

What the cross meant to... God the Father

2nd Sunday in Lent, March 8, 2009

Last Sunday we laid the foundation for our series, “What the cross meant to...” by looking at a snapshot in the life of Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Our message last week was really built around the Hebrew word, “Chasak”, that means to stop an action from occurring; to cause to be free from danger; to cause to have a favorable circumstance, and so not be in a state of trouble or pain. We saw how Abraham did not ‘chasak’ Isaac, and God the father did not ‘chasak’ Jesus, either.

Since God the Father did not chasak Jesus, and instead allowed Him *not* to be spared the cross, what did that mean for the Father? What did it mean to Father to see His Son suffer and die? What then did it mean to us?

We’re going to be using our Epistle Reading today as the springboard for our message, so I invite you to open your Bibles to Romans chapter 5, and we’re going to be looking specifically at verses 1-9. Romans is the sixth book in the New Testament, so the order goes, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John – the Gospels that tell about the ministry, life, death and resurrection of Jesus; then comes the book of Acts which records the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church. After Acts come the Epistles, books that answer the question, “In light of the teachings of Jesus and what we now understand through the Holy Spirit, how should we live?” Romans is the first Epistle, and it comes right after the book of Acts. Once again, we are going to our reading from today, chapter five, beginning at verse one.

Therefore... and stop! We’ve mentioned this before: words like “therefore”, “but”, “so that”, “however” are key words in scripture. They indicate that what comes next is something we really need to pay attention to because it drives home a point the Holy Spirit has been building to.

... since we have been justified through faith... and stop again. In your Bibles, underline that phrase. It is not “*IF* we have been justified”, it is “*SINCE*” we have been justified by faith. You can make a note in the margins of your Bibles, a decent definition of “Justified” is “just-as-if-I’d never sinned.” When God looks at one who is justified by faith in Jesus, our sins we’ve confessed and repented of are washed away – He just doesn’t see them anymore.

Ok, I promise I won’t keep stopping like this! Let’s go on!

... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!

What did the cross mean to the Father? First, it meant that the time was just right, like it says in verse 6. What made it the right time? A couple of things like the roadway systems the Romans had established throughout the empire that made travel and the spread of the Gospel easier; a common language spoken throughout the empire in Greek so the Good News could be preached and understood by a greater number of people than ever before; and a heightened sense of awareness of the need and coming of a Messiah, so people were thinking and longing for the Christ to come. But even more than that, I think what made it the right time was the fulfillment of prophecy.

Next to verse 6 you can make a note of Genesis 3:15: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.*

To God the Father, the cross meant the ancient promise given in the Garden of Gethsemane after Adam and Eve fell into sin had come due. It was time to keep that promise, even though it would mean Him seeing the torture and the pain of the crucifixion. Even though it meant that God the Father knew He would turn away from His own Son on the cross, while Jesus screamed out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

The cross meant God was not going to chasak Jesus. He was not going to save His Son. We're going to talk a little more about this when we look at what the cross meant to Jesus, but we'll mention it here today: God did not spare His one and only Son, even when Jesus cried out to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Abba, Father." Abba; daddy. Save me.

And God said no. He said no for you and me, and we have to know that broke His heart.

Another thing the cross meant to the Father was that He was giving His Son in the place of you and me. You can write the scripture reference 1 John 4:9-10 in the margins of your Bibles, *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* Why did God give Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins? Because He loves us. He loves you and me just that much – nothing was going to be allowed to remain that would in any way compromise or get in the way of Heaven.

The biggest thing the cross meant to the Father, and where we want to go with this message today, is the cross meant we have a new relationship with Him. We have a new way of coming to God that didn't exist before. And it was a way that God Himself planned.

Let's go back to our reading. In your Bibles, we're going to be doing a lot of underlining and application!

What did the cross mean for God the Father as it relates to you and me? You can underline in verse 1, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*, and then circle the word “through.” In fact, sometime pick up the book of Romans and read through it, and whenever you see the word ‘through’, circle it. The Holy Spirit lays out for us a lot of the blessings we have through Jesus!

We have peace with God. Maybe you’ve never thought about that, or maybe those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior have never thought about it, but we, on our own and in our sinful nature, are not at peace with God. We do not have peace with Him – we are set in direct opposition to Him. Where God is, sin cannot be. We say in our confession, and it’s clear in the Bible, we are by nature sinful. But the cross means that through the violent grace poured out there, those who cling to that old rugged cross have peace with the Father.

The amazing thing to me is that God the Father knew that would be a result of the cross, and He let all the things that happened, happen, so we could be at peace with Him. How great is the love of the Father that we should be called the children of God, and that’s what we are!

Back to the Romans passage. You can also underline the next section, *through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace*, and again, circle that word, “through.” Not only did the cross mean God would be giving His peace to us, it also meant God would grant us access to His grace. And how do we have this access? “By faith.” Faith in what? In the death and resurrection of Jesus for the payment of our sins. And how do we get this faith? It is given to us by the Holy Spirit. And what is grace? Grace is getting what we don’t deserve. Grace is us getting ‘chasaked.’

So putting this all together: To God the Father the cross meant that we, by the gift of faith given to us, would be able to receive the gift of His grace – the gift of not getting what we deserve; the gift of being chasaked.

How are we at ‘chasak-ing’ other people? Or do we often fall into the pattern of thinking that says, “Git ‘em” for what they have done to us? To others? A pastor I used to know would sometimes say of those who are sometimes difficult, “When dealing with them, they are E.G.R. people: Extra Grace Required!”

Do we do that, or do we ignore, snap at, or even condemn those difficult people in our lives? To God the Father, the cross meant we would receive His grace. For those who have received His grace, how are we doing at sharing that grace with others?

Another thing the cross meant to the Father is that He would be sending His Holy Spirit. Without the cross, there would have been no Holy Spirit coming to people. Jesus even said in John 16:7 that if He didn’t go through the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection and ascension into Heaven, the Holy Spirit would not come. Back to our verses in Romans, you can underline in verse 5, *God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us*.

The love God has for you and me is shown in the birth, the ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's shown in the sending of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers. It's shown in the gift of Heaven that awaits believers, received by faith, given by the Holy Spirit, which was only sent after the cross.

If there had been no cross, there would be no resurrection.

If there had been no resurrection, there would be nothing to put our faith in.

If there was nothing to put our faith in, the best we could hope for would be to have a worldly happy existence, and then when we die, simply stop existing.

But because of the cross, there is the resurrection.

Because of the resurrection, we have something to put our faith in – the promise of our resurrection to eternal life in Heaven.

Because of Heaven, we have something to look forward to at the end of this earthly existence: eternal Life with the Father, through the way of the cross.

Finally, you can underline in verse nine, “...*how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!*” and circle ‘through’ again. The cross meant God opened a way for us to be saved from hell. It meant through the cross, God the Father was making a way for an eternal future without suffering, pain, regrets and mourning. Here's the big thing: the cross meant God's wrath for sin was put on Jesus; that's why we are saved from that wrath *through Him*.

What did the cross mean to God the Father? It meant a violent outpouring of the wrath of God for our sins on the shoulders of His only Son, and the purchase of a violent grace for you and me. It meant that while we were still lost in our sin, God suffered and died for us.

It means God Himself took the punishment our sins deserve.

I know in the past I've asked the kids when they come forward for the Children's Message, “How many of you would want to get punished for something your brother or sister did?” But let's take that one step further. Jesus is God the Son. What does that mean?

It means God took the punishment He determined for sin upon Himself on the cross. Think about this for a second, because it puts this in a whole new realm for us as we close this message today. Parents, you've set up boundaries for your children. You've told them “If you do ‘X’, ‘Y’ is going to be the punishment.” Now imagine your child did ‘X’, and you inflicted the punishment you told them was coming... on yourself. There had to be a punishment for what they did wrong, but you love them too much to give it to them, so you gave it to yourself.

That's what the cross meant to God. It meant He was going to take the punishment our sins deserve on His own shoulders. You can make one last note in the margins of your Bibles: Isaiah

53:5, 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.

We have peace with God; we have the gift of faith; we have the grace, the 'chasak' of God; we have the Holy Spirit and we have salvation from eternal separation from God. Maybe the title of this message should be, "What the cross means to us" rather than "What the cross meant to God the Father"! But that's the way it is with God – what He does, what He gives, what He takes, is for us, for our benefit.

Ultimately the cross meant to God the Father the same thing the manger did: us in Heaven with Him forever. No matter the cost, no matter the pain, no matter the suffering that He took on Himself.

Would you please pray with me?

Lord God, our Heavenly Father. Behold what manner of love You have given to us, that we should be called Your children! You didn't spare Your own Son, Your own self, but instead watched Jesus be arrested, tortured and crucified. And you did it for us.

Thank You for the cross. Thank You for the peace You give us through the cross. Thank You for the grace You give through the cross. Thank You for the Holy Spirit and the faith You give us, yes, through the cross.

It's hard for us to understand the kind of love that moves a father to sacrifice his child for others, especially when those others don't always acknowledge or appreciate the gift. Send Your Holy Spirit to us so that we may never forget what the cross meant to You, and what it means for us. And all at the expense of Your one and only Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

In His name,

Amen.