

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, February 21, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

The Message of the Cross - 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

Introduction: The Bible contains some of the greatest paradoxes in life: For example, Noah's ark seemed to be a foolish enterprise to the unbelievers, but it became a powerful refuge to the believers. Joseph's mistreatment by his brothers and his subsequent imprisonment in Egypt seemed like such a cruel act and an unnecessary waste of humanity. However, when Joseph showed his amazing integrity and spiritual insight in spite of his misfortune, he became the savior for his people.

Other Scriptures say you must lose life in order to save it; that the first shall be last and last shall be first. It says that the servant shall lead, that you have to die to live, and so on.

In **1 Corinthians 1:17-18 (NIV)** we find another great paradox. In this passage, Paul has been dealing with the issue of church divisions in the Corinth church. It seems as though folks had been choosing sides. Some claimed that because they had been brought into the church under Apollos, or Peter, or Paul or Christ, that made them more legitimate or maybe even superior. So Paul, in trying to correct their thinking, gives them not only the truth of the issue, but also a profound paradox to consider. He says, "*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

The cross, at the time of Jesus' death was such a hideous thing. It represented death and cruelty and the power and dread of the Romans. But after Jesus' resurrection, the cross had evolved into a transforming powerful element of salvation and eternal life.

In the book of Acts, after the Holy Spirit had empowered those weak and timid disciples, they began to boldly preach the cross, and folks were literally "*cut to the heart*" and began to ask, "*...what shall we do?*" **Acts 2:37 (NIV)**.

So, if you were to ask why the message and the preaching of the cross is so important, I would give you three reasons:

1. The Cross is the hinge on which the door of salvation's opportunity swings.
2. The Cross is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. The Cross brings together Old Testament idea of atonement with New Testament fulfillment of atonement. (i.e. blood sacrifice for sin), thus man can be "*at one*" with God through the finished work on the cross.

Tonight, let's take a closer look at this message of the cross. Now that message can be interpreted in several ways, but tonight I want us to look at Jesus' last words He uttered on the cross to find the message. What were these words, and what do they mean for us? We find these seven last sayings of Jesus scattered about in all four gospels. First, we read where Jesus offered:

1. A Message of Forgiveness - "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" Luke 23:34 (NIV)

Jesus modeled, even in death, His teachings on forgiveness. In Matthew 18, Peter came to him with a hypothetical situation, and sought an answer. Now, if the truth be known, this was probably Peter's own personal problem, but nevertheless, it was an opportunity for Jesus to give His philosophy on the subject of forgiveness. **Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)** says, "*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy seven times.'*" In other words, there is no limit to the number of times forgiveness can be offered.

For us, this means that in order to truly do as Jesus does, we are to not only say we forgive, but model forgiveness by our example. The forgiveness we extend to others must be characterized by sincerity, consistency, and completeness. In other words, we can't say we forgive, and then continue to bring up an offense and use it against folks. Jesus exemplified this kind of forgiveness on the cross when He prayed for the forgiveness of His executioners. In fact, His death made forgiveness for all sins possible. The next message we hear from Jesus is:

2. A Message of Faith - "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*" Luke 23:43 (NIV)

With this statement, Jesus recognized the saving faith of thief who had asked Jesus, "... remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus recognized the thief's acknowledgement of sin and guilt. Jesus recognized the thief's belief in Him as the Son of God. And He recognized and heard the thief's confession of sin as he told his partner in crime on the other cross, "*We are getting what our deeds deserve.*"

Jesus also activated the faith of thief with this statement. It was **punctual**. He said He'd be with him in paradise "*today.*" Not tomorrow, not next week, or in forty days, but "*today!*"

His message was **personal**. He said "*you.*" You will be with me. And His message was **promising**. He said that he "*will be.*" That was an iron-clad promise of assurance and hope that this dying thief could count on as he breathed his last breath.

What these words mean to us is that when we place our trust in Christ, we can be assured that He will deliver on what He promised. He won't forget us or cop out on us in a moment of stress. His truth is truth no matter what because His truth is not a principle or some lofty ideal. Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life...*" **John 14:6 (NIV)**. The truth is the person of Jesus Christ. Next, we hear from Jesus:

3. A Message of Commitment - "*Dear woman, here is your son... here is your mother.*" John 19:26-27 (NIV)

In vs. 26, Jesus uttered these words to His mother Mary. It was a commitment to His earthly family. Jesus and Mary shared a special and unique relationship as He was her earthly son, but also was the Son of God. No one else can claim such a relationship. With these words, there was an acknowledgement of Mary's faith and commitment to carry out God's plan of raising Jesus to be the savior of the world. It was as if He was saying, "*Well done Mom! Thank you for being my Mom and my Father's servant.*"

But Jesus' next sentence was a message of a forever commitment to John. He was saying, "*John, take care of my mother until I come back – and I will be back!*"

With this message of commitment, Jesus says to us, "*I'm here for you. I'll always be here for you. I'll be your hope, your encouragement, your joy, and your peace. You can count on and depend on me.*" Next, we hear Jesus utter:

4. A Message of Fulfillment - "*I am thirsty*" John 19:28 (NIV)

Of course, as Jesus endured the pain and suffering of the trial, the beatings, and the crucifixion itself, His body was undergoing a tremendous amount of physical trauma. Naturally, dehydration would set in because of all the tissue damage, blood loss, and hours of exposure to the scorching sun. So, for Him to say, "*I am thirsty*" would be an understatement,

But these words were more than a statement of the physically obvious. It was a statement of prophecy – In **Psalm 69:21 (NIV)**, David prophesied centuries earlier, speaking of Christ... "*They put gall in my food, and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*"

So even on the cross, Jesus was well aware of His course in life as being a fulfillment of His Father's plan of redemption, and He would carry it out – even down to the last word of prophecy.

But I see this also a not only a cry of physical thirst, but a cry of Spiritual thirst as well. Yes, He thirsted for water, but He also thirsted for souls, for soul winners, and for home. He was dying to set man free, and He knew He would need people like you and me to tell our friends and neighbors about Him and His life-changing message of forgiveness and eternal life.

Are we thirsty for souls? Do we see ourselves as a part of God's prophetic plan to redeem man? Next, we hear:

5. A Message of Forsakenness - "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" Mark 15:34 (NIV)

I've often wondered why these are the only words of Jesus recorded in His native language, and then interpreted. I've never heard or read a message on this subject, but I think I've come up with a possible reason.

Vs. 35 says, "*When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, He's calling Elijah.'*" Obviously, these people misunderstood Jesus. They thought they heard Him calling for the prophet Elijah, but He was not. He was calling out to His Father in utter desperation and loneliness.

Many times, people misunderstand Jesus. He tells us to love one another, and we think He means to only love people who love us back. We hear Him talk about storing up treasures and we think He means "*Get all you can on earth, because you only live once.*"

Sometimes, we don't always get it when we hear Jesus talking to us. And I think it's hard for us to understand what was going on at this moment in Jesus' life. But what was going when Jesus was on the cross was this: Because of our sin, Jesus had become our **sin**. **2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)** says, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" And when He became our sin, that meant that God, being purely and completely holy, could not bear to even look upon His own Son. And for the only time in His existence, Jesus was separated from His Father. For the first time, He felt the pain and horror of being utterly alone, so He cried out in anguish, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*"

But not only had Jesus become our sin, He had also become our **substitute**. **Romans 5:8 (NIV)** says, "*God demonstrates His own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" And in doing so, Jesus bridged our **separation** from God. **1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV)**: "*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...*" Next, we hear Jesus giving:

6. A Message of Finality - "It is Finished" John 19:30 (NIV)

By enduring the cross, the pain, the sorrow, the suffering, the sin, and the separation; Jesus paid the price and bought our salvation. Redemption's plan was finished, and our ticket to heaven was punched. **Ephesians 1:7 (NIV)** says, "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*"

There is nothing more to be done as far as salvation is concerned. We just accept the finished work of Christ on the cross, and God accepts us into His family. **John 1:12 (NIV)**: "*Yet to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*"

Finally, we hear Jesus' final words from the cross. It is:

7. A Message of Flight and Freedom – "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Luke 23:46 (NIV)

The verse continues to say, "*When he had said this, he breathed his last.*" Jesus' suffering was over. The work was done. Man's sin had been born and been paid for by the sacrificial Lamb of God. God's demand for righteousness had been satisfied and His plan of redemption had been completed. It was time for the spirit of Christ to go home to be reunited with the Father. As Jackie Gleason used to say, He said, "*And away we go!*" Immediately Jesus goes back to the throne of His Father in heaven. We know this because He told Nicodemus in **John 3:13 (NIV)**, "*No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man.*"

These words should be of such comfort to every believer because in this life, we are bound by time and space. We are bound by pain and suffering. We are bound by our human will to live here on earth, because it is our reality and our home, and we get attached to it. But Jesus' words of freedom as He breathed his last on the cross assures us that some day, when we breathe our last, we will be free from this world's hold. We will be free from this world's hurts. We will be free from this world's hindrances. We will be free and take flight when we say, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*"

Conclusion: 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV) says, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

What is the power of God found in the message of the cross? Perhaps it can be explained in the following illustration: A young child was diagnosed with a terminal disease. The parents knew that he would die soon. The child as well knew that his death would be soon. One night he was sitting in his mother's lap when he looked up into her eyes and said, "*Mommy does it hurt to die?*" The young mother was overcome with grief and had to leave the room for a moment to gather her emotions. She stood in the bathroom and prayed, "*God what can I tell him?*" She felt that the Lord gave her a word for him. She went back into the room and said, "*Son do you remember how sometimes you've fallen asleep in front of the television and then the next morning you wake up in your room? Well, when you go to sleep your dad comes in and with his strong arms he picks you up and carries you into your room. And then the next thing you know you wake up in your room. Well death is just like that. When you die, you fall asleep and Jesus gathers you up in His strong arms and carries you to heaven. And then you wake up in another room!*"

That is the power of God in the message of the cross. Hear it! Believe it! Trust it, and when it comes time for you to die, Jesus will pick you up in His strong arms and carry you to heaven too!