

"The Cross"

From time to time we each need to take a close look at the cross of Christ. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders; and this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're going to focus on the Lord Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. So stay with us.

Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and we're here to search God's Word for the Lord's Way. We want to please God, because we love Him. We want to do His will and we have no other intention. God desires that we believe, love, and obey Him. And we're not interested in anything men have to say; we want to serve God. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

Jesus was just 33 years old when he decided to take up a cross and die. He was in the prime of life, doing so much good. He had everything to live for! Jesus was not given a cross and He didn't want it, but He took it up! He chose it!

In the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord said to Peter, James and John in Mark 14, verses 34 to 36, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and He prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

The commitment that Jesus made to endure crucifixion was permanent; there was no turning back. The Lord Jesus explained in John 10, verses 17 to 18, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

You see, Jesus willingly laid down His life to atone for the sins that you and I have committed, because He genuinely loves us. The Bible says in John 15, verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Today we want to remember that great love.

Now, if you want to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. If you would like a printed copy or CD of our study about the cross, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send us an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org. Study sheets accompany each program. The Edmond church will now worship in song, and then we'll read from Romans 5, verses 6 to 8.

Our reading today comes from Romans chapter 5, verses 6 through 8. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." A most powerful and important passage! Let's pray together. Father, we know that Jesus was willing to die for us even when we didn't deserve it. And, Father, we are so grateful for the love that He showed; and we pray, Father, that our hearts will show that kind of love toward You. In Jesus' name, Amen!

What led Jesus to die on His cross? Well, there are several reasons; but one thing is sure: He put the spiritual needs of everyone else before His own physical needs. His death is the most selfless act of all time. Never has any individual given so much for so many. Never has any individual been willing to endure such shame and hostility so that others might benefit.

The Lord Jesus was willing to suffer that horrible death because of His love for His Father in Heaven. The Lord said in John 14, verse 31 that doing exactly what His Father commanded showed the

world His love for the Father. The Father required a blood sacrifice to atone for sin. According to Hebrews 10 and verse 4, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Only the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God could atone for your sins and mine. We must thank God and thank Christ Jesus for His willingness to die in our stead.

The prophet Isaiah more than 700 years before Jesus explained this sacrifice in Isaiah 53, verses 5 and 6, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." We can enjoy an abundant life here on earth and an eternal life in Heaven, because of the sacrifice of Jesus, who bore the punishment that was due to us, so that we might have forgiveness and a life with God.

You see, Jesus was willing to be obedient to His Father, so He could open a way for salvation. Hebrews 5, verses 7 to 9 presents a marvelous picture of this obedience and how difficult it was for Jesus. The Bible says, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One that was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." It wasn't easy for Jesus to obey His Father, but He obeyed out of love.

Second, the Lord Jesus bore the cross because of His utter love for you and me. Romans 5, verses 6 to 8, which we read a moment ago, described us as helpless, as ungodly, and sinners. We are helpless in the sense that we're utterly incapable of reaching salvation and eternal life without Jesus Christ. We were once ungodly, that is, we pushed God out of our lives and neglected to do His will; and when we broke His commandments, we sinned against Him. Sin is a personal thing with God. We don't merely break God's commandments; we violate our relationship with Him.

Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2 says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." Sin is always, always offensive to God. All sin—your sin, and my sin.

Now, in spite of the offense of sin, the Lord loved us and wanted to restore a relationship with us, that is to make friends with us again. Reconciliation, that means that God no longer holds our transgressions against us (2 Corinthians 5 and verse 19). It means that our offense toward God is removed so that we can maintain a loving and close relationship with our God. And this is made possible through the blood of Jesus Christ, sacrificed on the cross. What He did for us was amazingly loving, opening a way to be close to our Creator, our God.

And I can still hear the words of the Lord Jesus, who was scourged and made to carry His cross through the streets of Jerusalem to the Place of the Skull. They removed His clothes and they laid Him on the cross. They nailed His hands and feet; and while they were crucifying Him, the Lord Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23 and verse 34). Jesus died to save you and me, and no one loves you and wants your salvation more than Jesus does.

The Lord's salvation for us makes a marvelous difference in our lives. The Lord removes our past sins, so that God no longer holds them against us; but the Lord knows that we're human and imperfect. He knows that we continue to sin, even when we don't want to. Even as Christians, we all live with the nagging reality of sin. And for this reason, the Lord constantly defends us and pleads our

case for us and for our salvation before the Father. Jesus knows our weaknesses and yet He cares enough to provide a way for us to find forgiveness all through our lives.

First John deals with the Christian's imperfections and God's provisions. The Bible says in 1 John 1:7 to 10, "but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, then we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all (all) unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

People who walk in the light; yes, they still need the blood of Jesus to cleanse them from sin. You see, walking in the light, is not perfectly sinless behavior. Nobody one can live a perfectly sinless life. If a Christian says, as some in ancient times claimed, that they do not have sin, they deceive themselves and the truth isn't in them. In fact, they make Christ a liar and aren't listening to His Word. What Christians must do when they sin is confess their sins to God and repent of them.

The Bible says in 1 John 2, verses 1 and 2, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." The word propitiation refers to a sacrifice that atones for our sins, so that we may have peace and a relationship with God our Father. Jesus bore the punishment that we should have endured so that we might be redeemed and reconciled to God.

Jesus serves as an advocate for us every single day. We need a righteous advocate, a defender called to our side to assist us as we approach God. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2, verses 3 to 6 that, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time."

Hebrews 7 and verse 25 says that, "Jesus always lives to make intercession for them." Jesus, the Righteous sacrifice for our sins, is also interceding with the Father for you, begging for the continued forgiveness of your sins. You might recall how Peter denied the Lord three times. But before this took place Jesus told Simon Peter in Luke 22, verses 31 to 34, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Dear Christian friend, when you have sinned against God, remember Jesus prays for you too! He loves you enough to ask the Father to forgive you and to keep you in His grace and favor. I must tell you the Lord has made an amazing commitment to your salvation that includes the cross but it goes far beyond it. The Lord will stick with you all the way.

The Lord won't turn His back on you, but beware lest you turn your back on Him and forsake Him completely. You see, a person walking in the light confesses sin and stays with the Lord. But a person walking in darkness forsakes the Lord and lives for himself. And when he does that he loses his fellowship with God and the ongoing hope that he has in Christ. Oh, I wouldn't want to live one day; I wouldn't want to live one hour; I wouldn't even want to live one minute outside of the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

Third, Jesus on the cross taught us how to trust in God. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2, verses 21 to 24, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth;

and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

Jesus suffered the worst man could throw at Him on the cross. Cruel men designed the cross to give the maximum punishment before death. Jesus was taken by force and bound as a common criminal in the Garden of Gethsemane. They falsely accused Him and wrongly tried Him. The High Priest and members of the Sanhedrin Council determined to put Him to death before the trial ever took place. Their witnesses were weak and their evidence was manufactured. Ultimately, they falsely accused Him of blasphemy for acknowledging that He was the Son of God. The Jews generally put people to death for blasphemy by stoning them, but the Jews sought to do more to Jesus. They sought for the Romans to crucify Him. They took Him before Pilate and Herod for condemnation.

Pilate wanted to release Him, saying four times that he found no fault in Jesus that was worthy of death. Pilate even had Jesus scourged in order to draw the sympathy of the crowd. When the Roman scourging—that’s a horrible punishment—failed to touch the determined crowd, Pilate thought of the custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover. But the cruel crowd called for Barabbas instead.

Jesus endured the mocking and beating of the soldiers, yet prayed for the Father to forgive them. Jesus endured the nails driven through His hands and feet, the gambling over his clothes, and the cruel taunts of the Jewish leaders as He hung between heaven and earth.

And during all this suffering, Jesus never once sinned with His lips. He didn’t revile or speak ugly words to those who mocked Him. He didn’t threaten those who did violence to Him. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2 and verse 23 that He “kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” He kept putting Himself into the Father’s hands. And even with His last breath, Jesus said in Luke 23 and verse 46, “Father into Your hands, I commit My spirit.” This is a quotation from Psalm 31 and verse 5.

My friend, at the hardest moments of our lives, we too must learn to commit ourselves into the hands of the Father. First Peter 4:19 says, “Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” The cross was exceptionally painful and incredibly humiliating, but Jesus bore it patiently and lovingly. He was able to endure the cross through His willingness to put Himself into the hands of His Father. He died to open up a way for us to live with God forever. May God be praised. Let’s pray. Father, we are thankful that the love of Jesus for You was so strong, and that His love for us was so strong, that He would bear Himself upon a cross for our sins. Help us to love You in that same way. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

The Lord Jesus challenges us to take up our cross daily and follow Him. The Lord said in Matthew 10, verse 38, “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” The Lord has a cross for you and for me; and if we are to be worthy to wear His name and follow Him, we too must take up our cross.

Well, how do we take up our cross? The Bible says in Romans 6, verses 3 to 7, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who died is freed from sin.”

When we place our faith in Christ, repent of our sins, confess His name, and are baptized into Christ, we’re baptized into His death. The Lord shed His blood in His death and the Lord applies His

blood to cleanse us from sin when we're baptized and we are baptized, of course, into the death of Christ. It is at that time that the old man of sin is crucified with Him. And throughout life we continue to carry our cross by serving the Lord Jesus. We hope and pray that you will take up your cross and follow Him today and serve Him the rest of your life.

We pray today's study of the cross has blessed you. If you want a free printed copy or CD of this message about the cross, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call the Search office at 1-800-321-8633. Our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. We also have many downloadable songs there. We offer Bible Correspondence courses to help you learn more about God's will for your life. And we offer free study sheets that go along with our programs. You can download them from our website before each program or call and request them. Now we won't ask you for money or put you on a list.

Please worship with a church of Christ in your area. They support us. And if you're looking for a church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ love and want guests, and you'll be glad you attended. We're going to be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.