

## What the cross meant to... the devil

Third Sunday in Lent, March 15, 2009

We're continuing our series today, "What the cross meant to..." by asking the question, "What did the cross mean to the devil?" The past two Sunday's we've looked at the Hebrew word, "Chasak" which 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. Two weeks ago we saw how Abraham didn't chasak Isaac, and last week we talked about how God the Father didn't chasak Jesus (which really means He didn't chasak Himself).

This week, in answering the question, "What did the cross mean to the devil?" we are turning to our Epistle reading, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter one, and we're going to be looking specifically at verses 22-24. The past two weeks we've looked at some Hebrew, this week, we're looking at some Greek! Would you please open your Bible to the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:22?

1 Corinthians is the 7<sup>th</sup> book in the New Testament, so the order goes: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – the Gospels that tell about the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus; then comes the book of Acts that tells us about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. After the book of Acts, come the Epistles, literally, the letters, that answer the question, "Now that we know about Jesus and have His teachings, and now that we have the Holy Spirit who is leading us to understand more and more, how are we supposed to live our lives?" This is the question the Epistles answer. First comes the book of Romans, and then 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians.

We've mentioned this before, but as a review, Corinth was one of the greatest trading and commercial centers in the ancient world. In fact, as far as wealth goes, it was one of *the* places to live in those times. It's population was a broad mix of Jews, retired Roman soldiers, philosophers, merchants, sailors, freedmen, slaves, and hawkers of every kind of vice you can imagine. In fact, because of the vices present in Corinth, the very name became almost synonymous with evil living. It was so bad, the Greeks had a word for it: Korinthiazesthai, meaning lives lived with drunkenness and immorality. You might even think of Corinth like Las Vegas, except what happened in Corinth didn't stay in Corinth – everyone knew all the trappings and sins that took place there. In fact, the trappings and the sins were some of the reasons people liked living in there – fast living, quick money and little morality. It was this population that made up the members of the church in Corinth.

Enter then our verses we're look at this morning: *"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*

Now what does this have to do with what the cross meant to the devil? First, let's do a little definition of a couple of words here.

A "Greek" and a "Gentile" are basically the same thing – anyone who is not a Jew. It might look like we're reading about three different groups of people here, Jews, Greeks and Gentiles, but we're not. We're actually only reading about two groups: Jews and non-Jews.

Second, you can make a note of this in your Bibles: the Greek word that is translated as "stumbling block" in our text this morning is "scandalon." It is the word from which we get our word "scandal." The dictionary defines a scandal as "a loss of, or damage to, reputation caused by actual or apparent violation of morality or propriety." Does that sound like Christ to you? Yet, in our text that's what Jesus is called – a scandal.

It was the scandal of Christ that was preached to the Corinthians. More specifically, it was the scandal of Christ crucified. To the Jews it couldn't be reconciled: the Messiah could not be crucified – He could not die the death of a cursed and condemned man. To the Gentiles, no god could be crucified; that would mean he would be subject to the will of man, and not all-powerful. The Christ being crucified was a scandal – a damage to the reputation of God – to both cultures.

That's Greek lesson number one! Greek lesson number two is with the word "foolishness." You can make a note of this in your Bibles, too. The word "foolishness" is from the Greek "moros" and it's the word we get 'moron' from.

To the Jews it is a scandal – the Messiah cannot die! To the Greeks it's moronic – a god cannot be subject to people and be put to death by them. Scandalon and moros. Now what does this have to do with our message today?

This is the first answer to what the cross means to the devil. It means he's on the offensive, and will work to make the cross and Christianity as a whole, a scandal – something to be ashamed of so your own reputation will not be damaged, or else you'll be considered a moron for clinging to Christ and His cross.

If this sounds too simple, just ask yourself why some Christians won't pray out loud at a restaurant before eating. Most often it's because they are embarrassed by their faith – it is a scandal to them: something that they are afraid will cost them damage to their reputation if someone sees and hears them praying. They are afraid they will be considered simple-minded – a.k.a: morons – by others.

Why does the cross affect the devil this way so much, putting him on the offensive and working to try to get it to be a scandal to us? You can write Colossians 2:15 in the margins of your Bibles: "{through the death and resurrection of Jesus, He} *disarmed the powers and authorities* {of darkness}, *He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*"

The cross means the hold the devil had on people is broken. He is defeated and disarmed and embarrassed. Before the cross happened he could say of people, “They are not good enough to be in heaven! They are too sinful!” Since the cross he can’t say that, in fact, that’s what we cling to! We are not good enough! We *are* too sinful! But it’s through our faith in Jesus and his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, that we have our names carved into the palms of His hands. In other words it is Jesus that holds on to us now, not the devil.

Another thing the cross means to the devil is that he is going to target Christians. You can write 1 Peter 5:8 in the margins of your Bibles, “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*” Be self-controlled and alert, not scandalized and afraid of being considered a moron. One of my favorite Contemporary Christian songs is “I’m Not ashamed” by the group, The Newsboys. Their lyrics are:

What are we sneaking around for?  
Who are we trying to please?  
Shrugging off sin, apologizing  
Like we're spreading some kind of disease.  
I'm saying "No way. No Way."

I'm not ashamed to let you know,  
I want this light in me to show,  
I'm not ashamed to speak the name of Jesus Christ.

Even if that makes us a target of a defeated, fallen angel. Even if that means we are scandalized by Jesus, *the* scandalon. Even if that means people who don’t know any better think we are “moros” – fools.

We shouldn’t be surprised if we find ourselves coming under attempted attacks by the devil as we grow closer to Jesus and more bold in preaching, teaching, talking about and living Christ crucified and risen. The cross means we can be bold and strong in the salvation we have from the devil. To the devil the cross is a constant reminder he lost.

The cross is central to the Christian faith, and if the devil cannot remove it from our sight, then he will do what he can to remove from the minds and hearts of people who we are in God’s sight. That’s the next thing the cross means to the devil – he undermines what God says and does, and the two biggest ways he has of doing this is getting people to ignore the significance of their Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.

In our Baptisms the same thing that was said to Jesus by God the Father is said to us: “You are my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased.” The devil would get us to dismiss our Baptisms as something we ‘just do.’ It’s something with no meaning, a ritual that has no power, it’s a mere sign of conformity. Take a look at the many people who bring their children to the waters of Baptism, and then never come back to church again. The cross means that the devil

will attack Baptism; attack the pronouncement made over the person by God Himself, by getting us to ignore our Baptism, forget it, and making those who hold to it as something wonderful and sacred thought of as nothing more than moros's – morons. The same is true of Communion.

Think about the words of institution we use at Communion: “This is my body given for you; this is my blood poured out for you.” It was on the cross Jesus gave His body and spilled His blood. The cross means the devil will work to make Communion just another ritual either through overuse or underuse. Overuse because since it's done all the time the specialness of what is happening is eroded because it becomes just another thing we ‘do’ during church. Underuse because if it's ignored by someone because they see it as just another thing they ‘have’ to do because it's expected of them, then they are not receiving what it being given them – the forgiveness of their sins; the forgiving and forgetting of the very thing that keeps us from having a complete and whole relationship with God the Father, through the cross.

To the devil the cross means he is on the offensive and works to turn Christianity into a scandal, and those who believe in Jesus as their only Lord and Savior to be viewed as morons. It means the devil is defeated, disarmed and embarrassed. The cross means the devil is on the prowl to attack Christians, and it means he will work to rob Baptism and Communion of their place and power in our lives.

Another thing the cross means to the devil is that since it means all we've talked about so far to him, his biggest ploy is to try to turn the cross into a meaningless trinket. If he can't scandalize it to you and me, and if he can't get us to feel like morons, he'll just rob the cross of its significance all-together. The way he will do this is by working to get us to ignore Jesus. Note the difference: not to get us to be embarrassed by Jesus, but to just not think about Him at all. Not to get us to feel like morons for being Christian, but get us to not even think about what it means to be a Christian.

Not to get us to speak out against Jesus, but to get us to not speak about Jesus at all.

The cross means that the devil will work hard to keep us too busy and preoccupied with this life and ourselves to even think about our next life – our eternal life. Or for that matter the eternal life of others. One pastor I knew said it this way, “If the devil can't make you ‘bad’, he'll make you busy.”

Too busy to pray; too busy to come to church; too busy to read the Bible; too busy to spend time with other Christians, even though we can always find the time to spend with non-Christians. Too busy to care about Jesus, but not too busy to be complacent about Him.

Finally, there is one last thing the cross means to the devil. You can make a note in the margins of your Bibles, Revelation 20:10: “...*the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur,...* { where he } *will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*”

The cross means the devil loses, and loses big! The cross means his end is sure. The cross and the empty tomb means his future is written and will not be changed. The cross and the empty tomb means he will spend eternity suffering in a lake of burning fire.

And to you and me, that means we win. That means the devil is nothing more than a big bully who has no real power in our lives other than what we give him, like being scandalized by the cross, ignoring our Baptisms and the Lord's Supper, and the like. It means the reason he is a roaring lion looking to take down as many people as he can is because he knows his time is short. He knows the Bible better than anyone, and knows what it says about him.

He also knows what it says about those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He knows what the Bible says about you.

You are loved – God says, *“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”*<sup>1</sup>

You are not alone – Jesus said, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”*<sup>2</sup>

You have an eternal blessed hope – *“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*<sup>3</sup>

You have a promise given to you from God Himself – *“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*<sup>4</sup> God Himself will wipe every tear from our eyes with His own almighty hand. The same hand that created everything, the same hand that clenched in pain on the cross, and the same hand that still bears the scars of the cross will reach out to our eyes and wipe our tears away.

The cross means the devil loses, and we win. Rejoice in that today!

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:5

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>3</sup> John 14:2-3

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 21:3-4