**The Beautiful, Terrible Cross** March 25, 2018

**Business Insider** put together a list of the reported last words of notable individuals.

**Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor:**

"I found Rome of clay; I leave it to you of marble."

**Bob Marley, a musician:**

"Money can't buy life."

**Karl Marx, a philosopher:**

"Last words… are for fools… who haven't said enough."

**Humphrey Bogart, an actor:**

"I should never have switched from scotch to martinis."

**Thomas Hobbes, a philosopher:**

"I am about to take my last voyage, a great leap in the dark."

**Ludwig van Beethoven, a deaf composer:**

"I shall hear in heaven.”

Coffee/Question:

If you knew you were going to die today, what would you say to those you love most?

On the day we call Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem to be crowned as King.

But there never was… and never will be… a coronation like his.

In anticipation of his coronation, the body of Jesus should have been washed with clean water.

Instead he was bathed with his own blood that poured from the wounds inflicted on him by flogging.

Those who helped Jesus dress, should have put on him royal clothing.

Instead, they stripped him naked.

They did put a crown on his head…but it was made of thorns.

A scepter was placed in Jesus’ hands. But it was a staff of wood, which was then taken from him and used to strike him …repeatedly.

The oil poured out on his head was spit.

The praise which greeted him was shouts of scorn and mocking.

The gifts given to honor Jesus were three nails and a spear that were driven into his hands, his feet and his side.

The food offered to him was sour wine.

The throne he was placed upon… was a cross.

And the final words spoken by Jesus were – “It is finished.” John 19:30

What did Jesus mean when he said this?

Where he said what he said…is of the utmost importance.

Jesus’ last words were spoken from a cross.

F.F. Bruce wrote: *The Latin word for cross, “crux,” was unmentionable in polite Roman society…In the eastern provinces of the Roman empire the Greek word for cross, “stauros,” inspired dread… The cross in the time of Jesus was not a sacred symbol, but one of unspeakable horror.”* oneplace.com/ministries/boast-of-the-cross-10210.html

Did “horror” overwhelm Jesus? Were these words spoken in shock; panic?

Or were these words of resignation – indicating his enemies had won?

The cross did not overwhelm or defeat Jesus. Nor did it discredit him, even though as Paul would later write to the church in Corinth, *“Christ crucified is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”* 1:23.

Jesus’ cry, “It is finished,” was a shout of victory.

When we look at the cross we see the *“power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

1 Corinthians 1:24

But we must ask why did it have to be this way?

Why the “catastrophe of Calvary?” Brian Zahnd, Don’t Rush Past Good Friday

Ravi Zacharias says, *“The cross of Jesus brings into focus evil’s assault against innocence …[the cross serves as] both a mirror and a window.”* Jesus Among Other Gods, p.132

**Big Idea:**

**Like a window... the cross reveals who God is.**

He is a holy God, which means he is more than simply good.

In the Bible, to speak of God’s holiness is to speak of his… *“tremendous ‘otherness.’*

*God has revealed himself as the Being in whom all goodness dwells...He is the very essence of what the word ‘goodness’ is based upon.”* Jesus Among Other Gods, p.123-124

The centurion, who oversaw the execution of Jesus, was left in awe by the “otherness” of Jesus, and said, **“Surely this was a righteous man!”** Luke 23:47

**Big Idea:**

**Like a mirror... the cross shows us who we are.**

In the beginning, God created male and female human beings in his likeness.

It was at this point that God entrusted to the first humans…the tremendous privilege of caring for the creation and the creatures of the earth… on his behalf.

God created Adam and Eve to be perfect; but theirs was an… untested… perfection.

Acting on behalf of all who would be born, Adam and Eve were given by God a choice - to love him or to live without him.

They chose… to live without God – to live life on their own terms.

This choice unleashed devastating consequences, that they could not undo.

Through their choice and because of their choice, death entered the human experience.

Since then, every person born, enters life spiritually dead.

This condition is beyond a person’s ability to remedy.

We are no more capable of making ourselves spiritually alive, than a corpse can make itself live again.

This is a concept that is hard for us to grasp!

Human beings have done wonderful things – evidenced in literature, music, art, architecture, medicine, agriculture, science.

But everyone knows – something is not right... in this world.

The problem of evil…is not… out there…it is in me; it is in you.



John Stott wrote: *Before we can begin to see the cross as something… done for us, we have to see it as something… done by us.* leadershipresources.org

This is the truth which the cross mirrors to us.

Something is tragically wrong with us.

What other viable explanation can there be as to why humanity, not just killed, but brutally killed Jesus.

What did he do… that was so wrong?

He went around doing good – he healed sick people. Acts 10:38

He taught that to see him was to see the invisible Father, John 14:9, and that he was the way home to God. John 14:6

How were any of these… a crime… deserving of death by crucifixion?

They weren’t.

The kingdom of God which Jesus announced was a new way of living; a new way of “arranging human society” (Brian Zahnd, Don’t Rush Past Good Friday ), with God again at the center.

Jesus was perceived to be a real threat to the way things were.

And so, “Caiaphas the religious, Herod the rich, and Pontius Pilate the powerful, with the complicit involvement of the Jews and the Romans, killed Jesus.

**In mirroring who we are, the cross also shows humanity’s desperate need of a Savior, and just how great God’s love is, in that he would rescue us.**

Richard Foster says, *“Golgotha came as a result of God’s great desire to forgive, not his reluctance.”* leadershipresources.org

It is because he dearly loves us, that God hates sin and its consequence – death.

We need to hear this again.

God hates sin because… he loves us.

The word used in the Bible to describe God’s response of hatred towards sin… is wrath.

James Smith wrote: *“Wrath is not a permanent attribute of God…but a temporary, necessary and just reaction of a loving, holy, good and beautiful God, to sin and evil….Wrath is not something that God is, but something that God does… God is fiercely and forcefully opposed to that which destroys his precious people….”*

The Good and Beautiful God, p.121-122

**The cross reveals what Jesus had to do, in order to bring us home to him.**

The wrath we deserved, fell on him.

If there had been any other way, it would have been taken.

But the seriousness of our sin was such that only the sacrifice of Jesus’ perfect life could pay in full our spiritual debt and break death’s power over us.

This is why Timothy Keller says:

*You are*more*sinful…*than*you could dare*imagine…*and you are*more loved*and accepted….*than you could ever*dare hope.*

The cross exposes our sin; and… reveals God’s goodness, kindness and mercy.

This is why Paul wrote in 1 Corinthian 1:31, “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*

He came back to this theme again in Galatians 6:14: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ…*

What is precious to us, who follow Jesus, is not the cross, in and of itself, but the One who hung on it, our Lord Jesus.

What is of unmeasurable worth is what was accomplished when Jesus gave up his life on the cross.

Jesus’ death brought about the death of sin.

Look again at Galatians 6:14: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

The word “world” used in this verse means the way of life that excludes God, where sin is the primary energizer that influences all that happens.

Jesus’ death on the cross broke the tyranny of sin.

This is why we boast in the cross.

Look at Colossians 2:13-15:

*… God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,****14****having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.****15****And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

How did God make us alive with Christ?

Our guilt gave sin power over us.

But Jesus by the sacrifice of his life on the cross, paid in full the debt of our sin.

As the Roman soldier’s nailed Jesus to the cross; God the Father on that same day, nailed sin’s legal claim over us, to that same cross.

This was how sin’s power was taken away.

This was how the dark powers who were operative in this world; who work in the shadows... were disarmed.

This is why I earlier said that the cry of Jesus, “It is finished,” was a shout of triumph.

And his triumph… is our triumph and our hope.

We boast in the cross, because…this was the means by which the power of new creation is now at work in us.

We are no longer slaves to sin.

Through faith in Jesus, we have been given a new nature that is alive to God.

We are no longer helpless.

Jesus by the Holy Spirit lives in us and he gives to us inner strength to say yes to living life as God says it is best lived.

We boast, we celebrate, we hope in the cross because it is the greatest demonstration of God’s love. If doubt ever creeps into your mind; if you ever feel like God doesn’t love you, look to the cross of Jesus.

Billy Graham said, many time over the course of his life, *“God proved his love on the cross. When Jesus hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, “I love you.”*

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Today we remember the beautiful terrible cross.

At the cross, God reconciled the world to himself in Christ. Because of the cross, God does not count people’s sin against them. 2 Corinthians 5:19

Philippians 2:6-8

*Jesus was in very nature God. He did not consider equality with the Father something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!*

We remember the beautiful terrible cross.

There on the cross, the Father laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all; and he was crushed.

The Father made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become righteous. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Who can grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus? Ephesians 3:18

It was not nails that kept Jesus on the cross; but love.

He could have called for angels to rescue him - but he didn’t.

He bore our sin. He stayed the course.

He finished what he had come to earth to do.

We remember him.

We remember the cross... and we worship.

Follower of Jesus, let the words of the songs we are going to sing, be your... awe-filled... prayer of gratitude for what Jesus did on your behalf.

**W**orship thrives on wonder.

And as we look at the cross we are left in wonder.

Those of you, who are dearly loved by God, but who have not yet opened your life to the One who died in your place...

when you receive him; when you believe in him…

in addition to removing your guilt and forgiving your sin, God will birth in you a new nature, so that you can begin to live the life that is truly life; alive to God; centered in God; in relationship with God.

Will you… this morning, open the door of your life to Jesus?

Will you come to him who has come to you?