

INTRODUCTION

If I was told I only had one sermon left to preach in my whole life, I believe I would preach on the cross, because there's nothing more important to us as Christians than the cross. A couple of hundred years ago when missionaries first went to China, they found the fields wide unto harvest, and there were many converts to Christ. And missionaries and Chinese Christians build a beautiful church building on the south coast of China. But a terrible storm raged from the south, a typhoon, and demolished the church except for the front façade, and at the pinnacle of the façade, there was a beautiful, large, brass cross. And the rest of the building had been destroyed, but that one cross stood high on the south coast of China.

One evening, there was another storm, and a terrible shipwreck. John Bowring, a young English sailor, was hopelessly lost at sea. It was dark and he didn't know which way to swim. He was holding onto debris but he didn't know where the shore was or where at sea he was, but as the first rays of sunrise came over the horizon, he happened to glance up. And there at the distance, he just happened to catch a glimpse of that cross, and it gave him his bearings, and he began to swim toward the shore, and he survived. Later was knighted Sir John Bowring, and he wrote the words to this beautiful hymn based on his experience: In the cross of Christ I glory, towering over the wrecks of time; all the light of the sacred story gathered round its head sublime.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (NIV). "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

I. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

Consider with me the meaning of the cross. What does the cross say to us? What is the significance of the cross? I'm not talking about the symbol people wear around their necks or that you see built on church buildings. I'm talking about what happened when Jesus went to the cross for you and for me.

Verse 18 is the key verse to the entire passage. "The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved..." The King James Version says, "To those who are saved," but it is in the present tense, and so it's correctly translated here in the New International Version, "For those of us who are being saved." Now, you may look at that, and you may say, "Well, now, Pastor, I don't quite understand that because I've always heard, 'I

have been saved. Praise God I'm saved," past tense. But this talks about those who are *being* saved. Romans 13:11 says, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Have you ever realized that there is a process of salvation?

A. Past Tense: We have been saved from the penalty of sin

Salvation is in three tenses. Let's learn something about our salvation. In the past tense, we have been saved from the penalty of sin. I'm going to give you these, and then let's talk about them.

B. Present Tense: We are being saved from the power of sin

C. Future Tense: We will be saved from the presence of sin

In the present tense, we are being saved from the power of sin. And in the future sense, we will be saved from the very presence of sin.

Think for just a moment to the time when you were born again, the time that you were redeemed, the time that you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. At that moment, God forgave every sin you ever committed, every sin you'll ever commit. He took the penalty of sin, which is eternal separation from God forever in a place called hell, and He canceled the penalty of your sin. That's what happened in the past tense. The penalty of sin was removed. Back there, when you were saved in the past, did God remove the very presence of sin in your life? No, He did not. The presence of sin is still in our lives.

Paul the Apostle was redeemed. He was saved when he wrote these words: "The very things I want to do, I find myself not doing them. And those things I don't want to do, I find myself doing them." Paul still struggled with sin. He said the flesh and the spirit are contrary, one against the other, and they're constantly fighting. And even though we've been saved from the penalty of sin, the presence of sin is still in our lives, let's face it. But what God is saving us from the power of sin right now. In other words, as you grow in Christ, the power of sin in your life becomes less and less and less. And no longer do you have to say, "Well, I couldn't help myself." Now, before you came to Christ, you were a sinner by nature and by choice. But once you came to Christ, no longer were you a sinner by nature.

God took that old nature and replaced it with His holy nature. But the presence of sin is still there. But in the future, when you are in heaven, the time is going to come when the presence of sin won't even be there. Isn't it wonderful to know there will be no temptation or sin at all? And you've got to understand salvation in three tenses. That's what Jesus did on the cross. Did you notice in verse 18 that Paul writes for those of us who are being saved, it IS the power of God, not WAS. Although Jesus died on the cross almost 2,000 years ago, the cross is still working in your life, present tense.

When God created Adam and Eve, and He said, "I love you so much, I'm going to give you access to every tree in the garden—all the trees, all the fruit except one. There's one tree that I reserve for myself, and I put limitations around that. Do not trespass. Do not sin against my will. Do

not eat of that tree." And so, that's exactly what Eve did, and that's exactly what Adam did. Do you remember what God said to Adam and Eve? He said, "The day that you eat that fruit, you will die." Well, Adam ate the fruit, Eve ate the fruit, and the Bible says they lived for 800 more years. What happened? Is God telling the truth? He said, "The day that you eat of that fruit, you're going to die," they ate it, and they lived a long time.

Here's what happened: Most of you already know that we are body, soul, and spirit. But when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree, they died immediately in their spirit. They died progressively in their soul, and ultimately, they died in their body. In the Bible, death is not the separation of the soul from the body. In the Bible, death is the separation of the spirit from God. And so, they did die. Salvation is God reversing what Adam and Eve messed up.

- 1. Justified in Spirit: Immediately**
- 2. Sanctified in Soul: Progressively**
- 3. Glorified in Body: Ultimately**

Number one, this is what happened to you in your past. You were justified in your spirit. Number two, you are being sanctified in your soul, your personality. That's a process. God is still working on me. And then number three, you will be glorified even in your body. Adam died immediately in his spirit; he died progressively in his soul, and he died ultimately in his body, and when you become a Christian, God just reverses it. You're immediately justified in your spirit. Progressively, you're sanctified in your soul, and ultimately, you're glorified in your body. I've already given you those three words. What goes beside justified in spirit? Immediately. We believe in instantaneous conversion. The moment that you are born again, you are immediately justified in your spirit. But what about sanctification? That happens progressively. You are sanctified in your soul progressively. And then you will be glorified in your body ultimately.

It's very important that you understand these three tenses of salvation. You have been saved. That's justification. Justified is a word is a bible word a lot of people don't understand. I want you to think of this little phrase "Just as if I'd..." It means God looks at you just as if I'd never sinned. When you're justified, God looks at you and said, "You're innocent." The penalty of sin has been removed. Now, what does it mean for you to be sanctified? It means God is making you more and more like Jesus. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6 NIV)

Have you ever seen anybody walking around with this little button on their lapel that says PBPWMGIFWYMY? I saw one once, and I asked what it meant and the guy said, "It means please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet." And that's true. God looks at you not as you are, but He looks at you as you can become. God still working on you, but ultimately, one day, you're going to be glorified in your body. That means you're going to be made like the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what salvation is.

But here's our problem: We're really big on, "Oh, yes, praise God I've been saved." But have you ever noticed some people that's about all there is to their testimony? "29 years ago, I got redeemed. Oh, and bless God, one of these days, I'm going to be glorified. Oh, I can't wait to get

my little mansion and glory." I like what Ron Dunn says about this. "Most of us, when it comes to salvation, we're like grandmother's featherbed. We're firm on both ends, but we're really sagging in the middle." We concentrate so much on the past: "This is what happened to me" and we look forward so much to the future: "Praise God I'm going to heaven" that we don't really concentrate on where we are right now in letting God sanctify us and make us more like Jesus. Isn't this where we are right now in the process of being sanctified? And that's exactly what Paul is saying there. He says it is the power of God to those who are being saved.

I don't have anything on the outline about this, but I want to look at the flip side of those of us who are being saved. Verse 18 says, "the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing," present tense. When I was a teenager, there was a television program called "Run for Your Life" about a man who had a terminal illness. He had no physical symptoms of his terminal illness and had a year or two to live. He seemed pretty healthy, so he quit his job and he went off and did all these strange, weird, exciting, adventurous things because he knew he was going to die. On the outside, he looked fine and healthy. But the whole time you're watching this program, you know that inwardly, he's dying from some unseen disease.

That's a picture of a person that's not a Christian. They may look good from the outside, they may seem healthy and happy, but the Bible says in Verse 18 that if they don't know Jesus Christ, they *are* perishing, present tense. Now, if you tell somebody that, they say, "Oh, no, I'm not. I'm happier than you are. I'm having a good time." The Bible says they think we're a bunch of fools for being here and that the preaching of the cross is foolishness.

If you went to some of your friends or coworkers tomorrow, and they ask what you did last night and you said, "I went to church, and I heard this guy preach."
"You did what? You mean, you could've been out eating, you could've been out at the lake, you could've been watching a movie. You could've been having fun! You mean, you went to a church, and sat down, and opened your Bible, and sang songs, and listened to a guy get up there and holler about the Bible?"
"Yeah, I did." They're going to think you got a screw loose somewhere. You know why? The preaching of the cross is foolishness to them who are perishing.

II. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

Let's learn something else about the cross, and that is the message of the cross. Look at that word in Verse 18 again. It says for the *logos*, the concept, the preaching the Word, the message of the cross. Let's study a little crossology tonight. What is the cross saying to us? Paul takes this entire passage to say that to the Jews, they're looking for a sign because they're impressed by power. But the Greeks—that's us and everybody else—they're looking for wisdom because they're impressed by wisdom and philosophy. And that's why to them, the cross is a stumbling block. When you look at a cross, and you look at a man dying on a cross, you say, "Well, I don't see any power there."

A. Jesus is the power of God.

B. Jesus is the wisdom of God.

That's why when Jesus was hanging on the cross; the Jews said, "If you are the son of God, come down off the cross." The Jews were always saying, "Give us a sign, and we'll believe. If you just show us a sign." But the Greeks, they were impressed with philosophy. They wanted Jesus to be a double Socrates. Plato in the flesh, spouting out witticisms of wisdom. And there just doesn't seem to be anything wise or powerful about a man dying on a splintery cross. But Paul says if there's any message whatsoever of the cross, this is what it is. Look at verse 24. Here is the message of the cross, and it's two-fold. Number one, he says Christ is the power of God, and number two, Christ is the wisdom of God. That's what the cross is preaching. That's what the cross is trying to communicate.

The Jews were impressed by power. Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said, "Jesus, jump down off the pinnacle because if you jump, the Bible says the angels will catch you lest you dash your foot against the stone." You know why Satan tempted him that way? Because he knew the Jews would go crazy over some kind of a sign like that. That was powerful. But Jesus resisted that temptation. They wanted something powerful, and Jesus gave them a cross. The Greeks wanted some kind of wisdom, and that's why they were always looking for the teaching of Jesus, the parables of Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, he made all of man's power powerless. And when Jesus died on the cross, he made all of man's wisdom like foolishness. Isn't that what Paul is saying? The foolishness of God is smarter than the wisdom of man, and all the wisdom of man is foolishness to God.

A lot of people out there that you work with, that you know, maybe family members that honestly, the idea of a man dying on a cross and taking away our sins is just too hard for them to accept. I don't understand it, but that's just the way it works. When we were coming back from Russia a couple of weeks ago, we flew from Kiev to London, and I had the opportunity to sit on the airplane next to an agricultural scientist from Oxford, England who was living in Kiev, working with the Ukrainian government in food distribution. He was a very intelligent man. And we began to talk, and of course, he asked me what we were doing there, and it gave me an opportunity to talk to him about the Lord. And he smiled, and he was very polite and cordial, but he just let me know quickly that he thought all the claims of Christianity had no intellectual basis whatsoever.

It allowed me to talk about C.S. Lewis, one of my favorite writers, whom he could relate to as a highly intelligent man who set out to disprove Christianity, ended up becoming a Christian. And it was very interesting. We had a wonderful discussion. And he said, "I just don't see how anybody can believe in God." And he said, "I admire you for believing in God, but I just can't." And so, I just asked him, I said, "Well, I'm just curious because when I look at the universe, and I see how intricate the universe is, how complex it is, I just have to think that there is some intelligent design behind it. And when I look even at human reproduction, and I think about all the complexities of DNA and reproduction, I have to believe that there's some intelligent force that's guiding it all. I'm just curious you believe about that." And he said, "I've thought about it a lot. And I have come to the belief that it is all by chance."

He basically believed there was just some fortuitous concurrence, some explosion in space eons ago, and plasma became life. And he honestly believed that everything is just happening by

chance. And I was very polite, and listened to him, and we were getting along real good. And I said to him, "I wonder where this Boeing 737 came from?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said to him, "You know, I really believe that there was an explosion in a factory over in Washington State, and suddenly, all these parts just flew together, and they formed a Boeing 737 jet." And I said, "And furthermore, we're at 35,000 feet flying toward London, and I don't believe there's anybody in the cockpit steering this thing. I think it's just going along by chance." He got a real chuckle out of that.

I said, "For me to believe that this jet just happened by chance, and there's nobody guiding this jet is preposterous. And by the same token, I just cannot believe that this world came into existence by accident, and that it is going along simply by chance." He was so open. I gave him one of New Life's tapes, and immediately, he put it in his player and began to listen to it, and he was very interested, and very open. I think I planted some good seeds there, and I hope that he'll become a Christian. But it was interesting at the beginning how the idea of going halfway around the world to sing songs, and to take Bibles, and to tell people about Jesus was absolutely foolishness to him. That's what the Bible says: the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. But the Bible says that Jesus is the power of God, and he's the wisdom of God.

III. THE MIRACLE OF THE CROSS

Finally, let's consider the miracle of the cross, because it is by the cross that we are born again. It is by the cross that our sins are forgiven. It is by the cross that we're saved, but if you were to ask me to explain how that happens, I couldn't do it. It is simply a miracle. There is something amazing in verse 23, "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles." And then look back at verse 21, "Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

This is 1994 and I am basically standing up and doing for you today that the Apostle Paul was doing almost 2,000 years ago. I'm just preaching the cross. Wouldn't you think in 1994, we would have some high-tech replacement or that we'd be doing it differently? Why is it that as the world changes and technology increases, there never has been—nor will there ever be—a substitute for the simple preaching of the cross? And by the preaching of the cross, God still chooses to save those who will believe.

A. Response to the cross: Faith

There are only two responses to the cross. You can respond to the cross in faith. And by faith means you don't try to figure it out, you don't put it in a test tube and analyze it, you just apply faith, and you accept it.

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NIV) We'll be studying this a little bit later, but Paul makes

much of faith as opposed to man's wisdom. He says the only way that the cross can have an impact on your life is for you to put faith in God's power instead of man's wisdom.

B. Response to the cross: Foolishness

The only other response to the cross besides faith is what we've been reading about in these verses, and that is foolishness. You either say, "I accept it by faith," or "I reject it because it is a bunch of foolishness."

Have you ever thought about how miraculous the cross is? Let's face it: 2,000 years ago, a Jewish carpenter was nailed to a cross for six hours on a spring afternoon. They took him down off the cross and put him in a tomb. And here we are centuries later, and if we put our faith in that act of atonement, our sins are forgiven, and we live forever in heaven. That takes faith which you can't explain. One of my favorite stories from the Bible is in Numbers 21. The children of Israel were being led by Moses toward the Promised Land. And they began to gripe and complain. First of all, they complained because they didn't have any food, and God sent them manna from heaven. That's kind of like Frosted Flakes that were on the ground every morning, and they went out, and picked up the manna, and they ate it.

The Bible says they got tired of manna—you know, manna soufflé, baked manna, roasted manna, bamanna bread. They fixed it every way they could, and they complained and began to gripe and complain against Moses and against God.

Now, this is not a pretty picture, especially if you don't like snakes. But the Bible says God got fed up with them, and sent poisonous snakes in the midst of the camp. And these snakes started biting people, and the people started dying left and right. Finally, the people got the message: We better stop this griping. And they confessed it to Moses, and they confessed it to God, "We have sinned. Moses, do something and get rid of these snakes."

God could have just thought the thought, and the snakes would have disappeared. But the people would have come up with some kind of man's explanation for that. "Oh, these were just migratory snakes, and they passed on through going somewhere else." But God took care of the problem in a way that caused Him to get all the glory. He told Moses to make a snake out of brass and put it on a tall pole in the middle of the camp with the instructions to tell the people that when they are bitten by a snake, if they will simply look at that serpent on the pole, they will be healed and live. Look and live.

Let's go back in time and walk into that camp that afternoon. Everywhere you walk, you see slithering serpents. You have to be careful where you step, and everywhere you go, you hear cries of agony as people are bitten by these snakes. You see rocks piled up everywhere where people have been hurriedly buried because of the fatal bite of those snakes. And you walk up, and there's a father, and he's protecting his young son with a stick, beating the snakes away. But one of the snakes comes up from behind that boy and attaches itself to his calf and the father turns around and sees that. With anguish, he grabs that snake and jerks it away from his son, throws it down, and stomps the head of that snake with the heel of his sandal.

And he picks up his young son in his arms, and already, he notices the leg is becoming swollen, and his pulse is increasing, and there's sweat on his brows, his fever increases. And he weeps, and he says, "My boy. My boy. My only boy." But suddenly, there's a messenger who comes running into that part of the camp saying, "There's a cure! There's a cure! Moses put up a snake, and if you look at the snake, you'll live." And the man walks over to the messenger, grabs him by his robe, and says, "Look me in the eyes and tell me: What are you talking about? A cure? Explain it to me." He says, "I don't understand, but God told Moses to make a brass serpent, put it on a pole, and put that pole up. And if you'll just look at it, you'll be healed, and you'll live." And the father asked, "How do you know that it works?" And the man says, "Because I was bitten, and now I'm healed."

The best witness is a changed life. And so, the father tells his son, "You see that serpent on the pole over there? Son, just look at that and believe God." And the little boy raises his swollen eyelids, and he looks over there, and he sees that snake on a pole, and I can't explain it, the father couldn't explain it, Moses couldn't explain it, but when he looks at that and believes the Word of God, suddenly, his fever breaks, color comes back in his cheeks, his pulse decreases until it's normal, and before long, he's a happy little boy walking around.

But there's a woman who hears the messenger, and with great excitement, she runs to the flap of her tent, because there laying on blankets in the tent is her husband who's been bitten, and she rushes in and she says to her husband, "Honey, you don't have to die. You don't have to die. I know you've been bitten, but Moses put a snake on a pole, and if you just look at that snake, you can live. You can live. Honey, please, let me pull back the flap of the tent. Look at that snake." And he looks at her, and he says, "Woman, are you talking about that brass serpent theory? Don't give me your religious superstition. How can looking at a snake on a pole do anything about my snake bite? I'll have nothing to do with that foolishness." And the preaching of the cross to them that perish is foolishness.

And Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up." I can't explain it. But if you'll simply look to Jesus, you can live. And that's the miracle of the cross.

OUTLINE

I. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

Salvation is in three tenses:

- A. Past: We have been saved from the penalty of sin
- B. Present: We are being saved from the power of sin
- C. Future: We will be saved from the presence of sin

- 1. Justified in Spirit: Past
- 2. Sanctified in Soul: Present
- 3. Glorified in Body: Future

II. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

- A. Jesus is the power of God.
- B. Jesus is the wisdom of God.

III. THE MIRACLE OF THE CROSS

Two responses to the Cross:

- A. Faith (vs. 2:5)
- B. Foolishness

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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