

Doctrine of the Cross – December 2014

1. The Cross as place of Sacrifice

Why does the Cross matter to you?

Recap – God gives (Gen. 1-2)

Man rejects (Gen. 3)

Curse, death, wrath (Gen 3)

That's how we are born – objects of wrath - cursed and heading for death – not about sins that we do – they are just the symptom – our fountain is poisoned at the source and everything that comes out of us is polluted by that deep poison – and so we are cursed and under God's wrath – Ps. 90:9: "all our days pass away under your wrath" – not only facing God's wrath in the future but we are under it now – same in Romans – wrath of God is being revealed (Rom. 1:18) and there is a day of wrath to come (Rom. 2:5) – and *that* is our big problem.

Sin is not our biggest problem,

God's wrath is our biggest problem.

So the answer is not just repentance but propitiation

The big question is not will you turn to God but will God turn to you in mercy

But right from the beginning we get hints of the cross:

- Gen. 3:15 – a man will crush the serpent but at a cost – physical cost – Col. 2:15
- Gen. 3:21 – we are not okay before God anymore – we need to be clothed with something that has been killed – Romans – receive Christ's righteousness through Jesus' death
- Gen. 3:24 – if we are to get back to the tree of life someone is going to need to take the blow of the flaming sword – Matt. 27:51

Blood

Gen. 4:4, 10; 8:20-21; 9:6

Blood = violent death

Blood shed in murder calls out to God for vengeance and judgment (Gen. 4:10; Deut. 32:43a) while blood shed in sacrifice or punishment calls out to God for mercy and propitiation (Gen. 4:4; 8:21; Deut. 32:43b; Heb. 12:24).

Nothing magic about blood – not got some sort of magical power in it if you drink it or spread it on things – just = death.

How do we think about Jesus' blood?

Jehovah-Jireh

Gen. 22:14

What exactly does God provide?

Gen. 22:13 - sacrifice! A substitute

The whole thing is top down

Propitiation in pagan religions is humans trying to give something to God to appease him.

Propitiation in the Bible is something God provides

Passover

Ezek. 20:6-10 – it's deserved by the Israelites as much if not more than the Egyptians

Read Exodus 12 – What's going on? What hints of the cross do you see?

- epoch changing (Ex 12:1); eaten (Ex 12:8-11); judgement upon the gods (Ex 12:12); a sign for the LORD's people (Ex 12:13); for the LORD Himself to see (Ex 12:13); an unblemished male (Ex. 12:5); bloody (Ex 12:13); plague (Ex 12:13)
- to be memorialized in perpetuity (Ex 12:14); new/fresh not old bread (Ex 12:15,18-20,34,39); a sacrifice (Ex 12:27); no work (Ex. 12:16); applied with hyssop to the crossbar (Ex 12:22);
- in darkness (12:29); substitutionary (Ex 12:30); promised (12:40-41); community-defining (Ex 12:47); open to non-covenant people (Ex 12:38,44,48-49); legs not broken (12:46); liberation (Ex 12:51)¹

Sacrificial System

Exodus 25:40 – top down – system of forgiveness given by God

Read and act out Leviticus 1

- What senses are involved?
- What's the point of the laying hand on head?
- Imagine if you had to do that every time you realised that you had sinned – even unintentionally touched something holy – connected with the tabernacle?

The stages of sacrifice:

1. Worshipper 'brings near'/'offers' victim
2. Worshipper lays hand on head of victim
3. Worshipper kills victim
4. Priest puts the blood on the altar and sometimes other parts of the tabernacle
5. Priest burns parts or all of victim on the altar
6. Any remaining parts of carcass are eaten or burnt outside the camp

Over and over and over again for a thousand years...

All intended to teach three simple lessons:

- ☉ God is very holy
- ☉ You are very sinful
- ☉ You need a substitute

Someone has to die instead of you

Hebrews 9:22: without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness

But what's the point of the fire? (stage 5 above)

Read Leviticus 9:22-10:3

- What's going on there?

The fire is the fire of God's wrath – all through the Bible.

Either the sacrifice gets burnt up or we do

Jesus

John 1:29

With all the OT background – what do you think when you hear 'lamb'?

Look at the build up to this verse – John 1:1,14,18,23 → 1:29

Yahweh has come into his creation, God has taken on flesh and turned up... as a sacrificial lamb

¹ Modified from G. Scrivener, [The Passover is...](#), on *Christ the Truth*.

Read John 19:28-37

- How is Jesus the Lamb of God?
- What is finished?

Hudson Taylor's conversion...

"On a day which I shall never forget, when I was about fifteen years of age, because my dear mother was absent from home, I had a holiday, and in the afternoon looked through my father's library to find some book with which to while away the unoccupied hours. Nothing attracting me, I turned over a little basket of pamphlets, and selected from among them a gospel tract which looked interesting, saying to myself, "There will be a story at the beginning, and a sermon or moral at the close: I will take the former and leave the latter for those who like it." I sat down to read the little book in an utterly unconcerned state of mind, believing indeed at the time that if there were any salvation it was not for me, and with a distinct intention to put away the tract as soon as it should become tedious. Well while reading the tract I was struck with the sentence, "The finished work of Christ." The thought passed through my mind, "Why does the author use this expression? Why not say the atoning or propitiatory work of Christ?" Immediately the words "It is finished" suggested themselves to my mind. What was finished? And I at once replied, "A full and perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin: the debt was paid by the Substitute; Christ died for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Then came the thought, "If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?" And with this dawned the joyful conviction, as light was flashed into my soul by the Holy Spirit, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on one's knees, and accepting this Savior and His salvation, to praise Him forevermore."

This is the truth that frees you for service, for mission to the ends of the earth
"It is finished"

The book of Hebrews has this as its main theme:

Hebrews 1:1-3
Hebrews 9:11-14
Hebrews 9:25-26
Hebrews 10:10-14
Complete, once for all sacrifice – 10:14

- What do we mean by covering things or people with the blood of Christ?
- What do we need to do when we sin? If we die before we do that where do we go?
- Why should God let us into heaven tonight?

Listen to: ["Before the throne of God above"](#) (C. L. Bancroft)

2. The Cross redefines everything²

- ⊙ **God** – Phil. 2:1-11 – he is a humble God – it is the very nature of God to come down and die on a cross for us
- ⊙ **Love** - 1 John 4:10; John 13 – Where is the love? There: God dying for us on the Cross. How do we love? Like that. Love is cross-shaped.
- ⊙ **Glory** - John 12:23-24; 13:31; 17:1-4,5,24
Particularly from John’s Gospel we see that true glory is riches, fame, power, golden thrones – glory is displayed in what looks to the eyes of natural man least glorious – the Cross.
“The cross of Christ is the event in which the eternal glory of the Son is displayed. Isn’t this amazing? It’s not a tangent. His humiliation, Him bearing our sins unto death is the one point in history where human eyes have seen the eternal glory of God. And what does that glory look like? Christ spilling out his life-blood in order to save those that crucified Him. His glory is in giving to others.” (G. Scrivener)
Glory is not so much a *something* that God gets but the display of who God *is* - a revelation of God’s being as Giver.
Glory is not what lies behind the cross – God’s glory *is* this self-giving cross.
- ⊙ **Power** – 1 Cor. 1:25 – You want power evangelism? Preach the Cross
- ⊙ **Wisdom** – 1 Cor. 1:25 – It looks stupid. Be warned people will think you are stupid. But that is the wisdom of God and it makes fools of the ‘wise’.
- ⊙ **Faith** – John 3:14-15 – believing in Jesus means *fixing your eyes on the Cross* – the snake on the pole – God become a curse for us
- ⊙ **Sin** – The Cross is the clearest display of the depravity of man – given the chance this is what we do to our maker. And more than we see that sin is refusing Christ – refusing the gift of the overflowing trinity – either by hurling abuse at him or just walking away and refusing to fix your eyes on the saviour – John 3:14-15, 18; 16:3.
- ⊙ **Spiritual warfare** – The great spiritual battle has already happened. Our great deliverance has already been achieved - at the Cross. Jesus fought for us. The fight didn’t happen behind the Cross in some heavenly realm – it happened *on* the Cross – the satanic onslaught *was* the taunts of the crowd and their temptations to “Save yourself”, “Use your power”. And Jesus’ resistance of this onslaught, his triumph over the devil was his continued trust in the Father, continued love, continued suffering. And so the devil’s triumph became his defeat, he falls into the trap he’s laid – Colossians 2:15.
- ⊙ **Leadership/ Lordship** – Read Mark 10:42-45:
 - How does desire for status express itself in the workplace, in public life, in the church? Why would most people rather be a ruler than a servant?
 - Are we sometimes sore when someone is more honoured than us or annoyed when our efforts don’t get recognised?
 - Why did Jesus come? How much praise did he get? What sort of God is this?
 - What must we learn from Jesus’ model?
- ⊙ **Life** – The Cross changes our whole understanding of what life is about – John 12:24-26 – life through death – to live is to die, to die is to live – this first applies to Jesus and then to us – you get the same thing in 1 Peter:
 - 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18 – Christ crucified our substitute

² Throughout this paper but particularly at this point I am influenced by Glen Scrivener on his blog [Christ the Truth](#) (as he mediates the work of Martin Luther) and particularly the his 2012 [Lent Course on the Doctrine of God for the Hailsham Churches](#).

- 1 Peter 2:18-21 – Christ crucified our example
- 2 Peter 1:4 – that’s what it means to participate in the divine nature

Suffering → glory (Rom. 8:17)

The only way to live is the way of the cross (Mark 8:31-38)

- What sort of suffering might the Christian life hold in store for you that you would rather avoid?
- How does the work of Christ and fellowship with Christ empower you to face that?

3. The Centrality of the Cross

We see this most clearly in Revelation 5.

Revelation 4 – an amazing vision of Creator on the throne – but in then, in the next chapter, we have something even more glorious.

Rev. 5:4 - Why is John weeping? – Rev. 5:1-4 – the Word of God is closed, the promises are unfulfilled, the treasures chest is locked up, the tensions are unresolved, the covenant is ungratified, the glory is veiled...

Rev. 5:5-6 - Extraordinary verses.

Hears – lion triumphing

Sees – slain Lamb standing

The Lion has triumphed/conquered – past tense.

What was his triumph? Being a slain lamb.

The big triumph, the big battle in Revelation is not Armageddon – it’s the cross – that is the central event in history of the universe – that is the heart of the story – that is what all Creation will sing about for eternity

The most unexpected triumph you could imagine – a slaughtered lamb - not normally a picture of triumph. But it is – Rev. 5:9-10 – it’s pure Exodus – the most bizarre - got to take a lamb – blood over the door – stay in house - God goes through land striking down the first born sons in every household except where he sees the lambs blood – passes over - next morning there’s a dead body in every house – either son or a lamb - Israelites free to go and worship the Lord and be a kingdom of priests to him. It’s a weird way to free a people from slavery. That is what Jesus has done – he is the lamb slain in our place - not just Israelites this time but “every tribe and language and people and nation” – he bore the plagues of God we deserve so that on the last day the judgment will pass over us.

That is what is at the centre of the universe.

Notice the expanding circles in Revelation 4-5 – creatures, elders , angels, all creation – all centred on the Lamb

Compare Rev. 4:8-11 with Rev. 5:11-14. See the greater praise?

This is the centre of the universe and if we are to be conformed to reality it must be the centre of our lives, passion, ministries, our reading of the Bible, our preaching.