

The Cross of Christ

By Pastor Alan Utting

'The cross stands as the centre of human history – where sin was confronted and salvation was secured' John Stott

There are many paths to the cross, but to the cross we must come! This is the central message of the Christian faith. If in doubt read the purpose of the life of Christ and the theme of the book of Romans. This is full of teaching on the cross. Like many things the symbol of the cross is often taken for granted.

It is common to see a crucifix worn around a neck, or a cross perched upon the apex of a church. However it is an outcome of Jesus' death and resurrection that we come to know God in a personal way. 'Since we have been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him' (Romans 5:9).

Purpose of the Cross

1. The forgiveness of sins and the removal of punishment.

'An Eastern legend tells of a young prince who had just ascended the throne after his mother's reign. She was proud and loved to rule, and it was with great difficulty that she surrendered control of the kingdom to her son. Things did not go well for the young king. State secrets began to leak and fell into the hands of the enemy. After this happened a second time, he issued a decree that whoever was responsible, once caught, would be scourged publicly in the marketplace.

To the king's dismay, it was discovered that his own mother was the traitor. Many assumed he would never punish her. A public trial was held, and at noon the palace gates opened with the woman leaning heavily on the arm of her son. As expected, the verdict was "guilty."

The woman was led to the whipping post, but before the sentence could be carried out, the young king rose from his throne, ran to the post, and bared his own back. Blow after blow fell upon him until his body was covered in blood. When the scourging was over, he was carried back into the palace to recover' (Source unknown).

Because God is just, sin must be addressed, which was accomplished through Christ's death. Faith in this leads to forgiveness. '..... and the Lord has laid on him, the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6).

2. Eternal life.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).

'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10).

As soon as a person experiences the indwelling life of Christ they experience eternal Life.

3. The defeat of principalities and powers.

'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12).

In Daniel 10, we read that Daniel was fasting and praying when an angel of the Lord appeared to him (verse 11). For twenty days, the angel—identified as Gabriel—had been battling to reach Daniel (verse 13). It was only when Michael, another angel, came to assist that Gabriel was able to break free from the opposing spirit of the prince of Persia. Verses 20 and 21 reveal that Gabriel was preparing to face yet another spiritual battle upon his return.

4. Power over habitual sin.

Many people are entrapped by habitual sin. The sin of an uncontrollable temper, lust, greed and covetousness etc. It sometimes becomes a cyclic pattern which many are unable to break. But praise the Lord, the power of sin is broken through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Paul affirms this victory, 'Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Romans 7:25). Countless thousands of people including myself testify to that same victory through the cross of Christ.

5. Healing.

God brings healing through doctors, the use of right medication and through the prayer of faith.

'Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective' (James 5:14-16). Also read Isaiah 53:5.

How may a person be Justified, made right with God?

Justification means that, from God's perspective, we are seen as if we have never sinned—made possible by Christ's work on the cross.

1. Conviction of sin.

This isn't just feeling regret or guilt for a wrong action—it is a godly sorrow that prompts true repentance and a strong resolve to avoid that sin.

'I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish' (Luke 13:3).

2. Justification is through Christ.

Jesus is not just a teacher or miracle worker; he is divine 'Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:28). Through his righteousness, you are Justified. 'This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned

and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ' (Romans 3:22-24).

3. Through faith in Christ.

This is not faith in our efforts, or even our faith, but in God. Scripture say 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness' (Romans 4:3).

Through repentance, faith in Christ, and seeking His forgiveness, we are justified.

Self-inflicted punishment upon ourselves or working for our salvation will never work. However to grasp and submit to the finished work of Christ upon the cross has far reaching consequences: eternal life, freedom, forgiveness and true love. No wonder the 'gospel' means good news!

It is vital to understand that salvation is a gift, not something we can earn by ticking boxes or following rules. Instead, it is about surrendering to God's grace, accepting His offer, and trusting fully in what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. This assurance brings comfort and peace, knowing that our relationship with God is secure, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us.

Resources

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*

N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Considering the Meaning of Jesus's crucifixion*