

# The Gospel of John

## The Meaning of the Cross

### John 19:16-18

#### INTRODUCTION:

Two weeks we looked briefly at how the scriptures, both the books of the old testament and the books of the new testament, are in complete harmony with each other despite the fact that the 66 books were written by over 40 different authors over a period of 1500 years. The old testament pointed to a suffering Messiah that was to come to be salvation for mankind. Messianic prophecies were written so that when the Messiah came, he could be identified. In the new testament we see how Jesus fulfilled those prophecies.

When we read and understand the scriptures it becomes very clear that, although they were written by men, they had to be inspired by God. When you look at the prophecies both in the old and new testament and see how Jesus fulfilled them perfectly, it becomes perfectly clear that He truly was the Son of God. The odds of one man being able to fulfill all of the prophecies concerning the Messiah was impossible. **Jesus was the prophesied Messiah!**

Then last week we examined God's plan of salvation for the world?

It was to send His Son to the world to teach us concerning His kingdom and to die on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for all mankind. John describes it in chapter 3.

#### **John 3:16-17 (NASB)**

**16 "For God so loved (endless love) the world, that He gave (grace) His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish (mercy), but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.**

So we see that God chose to save us because of His love for us. **We did not deserve salvation!** It was by God's grace (giving us something that we did not deserve) and mercy, (withholding the punishment we did deserve) that God provided a means of salvation for mankind by sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins.

Jesus knew what He was facing. Yet He was willing to suffer the cross in order to fulfill His Father's will and bring salvation to mankind.

#### **Matthew 16:21-23 (NASB)**

**21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get**

behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Although the disciples had been told of Christ's death, they were not willing to accept it. This was a horror beyond belief that their Messiah would be killed. They just did not understand the significance of the event. But it was to become clear to them when Jesus rose from the dead. This was an event that had been planned by God since before the beginning of time. Although it was prophesied in the old testament, it was concealed. Even Satan did not understand. He thought by crucifying Christ, He had won the war. Mankind was now his. But in reality, it was this very event that caused him to lose the battle.

### **John 16:20 (NASB)**

<sup>20</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.

**When Jesus died on the cross the disciples wept and lamented because of the physical suffering of Christ. But when He rose from the dead they realized that He had to die physically in order to spiritually suffer for sin in our place under the wrath of God.** The Jewish leaders and the people who cried out "crucify Him" thought they were doing a favor to God. In their mind they were eliminating a blasphemer Who claimed to be God. When, in reality, they were actually crucifying the Son of God. They had no clue that they were being instrumental in fulfilling scripture and accomplishing God's plan of salvation. Had they have known, they would never have put Jesus on the cross. That is one of the amazing things concerning the cross. God's plan was carried out by the very ones who disbelieved.

### **Stand and Read Scripture**

#### **John 19:16-18 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup> So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

<sup>17</sup> They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. <sup>18</sup> There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.

### **Prayer**

Throughout scripture we see that God is truly in charge of everything that happens in this world even when everything seems to be going awry. He uses the evil schemes of men throughout history to accomplish His own purposes. **He used the worst thing that men ever did to accomplish the greatest thing He ever did - the salvation of His own people.**

This morning I would like to look at the **meaning** of the cross. Why did Jesus have to die? Especially on a cruel cross? Even Jesus' chosen disciples did not understand the significance of His death. It was only after the resurrection that they remembered what Jesus had taught them and they believed.

### **BODY:**

#### **I. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE CROSS?**

So, what is the meaning of the cross?

Simply put, the meaning of the cross is death. From about the 6th century BC until the 4th century AD, the cross was an instrument of execution that resulted in death by the most torturous and painful of ways invented by man. In crucifixion a person was either tied or nailed to a wooden cross and left to hang until dead. Death would be slow and excruciatingly painful; in fact, the word *excruciating* literally means “out of crucifying.”

However, because of Christ and His death on the cross, the meaning of the cross today is completely different. In Christianity, the cross is the intersection of God’s love and His justice. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God points back to the institution of the Jewish Passover in Exodus 12. The Israelites were commanded to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and smear the blood of that lamb on the doorposts of their homes. The blood would be the sign for the Angel of Death to “**pass over**” that house, leaving those **covered by blood** in safety. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John recognized Him and cried, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”. This identified Jesus as the Messiah. And indicated that He would be the One Who would carry out God’s plan to be the perfect sacrifice on the cross for our sin.

One might ask why Jesus had to die in the first place? This is the message of the Bible—the story of redemption. God created the heavens and the earth, and He created man and woman in His image and placed them in the Garden of Eden to be His stewards on the earth. However, due to the temptations of Satan (the serpent), Adam and Eve sinned and fell from God’s grace. Furthermore, they have passed the curse of sin on to their children so that everyone inherits their sin and guilt. God the Father sent his one and only Son into the world to take on human flesh and to be the Savior of His people. By being born of a virgin, Jesus avoided the curse of the fall that infects all other human beings. As the **sinless** Son of God, He could provide the unblemished sacrifice that God required. God’s justice demanded judgment and punishment for sin; God’s love for us moved Him to send His one and only Son to pay the penalty for **all of our** sins.

The cross is the only source of spiritual knowledge concerning who God is and how God saves. Only at the cross does a fallen human being gain the understanding that we are covered by Christ’s blood just as the doorposts were covered by the sacrificial blood and we are protected from spiritual death. As a result we receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion that is promised to everyone who **truly** believes. The converted Christian will reveal himself by the way they live. Only then can the Holy Spirit dwell within them.

### **Romans 8:9 (NASB)**

**<sup>9</sup> However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**

Man does not have the ability to justify himself before a holy God. The only source of man’s righteousness comes from outside of ourselves through Jesus Christ. Man cannot attain righteousness in any degree by keeping the works of the law, but is saved and sanctified solely by grace. Salvation is **not** obtained by our good works

### **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)**

**<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

But we also know that true faith will be accompanied by works.

### **James 2:17 (NASB)**

*<sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.*

It is by faith that our their sins have been paid for through the work of Christ on the cross. This will produce good works as evidence of a true conversion.

Those are the reasons Jesus died on the cross. Next I would like to look at what the scriptures mean when it says to "Take up **your** cross and follow me".

## **II. TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.**

### **Matthew 16:24-27 (NASB)**

*<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to His disciples, "**If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.** <sup>25</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man **according to his deeds.***

Let's begin with what Jesus did **not** mean. Many people interpret "cross" as some burden they must carry in their lives: a strained relationship, a thankless job, or a physical illness. With self-pitying pride, they say, "That's my cross I have to carry." Such an interpretation is not what Jesus meant when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

When Jesus carried His cross up Golgotha to be crucified, no one was thinking of the cross as symbolic of a burden to carry. To the person in the first-century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only: death by the most painful and humiliating means human beings could develop.

Two thousand years later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of atonement, forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love. But in Jesus' day, the cross represented nothing but torturous death. Because the Romans forced convicted criminals to carry their own crosses to the place of crucifixion, bearing a cross meant carrying their own execution device while facing ridicule along the way to death.

Therefore, "**Take up your cross and follow Me**" means being willing to die to your selfish desires in order to follow Jesus. This is called "dying to self." It is a call to absolute surrender to Christ. Every time that Jesus commanded us to bear our cross, He said, "**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?**" Although the call is tough, the reward is matchless.

Wherever Jesus went, He drew crowds. Although these multitudes often followed Him as the Messiah, their view of who the Messiah really was—and what He would do—was distorted. They thought the Christ would usher in the restored kingdom. They believed He would free them from the oppressive rule of their Roman occupiers. Even Christ's own inner circle of disciples thought that an earthly kingdom was coming soon. When Jesus began teaching that He was going to die at the hands of the Jewish leaders and the Roman officials, His popularity sank. Many of the shocked followers rejected Him. Truly, they were not able to put to death their own ideas, ambitions, plans, and desires, and exchange them for His.

Jesus assured us that trials will come to His followers. Following Jesus is easy when life runs smoothly; but our true commitment to Him is revealed during trials.

### **James 1:2-4 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

God will allow us to encounter various trials in our life in order to test our faith. As we are able to faithfully endure each trial our faith will be strengthened.

If you wonder if you are ready to take up your cross, consider these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some of your closest friends?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from your family?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means the loss of your reputation?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your job?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your life?

In some places of the world, these consequences are reality. But notice the questions are phrased, “Are you willing?” Following Jesus doesn’t necessarily mean all these things will happen to you, but the question is: Are you willing to take up your cross if you are confronted by any of them?

If there comes a point in your life where you are faced with a choice—Jesus or the temporary comforts of this life—which will you choose?

### **CONCLUSION:**

There is a song entitled **It's not an Easy Road**. I would like to sing part of it for you.

It's not an easy road  
We are trav'ling to heaven,  
For many are the thorns on the way;  
It's not an easy road,  
But the Savior is with us,  
His presence gives us joy ev'ry day.

No, no, it's not an easy road,  
No, no, it's not an easy road;  
But Jesus walks beside me  
And brightens the journey,  
And lightens ev'ry heavy load.

(Chorus Twice)

It is just that simple and that hard. We live in a world of sin and it continuously bombards us to reject God's word. Knowing the peace that comes only from Him is just a matter of full surrender. We can **try**...to find it on our own. We can buy things. We can go places. We can choose to follow our fleshly desires. But I want you to **LISTEN CAREFULLY! I know that you know the difference between the deeds of the flesh and the fruits of the spirit.**

We are to walk by the Spirit. That means that we are to take up our cross by dying to our old worldly ways and to live according to God's word. Listen to what Galatians tells us if we continue to walk by the deeds of the flesh seeking our own personal pleasures.

### **Galatians 5:21b (NASB)**

...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We must make the decision to **believe** God's word when He says that enjoying worldly things and living by the flesh will **prevent** us from receiving our inheritance with God. If there is **anything** in your life...that you **continue** to do...**knowing** that it is wrong, it is a sign that you do **not really believe and love the Lord** because everything that we do and everything that we say are supposed to glorify God. We have to make the choice "Do I believe God's word or am I going to walk away?"

### **John 6:63-69 (NASB)**

**<sup>63</sup> It is the Spirit who gives life; (This is the spiritual eternal life that is promised us in John 3:16) the flesh profits nothing; (Everything that we do to satisfy our own worldly desires is temporary pleasure and has NO eternal value. We are not to store up treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven) the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. (God's word teaches us how to live a God pleasing life which gives us eternal life.) <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe.**" For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray (or reject) Him. <sup>65</sup> And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

**<sup>66</sup> As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. (The scriptures do not say that our walk with Christ will be an easy road. It is filled with obstacles that we must overcome. We must resist the deeds of the flesh and take up our cross and follow Jesus.) <sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> We have **believed** and have come to know that **You** are the Holy One of God."**

To take up our cross and follow Jesus is a very hard road to follow. But it is only when we are finally willing to surrender all of that to him that we will experience His Spirit within us and His peace in our lives.

### **John 14:23b (NASB)**

..."If anyone loves Me, **he will keep My word**; and (if you keep my word then) **My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.**

There may be some here this morning who have not surrendered all. When you surrender, you establish a personal, loving relationship with God. You will desire to continuously serve only God and not yourself! I would like to encourage you to do that right now.

### **I Surrender All. Page 366.**

I would ask that as you sing, consider the words and prayerfully sing them to God.

Sing verses 1, 3, & 4 of **I Surrender All.**

**He is Lord!**