

What Is So Important About The Cross?
Colossians 2:11-15 (NLT)
(Grace – March 21, 2010)

I. Introduction

In two weeks we will be celebrating Easter (Resurrection) Sunday. But before you can experience the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in your life, you need to embrace His crucifixion.

Jesus experienced the events of Good Friday before He experienced the victory of the resurrection. [Talk about Good Friday service.]

The Cross has a huge effect on anyone who acknowledges and embraces it in their day-to-day lives.

Today, I want to focus on how the cross can impact you in the areas of your life that are bound by shame, fear, and addictive behaviors.

In doing this we are just going to scratch the surface (the cross relates to every ailment known to humanity), but you can always go to the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and read through the account carefully for yourselves.

Before we delve into that, I would like to make two essential observations about the Cross and our day-to-day lives.

1. The cross of Christ when understood and applied to our lives means death to **self**, a total laying down of our lives to Jesus.

Not just giving up our things, but a total, complete, radical surrendering of ourselves to Christ.

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
(Galatians 2:20, NLT)

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24, NIV)

It seems clear to me that we are called to lay down our lives in total surrender to Jesus as a fitting response to His death on the cross.

2. The cross applied to our lives promotes **obedience** to the Father’s will.

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human

form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.
(Philippians 2:5-8, NLT)

If Jesus laid down His life, not only at the cross but daily, should we be expected to do anything less?

It is at the moment of surrender and obedience that we will truly come to know and experience resurrection power!

II. The Work of the Cross in our Lives

A. The Cross and Our Addictions

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature...Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:16-17,24-25, NIV)

Notice that verse 24 says that in Christ our sinful nature “with its passion and desires” has been crucified! This means the cross has the power to take away our desire to sin (not the temptation, but the desire).

Until we clearly see Jesus hanging on the cross and truly realize that it is our sin, pride, and selfishness that put Him there, we will never fully grasp the depths of God’s love for us.

It is the love of God that has the power to change the desires of our heart so that we no longer want to sin. The reason the cross has the power to change our desires is because through the cross we are given a new heart.

Ezekiel prophesied about this: *“And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.”* (36:26, NLT)

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 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 ...11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of

your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:1-7, 11-14, NIV)

B. The Cross and Our Fears

“They went to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, ‘Sit here while I go and pray.’ 33 He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. 34 He told them, ‘My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’” (Mark 14:32-34, NLT)

The Living Bible translates verse 33 that Jesus was “filled with horror and deepest distress.”

The word translated “deeply troubled” or “filled with horror” indicates a condition that was usually accompanied by trembling.

Luke says that Jesus was so anguished at this point that *“his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”* (Luke 22:44)

Now his sweat may have been like drops of blood, but there is a rare physical phenomenon known as hematidrosis, in which, under great emotional stress, the tiny blood vessels rupture in the sweat glands and produce a mixture of blood and sweat.

What was going on here? What was it that had the Son of God so thoroughly afraid?

Here is a man who has contended with the leaders of His day, walked calmly through a mob that wanted to throw Him off a cliff, and engaged satan himself in battle. What could be causing such deep emotional distress?

Consider this: over the next few hours every demon in hell was going to rise up and destroy His flesh. He was going to be beaten and whipped beyond recognition. He was going to be stripped and paraded through the streets, be nailed violently to a cross and die a slow and agonizing death.

How do you think you would feel if you knew this was going to happen to you within 24 hours?

But I don't think this is what was causing Him such great distress.

I believe two things were causing this horror and anguish of heart.

First, Jesus, for all of eternity, was untainted by sin. He was perfect in holiness and despised sin and all of its consequences. Yet, on the cross all the sins of humanity would come to rest upon Him.

Think about it. Every nightmare of murder, violence, perversion, drug overdose, and abuse were going to parade mockingly before him.

Every torture, rape, genocide, and broken promise was going to be laid upon the pure and spotless Son of God. In that moment the Rwandan genocide, the Holocaust, September 11, suicide bombers, and every terror known to humanity was carried out on Jesus.

Second, Jesus, who had been in perfect relationship with the Father for all of eternity, was facing separation from Him.

On the brink of death and in His darkest hour this relationship that had been in perfect harmony for all of eternity would be broken. Jesus was anticipating this, but let us look forward and see what happened on the cross. His anguish in that moment was so great that he cried out, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” which means ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’” (Mark 15:34, NLT)

Jesus literally died of a broken heart. All the horrors of sin and the separation from the Father led Him into such a state of sadness that His heart burst.

Science today confirms the reality of “broken heart syndrome.” John’s Gospel account confirms this when it says, “*But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn’t break his legs. 34 One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. 35 (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also can believe.)*” (John 19:33-35, NLT)

Jesus did not die from the crucifixion; the soldiers were surprised that he was already dead. Perhaps they thought Jesus was faking his death, so one of them pierced his side and blood and water flow out. [Explain]

But let’s get back to the idea of fear. In the light of the greatest fear ever faced by anyone at any time, what did Jesus say in the garden? “*Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.*” (Mark 14:36, NLT)

Here we are given the ultimate example of how to overcome all of our fears – surrender to the will of God. Jesus faced a fear so great that he asked the Father if there was another way to save humanity. But in the midst of all the distress, horror and fear, he surrendered Himself completely to the Father, rose up and faced His greatest fear.

As we look upon Christ and His death on the cross, we can overcome our fears.

C. The Cross and our abuse and shame

“So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. 16 The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard...and called out the entire regiment. 17 They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. 18 Then they saluted him and taunted, ‘Hail! King of the Jews!’ 19 And they struck him on the head with a reed stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. 20 When they were finally

tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.” (Mark 15:15-20, NLT)

Can you imagine the humiliation and shame that would accompany this kind of abuse? After having your flesh torn off your body with a lead-tipped whip, you are now standing in front of up to 600 men who are calling you names, spitting on you, hitting you on the head (while you are wearing a crown of thorns) with sticks, and mocking you.

But now things get even worse: *“Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him... The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. ‘Ha! Look at you now!’ they yelled at him. ‘You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. 30 Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!’ 31 The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. ‘He saved others,’ they scoffed, ‘but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!’ Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him.” (Mark 15:24-25, 29-32, NLT)*

Imagine yourself stripped naked, having large spikes driven through your wrists and feet impaling you onto a wooden cross. Then you are lifted up naked before the crowds and roughly the cross is thrust into a hole.

How would you feel? So do you think that Jesus should be able to identify with your abuse, humiliation and shame?

III. Application

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16, NIV)

“The whole purpose of all His abuse was for us to be healed and connected to God. For that to happen we must go to His cross and process our pain through it. We relate to Him and know that whatever happened to us, happened to Him and He was victorious over it. To find our healing we must not only know what happened to Him, but also realize in the depth of our heart that we too caused His pain. The awareness that we contributed to His suffering is essential for our deliverance.” (Cathy Ciaramitaro, *The Cross – The Power, The Purpose, The Passion*)

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:3-5, NIV)