

# Lent- Cross

By Rev. Kevin Wong

A Short Devotional for the Lenten Season

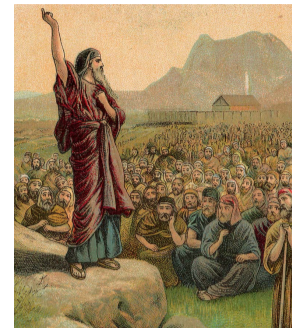
Days 29-35

Lent 2021

# Cross

Lent 2021- Day 29

*<sup>22</sup>“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup>his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. Deuteronomy 21:22–23 (ESV)*



Someone has said the cleanliness is next to Godliness. Perhaps ancient Israelites would have agreed. Whether in reference to laws about the skin, or to laws about war and spoils, Israelites focused on cleanliness as if it were Godliness. Maintain cleanliness by eating the right animals or laundering your clothes in the proper way, and you knew God’s holiness and purity. Violate these standards, and expect God’s curses, which might include loss of land or loss of crop. Cleanliness, in fact, *was* Godliness.

In Deuteronomy 21, Moses clarifies the law regarding executing those worthy of the death penalty and the method for disposing the body. It shall not be left to hang all night on a tree, for that will be cursed. It defiles the land. Why? Some speculate that it would spread a dirty dead body when birds and other vermin eat the body. Others venture that the act of leaving a body out in the open overnight simply insults God and his character.

Either way, a dead body hanging on a tree was unclean and impure and therefore worthy of a curse from God. God’s character hung along with that body as it was left out over night.

In the New Testament, Paul quotes this verse in Galatians, explaining that Jesus’ hanging on a tree for humanity removed the curse of sin. In other words, by dying and crucified on a cross, he took on a curse - the curse of sin and death that curses all.

This Easter, remember Christ’s embrace of your unholiness, and your free gift of blessing and cleanliness from Him. He was accursed. We receive cleanliness and holiness. Our lust, pride, insecurity, and control taken on a wooden cross, and in exchange, we walk away.

Ponder the curses of God- death, humiliation, insecurity, lack of identity (for Israel, it was land, harvest, and peace). Ponder God’s blessing: life, security, contentment, peace, and true joy in all circumstances. Ponder which you choose, life or death. Freedom or bondage. Holiness or cursing.

# Cross

Lent - Day 30

*<sup>26</sup>And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. Luke 23:26 (ESV)*



In 1992, with the onset of DNA technology and its ability to shed light on legal cases, two lawyers saw the chance to exonerate falsely convicted prisoners and created a non-profit called the Innocence Project. Carefully researching cases and understanding the nuances of DNA, lawyers work tirelessly to free those who have been wrongfully convicted, reorient them back into society, and work to change laws. What is their motivation? The ideal of freeing those who are falsely convicted because that is injustice. Unfortunately for Jesus and his cross, there was no Innocence Project.

In Jesus' trial, as presented by the gospels, we see several injustices. The sham trial and evidence. The mob of the crowd demanding Jesus' crucifixion without any rhyme or reason. Pilate moving to crucify Jesus, even though he sees his innocence and even asking his wife about Jesus.

In the road to his final moments, many are pulled into the momentous wave of sending Jesus to his cross. Women weep and lament. The town must have lined the streets to watch the procession of torture and cross carrying.

Carrying the cross, and more specifically, the cross beam punished and humiliated the convict. Roman specialists knew how to inflict both the mental and emotional toll of crucifixion. Jesus, probably out of dehydration and excessive bleeding, cannot carry the load, and so, Simon of Cyrene is seized and carries out the injustice in bearing Jesus' cross beam. Why Simon? Perhaps he was visibly a Cyrenian, and not a Roman citizen. Rome could not possibly treat their own citizens this way.

Jesus sees this along with the women weeping, and says to them, 'if they can do this to me now, imagine when the times get worse, and Jerusalem is politically expendable. Weep for your children.'" Injustice brought Jesus to a cross.

Today, embrace Simon of Cyrene and pray for the injustices that we see all around. Whether in Iraq, Asia, Europe, or the United States, we see the mistreatment of refugees, oppression of the poor, and the trafficking of children. In them, we see Jesus.

# Cross

Lent Day 31

*<sup>19</sup>Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” John 19:19 (ESV)*

Some want their last wishes written. Others prefer to leave it ambiguous. Still, others employ attorneys and officials to cement them as public record with various annotations and witnesses confirming the wishes. Whether they wish to prevent excessive taxation or to preserve some sense of control, a last testament or will represents a last attempt to control the outcome of one’s life and riches. The reality, however, tells us we have little control over these.

A funeral bill might be higher than expected. A relative might embezzle funds. A third party might steal any goods before these wishes bear fruit. In a sense, these are all in God’s hands.

Jesus, too, in his humanness, could not control his final testament. It was also in God’s hands. And as the Roman guard impales Jesus with the final, cold but searing stake, his reputation was all but solidified.

Following their protocol, the Romans would also nail a sign on top of the crucified. A testament or final word of humiliation, contrasted with the triumph of Rome and of blunt force. Usually, a sign would read, “robber” or “rebel.” Perhaps it might read “scoundrel” or “failed insurrectionist.” For Jesus, it was “king of the Jews.”



Pilate’s sign stamped an ambiguous situation. The Jewish leaders wanted it changed to “he *said* he was the king of the Jews.” But Pilate, obstinate and stubborn, held onto his version, “king of the Jews.” Not only this, he commanded the sign written in all three common languages so as to humiliate Jesus to all on lookers regardless of race, citizenship, or ability. God’s hand surely governed, and He had the final word, even as the human rulers jostled for control.

Today, reckon yourself to God’s control over your life and reputation. Many long for the last word. Whether in interpersonal relationships or on social media, humans long for influence and testaments that only belong to God. He has the last word, so let Him have it.

# Cross

Lent - Day 32

*<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)*

College humbles. Graduating from high school and entering college, I never knew or experienced anybody with a Ph.D. My family does not have a background of education or privilege, so professors speaking and lecturing on their subjects blew my mind. Lectures lasting 50 or 70 minutes on unheard subjects confused me and created a crisis. Already, I entered college with an undeclared major, and hearing professors further confused a confusing situation. I barely knew what I knew, only to discover so much more I did not know.

My ignorance proved itself in many ways. Textbooks costing hundreds of dollars and course readers compiled by professors who often wrote their own materials. I felt so small in a large pond of knowledge without a life preserver or even a paddle.

For Paul of Tarsus, his preaching also fell onto ears who loved philosophy and knowledge. Even in the church, his preaching fell on deaf ears for those who preferred the other, more eloquent preachers. Maybe Paul could not keep up with the YouTube preachers of his day. Perhaps he would not sell too many books.

Paul's philosophy and theology derived, instead, from the cross. It was his wisdom because it proved the foolishness of this world. The powerful and wealthy lose whereas the poor and lowly win. For him, the cross turned the world upside down. It was a different kind of wisdom only found in renouncing the ways of this world.

You want Christian wisdom? Lose your stuff. Feeling like trying to find your life? Lose it and consider it lost. Want to fill your bank account? Try giving it all away and then see the true value of money. Want to discover knowledge deeper than the ocean? Lose yourself in God's ways and find true wisdom lived out.

For Paul, wisdom came from a wooden cross that revolutionized the world. Today, consider how God's ways have turned you around. Evaluate areas of your life that still align with the world's system: cash is king, looks means love, or status is everything to name a few. Submit them to the cross and find wisdom.



# Cross

Lent - Day 33

*<sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:20 (ESV)*

The journey of recipe to cooking and cooking to table takes many twists and turns. The recipe outlines a list of ingredients that exist somewhere in a store or farmers market. The cooking, chopping, blanching, or roasting lie somewhere between market and table. The table finishes the process as flavors meld and aromatics fill the kitchen. With the ingredients prepared and cooked, the final meal testifies to the coming glory. The torture however, arrives when those awaiting the meal stumble into the kitchen before the food heads to table. Maybe a roast is ready but needs carving. A salad is ready but need tossing. A soup is hot and steaming but still needs serving.



For Paul and the Colossians, the cross proclaimed a work, but it was not entirely served. The ingredients of Christ's work accomplished a lot. The recipe met its climax. The meal was ready. However, it still needed serving.

For an audience that sought supernatural works, Paul says Jesus and His cross fulfills promises to reconcile all things, and yet there is more to come. The "all things" part of verse 1:20 is still coming. Christ's cross already bridged a chasm between humanity and God. However, it cannot be realized in this era.

The cross prepares the meal to come. We know the ingredients. When we read the Bible, we even see the meal cooked and ready. The only thing left is the experience of sitting and communing with God. Today, remember that our day when "all things" are reconciled and brought to bear with God are still on the table. Our questions of "why?" and "when?" still have question marks. Bring them to the cross and sit at His table. The meal is coming.

# Cross

Lent - Day 34

*<sup>14</sup>But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14 (ESV)*

Imagine you have a last chance to speak to your relatives and loved ones. What would you say? This seems dramatic, but for many this past year with COVID-19, we witnessed how some had their last words with nurses and doctors instead of relatives and friends. I wonder if their words were any different, given their different audiences. For many nurses and doctors, they felt guilt and shame hearing these last words and moments, usually designated for intimate relationships.



For Paul, he had the same opportunity in his letter to the Galatians. In some ways, he probably did not know if he would ever see them again. He might not have known if the church would even make it past the first century.

So, he tells them some important things. In fact, he will boast. He will elevate his greatest cause and his source of wisdom. He will finally dispel any notion that he is just a plain old tent maker. Right?

If you read his last few verses, he actually tells them he will boast. However, he says, he will boast in nothing except the cross. It seems this cross centered vision captivated his imagination. It shaped his reality, drove his destiny, and carved out his past. In other letters, it made him the “worst of sinners.” It cost him everything and yet, it provided all things.

My guess if Paul was sick with COVID-19, and doctors and nurses were asking who they could call for him, he would simply tell them of the cross. With masked nurses trying to comfort him, I wonder if he recounts the details his life. The blinding light. The piercing question, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” The missions that established churches and his trial before Agrippa. I imagine Paul lives up to his last word to the Galatians.

Imagine your final stage. What will you boast about? A career well worked? A clientele who carries your legacy? Or a cross that crucified our Lord and brought you an eternal gift?

# Cross

Lent -Day 35



*<sup>18</sup>For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Philippians 3:18 (ESV)*

Working in youth ministry, you learn slowly about different children and their personality types. Some group and learn generally from the lessons and wisdom. Some learn from their mistakes. Some hear warnings, and these serve enough to scare them away from toeing the line. Others find boredom in shared life

experiences and hear nothing at all. And still amazingly enough, there are those who hear from a leader or parent, and find the need to experience these mistakes for themselves. They simply cannot take someone's word for it.

For Paul, he preached to many audiences. Some probably laughed and scoffed. A few may have disregarded his public teaching and rolled their eyes. Even fewer heard his words of life, accepted it, and followed Jesus. But few heard his words and decided to reject it and become "enemies of the cross."

They may have heard it for a few years. They probably even invited others to follow Paul's message. Many may have considered them "insiders" of the Christian movement. They probably shared in their Christian meals and Bible studies. They could have served the poor alongside the Christians.

And they still proceeded to become enemies of the cross. For Paul, this devastated his heart. When he says he writes in tears, I believe him. As a pastor, I can only imagine his heartache and pain, knowing those he ministered to and served with turned their back on the message and movement. Even worse, they attacked him and rejected Jesus.

Rejection of the cross is not a personal rejection of our way of thinking or our own way of believing. It is saddening. It moves us to prayer and confession. In our prayers, consider rejection of the cross of Christ and its implications. Paul says they serve their stomachs, and they have their mind on earthly things. Pray against these, with tears if necessary.