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Great Words of the Faith #4 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross... Galatians 6:14

The cross is certainly the best known and most meaningful symbol of our Christian faith. Its image adorns our church buildings on walls and steeples. We sing about the cross in many of our favorite songs and hymns. Our sermons speak often of the cross.

We know there are enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18). This is true literally as we see those who seek to remove the cross from parks, cemeteries and other public spaces. It is also true figuratively as many oppose the message of the gospel and the public expression of convictions and practices of Christian faith. When we wonder why there is such animosity towards this particular religious symbol, we realize it is because the cross is the very expression of the message of our faith.

*As we consider some of the great words of the faith, we should certainly think about **THE CROSS**.*

In 1707 Isaac Watts published what many consider to be one of the greatest hymns ever written – *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. Consider his wonderful words:

*When I survey the wond'rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the Death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his Blood.*

Isaac Watt's hymn encourages us to "survey the wondrous cross". We should study the cross, think about the cross, meditate on the wondrous truths of the cross. This leads us to one the greatest statements about the cross in all the Bible:

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14

J.C. Ryle was a pastor and leader in the Church of England who lived from 1816-1900. He wrote a wonderful little booklet simply titled, *The Cross*. It focuses on Paul's words in Galatians and is a great resource to help us survey the wond'rous cross. Our study is adapted from his book.

Boasting in the Cross

It is significant to note that in which Paul **DID NOT** boast. He did not boast in his own good works. He did not boast in belonging to or going to church. He did not boast in his gifts or abilities. He did not boast in his great accomplishments as a preacher, missionary, and church planter. If anyone had reason to boast, it was Paul. Yet all of his own work and accomplishments he counted as rubbish and considered loss in view of knowing Christ and the message of the cross (Philippians 3:7-11). His words, "**May it never be**", is the strongest exclamation possible. He could not imagine boasting in anything except the cross.

In Galatians Paul is writing to those who were boasting in keeping the Old Testament laws, claiming you had to do so to be a true believer. The whole letter is Paul's response to those who turned from the message of grace found in the cross. He sums it up his exclamation, "**May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross...**"

When we see the word "cross" here and in other places in scripture, what exactly does it mean?

Many times, it is used to mean the wooden cross, the instrument of execution upon which Jesus was put to death by the Roman soldiers. As we consider that "old rugged cross" we are reminded of the physical suffering Christ endured as He was abused, beaten, and nailed to that cross.

In other places the word is used to describe the suffering, trials, persecutions, and self-denial believers experience because of our faith in Christ (Matthew 10:38);

Often, as we see here, “cross” describes the complete gospel message, the truth of what took place upon the cross. Jesus died on the cross for sinners as the complete and perfect sacrifice for sin. Some say Jesus was a revolutionary who died for what He believed. Some say He died as an example to follow or as the greatest expression of love. But the message of the cross is that Jesus, the perfect sinless Son of God died in our place upon the cross, taking the punishment of our sin upon Himself.

As we study the Bible it is important to understand that this is the message of all of Scripture. It will help us make sense of the Old Testament as we see it all points to Christ and what He would do for us on the cross.

What do we see as we survey the wond’rous cross?

We see the tremendous length, depth, and breadth of God’s love. **“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8). Paul prayed that believers might come to understand **“the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge”** (Ephesians 3:18-19).

We see how awful and heinous sin is to God. As we survey the cross, we see that our sin is so filthy and offensive to God that only the blood of God’s own Son can wash it away. We are so separated from God that only the Holy Son of God becoming a man so that He could suffer and die for us could make us right with Him. **“I cannot think little of sin when I look at the cross of Christ!”** (Ryle)

We see the fullness of God’s plan of salvation. We are all sinful people and fall under the condemnation of God’s righteous judgment. God sent His own Son to die on the cross and take the punishment for us. The demands of God’s law and justice are satisfied. The price is paid. When we turn from our sin and place our faith in Christ our sins are forgiven and Christ’s righteousness – His goodness and holiness – are credited to us.

Crucified to the World

While Paul boasted in the message of cross, he went on to say that through the cross, **“...the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”**. This is certainly true of our position – of our justification when we have trusted in Christ. We died with Christ

and rose again with Him so that we are made right with God (justified). The message of the cross also impacts our daily lives (sanctification). We live in a sinful world and deal with the challenges of our indwelling or remaining sin. We seek to put off our sinful thoughts and actions daily. As we look at the cross, we see the reasons and motivation for holy living. On the cross we see that Jesus died for us so that our sins may be forgiven. But we also see that He died and rose again that we might be made holy. **“There is nothing so sanctifying as a clear view of the cross of Christ”** (Ryle).

As we look at the cross we see the reasons we can be content even under that greatest of trials and difficulties of life. As we face trials, we know that nothing we endure can even begin to compare with Christ suffered for us. More than that, we remember, **“...If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”** (Romans 8:31-32). If God loved us enough to send His Son to suffer and die for us, He will certainly love us enough to care for us through all the trials and suffering which comes our way.

It is no wonder that Paul wanted to boast in the message of the cross. He talked about the cross. He preached about the cross. He wrote about the cross. He never forgot what God did for him in sending Jesus to suffer and die on the cross. Let us join with Paul in boasting in the cross.

We have an ordinance in the church to help us focus on the cross on a regular basis – The Lord’s supper. Let us join Isaac Watts and his response daily when we survey the wond’rous cross!

*See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!
Did ever such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?*

*Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.*

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

12:00 PM McManus Conference Room (M252 by House Min Ofc)