

Why the Cross Matters

By Chris Tomlinson

Is it possible to talk too much about the cross?

I ask this question only because some preachers and writers and teachers seem to talk about the cross a lot. Some do so almost continually. We can understand why they might carry on in this way because we know the primacy and weight of Calvary. But there are still times this thought crosses many of our minds: "Great, so I understand the cross is important. But can't we move on to the next topic?"

We say this sort of thing when we feel our faith is about more than Jesus. And in one sense, we can say this is true. Our faith is about God's glory, and our joy, and loving others, and meeting the needs of the oppressed, and being made holy, and sojourning through life, and laying up treasures in heaven, and all sorts of other things. In this way, we are saying the expression of our faith is about many things.

But in another sense, the entirety of our faith is about Jesus. God's grand, redemptive story begins with a foretelling of the coming Seed. His chosen servants foreshadow His mission. His prophets herald His arrival. As history progresses onward, we begin to see the entirety of God's revelation to humanity as pointing towards the advent of the Messiah. This is perhaps why Paul says, "All the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (2 Cor 1:20). In this second kind of way, we are saying the purpose of our faith is about one thing: Jesus.

So when we find the purpose of our faith is about Jesus, we have to ask ourselves the question: why is this so? What is it about the person of Jesus, the mission of Jesus, the work of Jesus, which makes Him the reason for our faith? And this is what leads us to the cross.

Here's why the cross matters: It is at the cross that we see God most clearly. If history were the vastness of space, the cross would be its brightest star. We see the fullness of God's being most clearly at the cross. We see the fullness of His active purposes most clearly at the cross.

At the cross...

...We see God's **sovereignty**—reigning with absolute control over humanity's greatest sin.

...We see God's **purpose**—making known the mystery of His will prepared before time.

...We see God's **plan**—to unite all things, on heaven and on earth, in Him.

...We see God's **judgment**—requiring recompense for guilt.

...We see God's **holiness**—demanding the perfect sacrifice.

...We see God's **power**—crushing the Son of God according to the purpose of His will.

...We see God's **wrath**—punishing the wretchedness of sin.

...We see God's **sorrow**—wailing as only a forsaken son can.

...We see God's **mystery**—the Son, as God, separated from the Father, committing His Spirit to God.

...We see God's **compassion**—pleading to the Father to forgive the ignorant.

...We see God's **gift**—His one and only Son, bruised and broken on our behalf.

...We see God's **mercy**—making unrighteous sinners righteous.

...We see God's **love**—Christ dying for sinners.

...We see God's **rescue operation**—delivering us from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of His Son.

...We see God's **proposal**—pledging Himself to His bride forever.

...We see God's **revelation**—the Word of God speaking His last so He might speak on behalf of many.

...We see God's **victory**—disarming His enemies, putting them to shame, and triumphing over them.

...We see God's **glory**—the name of the Father being magnified for the sake of all peoples.

But seeing God most clearly is not an end to itself. If it were, then the point of all history would be our own clarity of sight. But that is not history's purpose. Everything exists for Jesus, so that in everything He might be preeminent. We study the Scriptures to know more of God. We look forward with great hope to the day we will see Him face to face. But in the here and now, we know God most fully when we look upon the person and work of Jesus on the cross.

It is only when we behold the Son of God most clearly that we can magnify Him most fully, acknowledging His preeminence in all things, which reflects more brightly the reality of His glory. This is why one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, because on that day, all will see Him as He is, either toward our greatest joy or our greatest sorrow.

So if you preach and teach about the cross, remember that we, as your people, need the lens of your preaching to continually focus our hearts on the crucified Son of God. And if we hear or read about the cross and wonder what is next, that we're ready to move beyond it, let us remember that the cross matters for our yesterday, and our today, and our tomorrow.

And let us always hold the best of our hearts, the fullness of our hearts, for the One whose scars will testify for eternity to the glory and horror of that day that made possible the one day we will enjoy with Him forever.