

CHRIST ON THE CROSS:

A Picture of Grace

The cross of Jesus Christ is the central event in history.

by JAMES MACDONALD

NOT UNTIL THE second century was the cross thought of as anything but a hideous instrument of death. Only after the deaths of everyone who had actually seen a crucifixion did people represent the cross as something sacred.

Today, the cross itself has become big business. But it was never intended to be some lucky trinket. Is it any wonder we have lost the wonder of what happened on Calvary?

The resurrection of Christ was the event that accomplished salvation and verified Christ's victory over death. But it was the cross of Jesus Christ that showed us the grace of God. Everything God wants us to know about Himself comes together in those crossbeams.

Picture Jesus stretched out against the sky. What's Jesus doing on the cross?

He's **SUBSTITUTING.**

Jesus lived on earth at a time of revolution and unrest in the nation of Israel. The Romans had conquered the land, and every day, Hebrew insurgents battled in the streets. With that background, we enter the story at Passover, Jewish culture's most celebrated time of year. Passover culminated in the

governor releasing a prisoner of the people's choice to appease their anger and reduce their frustration with the Roman occupation. This was Pilate's opportunity to avert the murderous demands for Jesus' death by offering either Jesus or the most notorious prisoner, Barabbas. But the crowd was irrationally determined to see Christ die.

Everyone knew the evil Barabbas had done. It is not stretching it to say that Jesus literally, physically took the cross that had been reserved for Barabbas.

To understand the gospel, you must first understand this idea of substitution. Jesus died first for Barabbas and then for every other human who has ever lived. I am in that line. You are too.

I deserve to die that death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. That's substitution.

He's **SCANDALIZING.**

The cross is an outrageous offense. It doesn't matter from what vantage point you stand: The cross makes scandalous claims that cause intense reactions.

The Jews, rejecting Christ, called out for His crucifixion, the most shameful, painful, awful death a person could experience. And they wanted it for Jesus.

The dictionary defines a *scandal* as that which causes a public outcry and produces an expression of malicious sentiment. The cross of Jesus Christ has always been an outrageous scandal.

Why the irrational hatred of Jesus Christ? Why the illogical animosity toward our Lord? There's a battle going on as Satan and his demonic army incite hatred against the cross of Jesus Christ. Very few are neutral in this battle; most are firmly entrenched and fighting on one side or the other. When you express to others the message of the cross, you're going to experience this scandalizing hatred.

What's Jesus doing on that cross? He's fighting for the souls of men. He's seeking to redeem them from their own hatred. Hear the soldiers laughing as the Savior gives up His life for them. Two thousand years later, people still scream and mock the cross of Jesus. It's a scandal!

He's **SUFFERING.**

Unlike modern ones, first-century executions did not seek a quick, painless death or the preservation of any measure of dignity. On the contrary, they sought an agonizing torture that completely humiliated the victim. To fully appreciate the meaning of the cross of Christ, you have to comprehend the extent to which He suffered for our sin.

Though it is often our focus, the physical pain was the lesser issue in Jesus' suffering. Through endless, countless eons of time, Jesus had known only perfect unity with His Father. Now as He hung on the cross, He experienced total separation from that perfect unity. What finite mind can comprehend separating the inseparable?

Forsaken by the Father? It would be one thing if Jesus was simply separated from the dark-hearted, pagan people screaming insults at Him. It's still another thing for Jesus to be abandoned by the weak-willed disciples who followed at a distance. Certainly, that was painful, but He had a realistic understanding of their weakness. But to be abandoned by God the Father — nothing compares to that. That is the suffering of the cross.

He's **SATISFYING.**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is only a concept until we comprehend the way Jesus' death on the cross satisfied God's wrath.

The temple represented God's presence. God dwelt in unapproachable holiness behind an impenetrable curtain called the Holy of Holies. The curtain reminded everyone of the sin that separated man and God.

Jesus died as an atoning sacrifice for sin. In the instant Jesus died, God Himself reached down and tore the veil in the temple from top to bottom.

Sin is now paid for. "The way is open," He declares. "Come into My presence. My Son has paid the price for your sin. Evil, sinful men can now approach holiness." Why? Because of the cross.

Some people ask, "Why doesn't God do something about sin?" Newsflash: He did. All God's righteous hatred of all that sin from all human history was poured out upon Christ as He hung on that cross.

A holy God poured out His wrath on His innocent Son so that we could be forgiven. When Jesus said, "It is finished," God said, "Paid in full." Sin has been put away now. The cross of Jesus Christ satisfied the requirements of a holy God.

"But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14, HCSB). ☉

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JAMES MACDONALD is an author and the founding pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, a suburban Chicago church. He can be heard daily through the radio broadcast Walk in the Word.