

**A sermon outline about
the saving power of the cross of Christ, according to Mark.
Reading: Mark 15:25-39**

Introduction: Religion can sometimes be the enemy of Christianity. The religion I think about, has to do with ceremonies and rituals, symbols and traditions. There is a place for most of that, but too often, these things hold a primary place instead of a secondary one. When too much emphasis is placed on the symbols of Christianity rather than on the substance of it, the symbols themselves become meaningless.

Crosses are a most important example of this. Thousands wear crosses of gold and silver. Many beautifully decorated with even diamonds. One can wear a cross, completely unaware of the meaning of the true cross, the cross of Jesus. The cross can so easily become just another item of jewellery and decoration. Only a symbol, a trademark, of the Christian faith, and nothing more. It can be a trademark of Christianity, without any bearing on its true meaning in the hearts of those who wear and use it.

There were no jewels decorating the cross where our Lord died for our sins. Many lost the true understanding of the cross. How about you? What does the cross of Christ Jesus mean to you?

You may be involved in religion forever, yet never come to understand the true significance of the cross. You may end up with a sentimental understanding of a beautiful golden ornament, rather than a rugged instrument of death. *Like the gallows in England and her colonies, the guillotine in France and the electric chair in the USA, the cross was the instrument with which the Roman state executed the death penalty. I must say, I have never heard about someone wearing silver gallows or a golden guillotine as a decoration or piece of jewellery. The cross was a crude, splintered, rugged instrument of death. Why do Christians then see it as a symbol of their faith and allegiance to God?*

In order to understand the real of the cross, we have to listen to the Word of God. There we find a radically different picture of what the cross really means. It is a picture which, if received in faith, has the power to change your life. It is a picture that changed human history.

The cross of Jesus has immeasurable power and immense promise. Because of the cross of Christ, we can have hope, faith, love and salvation. Because of the cross of Christ, we receive forgiveness. Because of the cross of Christ, our lives find purpose and meaning. Because of the cross of Christ, we are made whole. In the cross we find healing and freedom. The cross of Christ has power. As Isaiah said centuries earlier: *"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Paul said: *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."* The cross of Jesus should make a radical, reconciling, redeeming difference in your life.

What does the cross of Jesus mean to you? Does it impact on your whole life and set you free from the slavery of evil? Let's look at the biblical meaning of the cross of Jesus. Let's listen to what the Bible says about the cross of Christ.

1. The priority and precedence of the cross of our Lord.

Jesus stumbled and fell on his way to the cross. But we have no doubt that he intended to be crucified on that cross. He was born to, and lived, to die on the cross. He knew that the cross was his purpose and his calling. A few hours earlier, in Gethsemane, he prayed in agony of the cross. But he knew that it was God's will for him and that it was God's way to redeem his people. The cross was the highest priority for Jesus Christ. It had precedence above anything else.

Verse 28 says, *"And the Scripture was fulfilled. . ."* The Old Testament has many prophecies concerning the death of Christ. The cross was no coincidence or matter of human cruelty and injustice. Jesus was no victim of Pilate's cowardice or the envy of the priests.

It was central to the plan of God to save his children. It was God's priority. *From before the creation, God knew about the cross. When God created man with a free will, he was willing to go to the cross for man's salvation. What God had to do to avoid the cross, was to not create the human race.* This tells us of God's love for me and you. That since the beginning he chose the cross, and suffering, in order to be our Lord and Friend.

The cross is essential to God's purpose for us. Because the cross does much more than to redeem us. As instrument of death, Jesus died at the cross. We, who follow him, must also die at the cross. This is the gospel!

The cross is God's priority. There he sacrificed his only Son, for our sins. The Scripture teaches that all of us fall short of the glory of God. We all are sinners. We are sinners by nature and by choice. And the wages of sin is death. Without the cross, we would die eternally in hell. *That is why Jesus came and why the cross was his priority and why the cross has precedence in the Good News of God.*

Jesus came to die on the cross, that we may have life. Jesus suffered on the cross, because he loves us with divine love. Jesus suffered on the cross, because it was God's salvation plan for us. The cross shows us the love of God. It assures us that God is on our side. Because of the cross, we can believe that we are saved and eternally protected by our Lord.

The cross teaches us how to live! Jesus not only died to carry the punishment for our sins, but to show us that the old, sinful person must die too. Without dying we are not raised to new life for the Lord. The cross teaches us to die daily to our selfishness and greed, our own desires and impurities - and to start living for God.

The cross is much more than a decoration or a symbol of our faith. The cross, an instrument of death, is our way of life. It is our priority. It is our motive to give Christ precedence, always.

2. The pain on the cross.

They led Jesus out to crucify him on Golgotha. Crucifixion was an extremely painful way to die. It is hard to describe the torture experienced through crucifixion. The pain of the cross was unbearable.

Jesus had been scourged. He had been mocked by the soldiers, a crown of thorns was pressed hard upon his head. He was beaten, spat upon and struck with many blows. Then the cross had been placed upon his back as he stumbled towards Calvary. Now, he was stretched out upon the rugged cross. Nails were driven through his hands. With knees bent, one foot placed over the other, a nail was driven through both. The cross placed into the ground, the final suffering had begun.

Dying on a cross was long, excruciating suffering. Hanging on a cross causes the lungs to fill up with fluids. As the pain became unbearable, you could push up for breath because of a bended knee, and

this would decrease the pain in the upper body, but then caused more pain in legs and feet. This could go on for a long time.

But remember that the agony of Jesus was much more than physical pain.

It was also emotional. Jesus was also mocked. Verse 29 and 30 say, "*And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'Ha! You who were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!'*"

And the pain of the cross was more than emotional and physical pain. Verses 33 and 34 record this: "*And when the sixth hour had come, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, Laama Sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'*"

Because Jesus bore our sin, even God had turned from him. This was the worst pain of all. He was alone, even without his Father's help. The Scripture says, "*Greater love hath no man than this, than he lays down his life for a friend.*" Because he loved us, he endured the cross! Because he loves us, he endured hell on the cross.

3. The saving power of the cross of Christ

When Jesus died, the Bible said that "*the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*" This is the power of the cross.

The veil separating the Holy and the Most Holy place in the Temple was torn in two. The veil which obstructed free access to the Most Holy place, was now torn in two. The way was opened for all of us to go to God.

The power of the cross makes it possible for us to come into God's presence again. There is power in the cross of Jesus Christ, the power to save us from sin, to give us peace and grant us true life again. Because of the cross, every obstacle between God and man was taken away. The gift of grace is ours through the saving power of the cross.

What does the cross mean to you? Have you experienced its power in your life? Is the cross only a decoration, a piece of jewellery or Christian logo to you, or have you received salvation through its saving power that would change your life and bring you into community with God and his people?

In closing:

At the foot of the cross stood a Roman officer. He had witnessed many crucifixions, but this one was entirely different. The officer saw something he had never seen before. *He saw how Jesus Christ died.* Was it the peace in spite of torture that he saw? Did God open his eyes to see the grace and love displayed? Whatever he saw at the cross, whatever he experienced when Jesus died, changed his life and his faith, and he said, '*Truly this man was the Son of God.*'

Has the cross of Jesus Christ changed your faith? Has it changed your life?

What does the cross of Jesus, say to you today?

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.