebrews reminds us the blood of the bulls and goats never took away sin, it only foreshadowed the once for all sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ. Though our sin separates us from God, through Christ's death in our place, atonement took place. We were brought back into the relationship with God we were created for. Atonement means "At-one-ment." To bring back together as one.

Here at Faith, penal substitutionary atonement is central to all we believe. We do not believe Jesus was a decent moral teacher or he was some kind of enlightened moral example. We believe he is God, who lived the life we have not lived, who died in the place we should have died, to give us the gift of eternal life we can not earn. That is why we love Jesus so much.

## What did Jesus' death accomplish?

There are many things Jesus' death accomplished for us. I want to just focus on one and there are two more in the Small Group Work Sheets.

### Jesus' death on the cross accomplished our justification.

...so we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

Let me explain justification to you. One day, you and I will stand before God and give an account for our life. God will be a just judge. Because he is just, we will not be declared free from sin because we are sinners. We learned this two weeks ago. We are sinners by commission, the things we choose to do wrong. We are sinners by omission, the things we fail to do right. We are sinners in our thoughts, words, deeds, feelings and even our motives. The Bible says in 1 John that no one can say they are without sin or they are a liar.

You and I are sinners and God is just. He can not look at us and say, "I declare you justified." The question is, how can we be declared right before God? Paul says the proclivity of our sinful human nature is to try to justify ourselves through what Paul calls, *the works of the law*. What he means is: we try to put on moral makeup to make ourselves look good before God. Paul calls this moral makeup, "works of the law."

Works of the law show up in two ways. The first is called *the religious form*, the second is a *vague spiritual form*. The religious form is trying to be a devout good religious person, so God will love you. The false assumption that underlies this thinking is we believe the only way God will love us or forgive us is



if we obey a bunch of rules. So religious people make a long list of things they will and will not do and they try very hard to keep the rules anticipating that on the Day of Judgment, when they stand before God, they will pull out their little list and say, "God, here is my life, I did a good job of keeping the rules, justify me."

The second way works of the law show up is not by people being religious and making lists of do's and don'ts but by reading the newspaper and figuring they aren't as bad as most people. After all, everyone knows there are bad people and good people. If you aren't on the cover of the newspaper and your face isn't posted on the post office wall, you must be a good person because you are better than most. The problem is, when you read the Bible, you discover God doesn't grade on a curve. He sees people as either perfect or imperfect. The Bible says that if anyone breaks just one of the commandments, they are guilty of breaking all of them. Any amount of unrighteousness in us permanently disqualifies us from being with God.

Another problem with trying to justify ourselves by the "works of the law" is that it leads either to arrogance or despair. It leads to arrogance because we start looking down on people who are not as good as we are or it leads to despair as we realize that no matter how many times we promise ourselves we won't keep giving in to sin, sin controls us and enslaves us so we give in to it again and again.

Even worse than these *works of the law* is the way God looks at our pitiful attempts to justify ourselves by trying to keep our list of rules or be better than most. You are going to have to hold on to your seats here. These are God's

words about what he feels about our pitiful attempts to make lists of the good things we do.

**We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)**

Isaiah is speaking here about religious list we make to try and convince God to justify us. God says that all of those righteous deeds are like a *polluted garment*. Let me give you a literal translation of this from the Hebrew. A polluted garment is a women's menstrual rag. It is like dying and standing before God with a lifetime of menstrual rags and saying, "God, I think I have a few things you will really appreciate. When you see them, you will declare me justified forever." You say, "That is disgusting." I know it is. Those are God's words, not my words! Our little good deed lists are totally disgusting to him.

Paul uses equally stark imagery when he talks about his religious life before Christ.

**Indeed, I count everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:8 (ESV)**

Paul is talking about all of his religious life before Christ as a Pharisee, as a leading religious figure of his day, as top in his Bible class, all of it is rubbish. Now some translations get a little skittish with this, just like they do in Isaiah. In the Greek, this is very graphic imagery.

I don't have a dog, but occasionally one of the neighborhood dogs gets off their leash and leaves a huge steaming pile in my yard. Every time I see Eckhard Tolle and Oprah, the Dalai Lama, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, you

name it,... I am reminded, that God sees all their religiosity as a huge steaming pile. I don't think that will impress God on Judgment Day.

When you stand before God on Judgment Day I don't think it will go well if you pull out a little religious resume and see it with God's eyes; a dirty menstrual cloth or a warm steamy pile. Trust me, God will not be impressed. You say, "That's disgusting." That's Biblical! Self made religion is disgusting to God! Trying to earn God's favor by what we do is so repulsive to him, it makes God want to vomit. That is why the Bible uses such disgusting imagery.

The alternative is Jesus. Paul said it this way and we talked about it last week.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

Martin Luther called this the great exchange. What this means is that all the sins of my past, present and future were put on Jesus Christ and the perfect righteousness of the sinless Lord Jesus Christ was credited to my account so when God looks at me, he see the righteousness of his son Jesus. My sin goes to Jesus, his righteousness comes to me. That is the great exchange. What we need to understand is this is purely an act of grace. Nothing in us makes us deserve this. We don't earn it. It is a gift, so it doesn't lead to haughty arrogance because we see ourselves as better than someone else. It also snatches us from the pit of despair because when we keep failing and we can't stand ourselves because of our sin, the good news is God chose to love us through Jesus in spite of ourselves. Yes, we don't deserve it! Instead of leading to pride

or despair it leads to humility. I did nothing to deserve God's love, Jesus did everything and he loves me.

### **The cross is God's love toward us in action.**

For many people, the cross is offensive. How can the cross be about God's love? It is about a disgusting barbaric death. Let me explain this to you. The most perverse misappropriation of love is to think love is just words or feelings and not actions. It is disgusting when a husband tells his wife he loves her but doesn't cherish her, encourage her, kiss her, provide for her, open the door for her, spend time with her, get a job to provide for her, pray for her and love her. Jesus doesn't just say he loves us, he actually did something to show it. He stepped in the line of fire intercepting God's fully deserved wrath that was headed our way. Jesus took the bullet we deserved. Some of you wonder if God loves you. Look at the cross, look at your sin. Jesus died the death you deserved to die. Of course he loves you. Look at these verses.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (ESV)

but God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 (ESV)

Friends, the cross is the clearest demonstration of the love of God in the history of the world. God loves us to such a degree that he came as a human being to identify with us. He lived a life without sin. He died the death in our place for our sins, and rose to forgive us and transform us. He lives to intercede for us and he's preparing a place for us. He will come again to claim us. After that we will live forever with him forever as our king.

This stuff is real and it transforms lives. I asked a friend of mine, Chad Goodman, to come and share how Christ has changed his life. For him, it all began two years ago on this weekend, when he, in faith, asked Christ's death on the cross to pay for his sin and transform his life.

Chad Goodman shares his story.

## Conclusion

Chad's story doesn't have to just be Chad's story. It can be your story. Do you want to become a Christian today? Do you want to give your sin to Jesus and accept his death in your place, and receive from him righteousness, grace, and salvation? Have you come to the place where you understand that your religion, morality and spirituality is insufficient to stand before the God of the Bible? Has God been burdening you that your life needs to change? If so, I invite you to become a Christian today by confessing your sin to Jesus and trusting him for salvation. The way we are going to do that will be terrifying for some of you. I'm going to invite you to join me up front so I can pray for you. If you have walked away from Christ and are living a life separated from God, this is a time to make a public commitment to Jesus so that I can pray for you and one of the pastors or elders can follow up with you.

Is there anyone here who would like to come forward and join me so we can celebrate together your decision to trust your life into the hands of Jesus? Is there anyone here who wants to become a Christian? Anyone? Is it time? Today is the day, now is the time? If you are shy? I understand. You need to

know that this is one of the safest places to meet Jesus because it will be celebrated and you will be encouraged. Is there anyone?

### Close Out

What is your name?

- Do you confess and acknowledge that you are a sinner?
- Do you acknowledge Jesus is God who died in your place for your sins?
- Are you trusting him for salvation today?
- Look at me, are you committing to walk with Jesus from this day forward? You won't be perfect but as God gives you grace, you will keep trying?

I want to pray for you.

### Prayer

Father, we pray for XXXXX. We pray for the forgiveness of their sins and their eternal life with Jesus. Father, I thank you that in a room filled with people they had the humility and courage to stand up and say, "I need Jesus to forgive me and I want to trust him." Holy Spirit, I ask that you would regenerate their hearts, renew their minds and give them the gift of faith as you transform them from the inside out. I pray Lord Jesus that as they read their Bibles, the Holy Spirit would begin applying the Scripture to their lives for healing and correction, even today. We ask all this in the good name of Jesus. Amen.



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