

THE CROSS



1. Background

a. Historical

The Law directed death by stoning (Lev. 20:2; Deut. 22:24). But the Law did permit the public display (or "*hanging*") of a lawbreaker's body "*on a tree*" (Deut. 21:22) strictly commanding that the "*body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day*" (Deut. 21:23); (also see John 19:31). Persons so displayed (or "*hanged*") after execution by stoning for breaking Israel's Law were said to be "*accursed of God.*" (Deut. 21:23). This helps explain the references to Jesus' being killed "*by hanging on a tree*" (Acts 5:30; 10:39) and the statement that Jesus was "*cursed*" in (Galatians 3:13). Jesus was publicly displayed as a criminal and enemy of the state.

b. Jewish view

To the Jewish people, crucifixion represented the most disgusting form of death (Deut. 21:23), yet the Jewish Sanhedrin sought and obtained Roman authorisation to have Jesus crucified (Mark 15:13-15).

c. Jesus' Crucifixion

As was the custom, the charge against Jesus was attached to the cross; He was offered a brew to deaden His senses, but He refused (Mark 15:23). There was no need for the soldiers to break His legs to hasten death. By the ninth hour (Mark 15:34, 37), 3:00 P. M.-- in only six hours-- Jesus was already dead (John 19:31-33). Jesus' body was not left to rot; the disciples were able to secure Pilate's permission to give Him a proper burial.

2. Meaning of the Cross

a. Symbol of full commitment

The authors of the gospels tell us that the Lord Jesus spoke of the cross before His death as a symbol of the necessity of full commitment (even unto death) for those who could be His disciples:

*Mat 10:38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me **is not worthy of me.***

*Luke 14:27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me **cannot be my disciple.***

*Mark 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must **deny** [c.f. Peter's denial] **himself** and **take up his cross** and **follow me.** (c.f. Luke 12:9 "But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.")*

An example of this is Mark 10:21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

b. Significance of the Cross

The major significance of the cross after Jesus' death and resurrection is in its use as a symbol of Jesus' willingness to suffer for our sins.

Phil 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

His suffering was in order that we, His children, might:

be reconciled to God

2 Cor 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Col 1:20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

know His peace

Eph 2:16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

c. Glory of the Cross

The cross symbolises the glory of the Christian gospel.

1 Cor 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Crucifixion was a horrific and offensive means of death, yet ...

1 Cor 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ... see the reasons offered in the 'Background', above - to be crucified was to be accursed of God!

d. Result of the Cross

The debt of sin against us was "*nailed to the cross*".

Col 2:14 having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

We have been freed from sin and death.

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

We have been made alive to God.

Rom 6:6-11 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

We have become 'new creations', no longer the old sin-full person, but one willingly allowing the righteous and holy One who suffered and died for us to direct our lives.

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Gal 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

3. Summary

We are a people who are made holy ., who are redeemed ., by the blood of Jesus Christ. There is no power in the Universe that can make a person right with God, through removing the stain and corruption of Sin. This is possible only through faith in the Person of Jesus, whose righteous blood was shed in our place. He purchased our salvation, by paying a price that no-one else could. He is the only **Redeemer** of human souls; we can turn to none other!

The cross, then, is the symbol of:

Jesus' love,

God's power to save,

The promise of eternal life, and

The thankful Believer's unreserved commitment to Christian discipleship, outside and inside His Church.

To those who know the salvation which Christ gained for us through His death, it is a "*wondrous cross*" indeed.

The cross has been a major stumbling block in the way of the Jews, and also to the intellect of our Western society, preventing the majority of them from accepting Jesus as their Messiah. The apostle Paul summed up the importance of the cross:

1 Cor. 1:23-24 *"We preach Christ crucified, to the `Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks [the Western world] foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God"*

Out of the ugliness and agony of crucifixion, God accomplished the greatest good of all -- the redemption of sinners; no, **the redemption of 'Me'**.

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