

“The Message of the Cross”
1 Corinthians 1:18
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The Apostle Paul wrote, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing".

That statement is as true today as it was then.

To believe that there is a God is largely acceptable in our culture.

To acknowledge the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is o.k.

To print God's name in the preamble to our service club charters was, at least until recently, considered very legitimate.

To refer to God in political speeches and after national tragedies is socially acceptable.

But if you believe in a savior dying on a cross for our sins, you will soon feel the pity if not the scorn of others.

The issue is: "What possible relevance could the death of a man 2000 years ago have for me today?"

But I counter, what could possibly be more relevant to any of us than to be in right relationship with God?

Some may say they don't believe in God.

But that doesn't solve the problem it only worsens it.

God is not changed by anyone's refusal to believe in Him.

He doesn't cease to exist just because someone or even many refuse to believe he exists.

And because God does exist, the most relevant thing in life is knowing who that God is and how we can live in right relationship with him.

Yes, the message of the cross may be foolishness to those who are perishing but the Bible says, "To us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Jesus' death 2000 years ago is central to what we believe and who we are.

To help us remember the importance of Jesus' death on the cross to our relationship with God, I would like us to remember four mental pictures:

- ⇒ A Courtroom,
- ⇒ A throne room,
- ⇒ A slave market,
- ⇒ And a large country home.

I. First, I want you to see a Courtroom.

As we enter, we see a judge seated behind a judge's bench that is elevated above all the other furniture in the room.

We've watched enough "Law and Order" to get the picture.

Across the aisle is seated the prosecuting attorney.

And we are immediately aware that we have no one seated with us, no attorney for the defense.

In an unusual move, the judge begins by reading the law.

And as he reads a video replays our lives.

And as the judge reads he also reminds us that sin is any transgression or breaking of the law.

A sin is any action or statement or thought or imagination that is not in perfect conformity to the will and character of God.

The Judge reminds us that it is possible to break the law in the heart without any visible outward action.

He reminds us that it is possible to break the law not only by what we do but also by what we don't do.

He tells us it is possible to break the law even while we are ignorant of what it demands.

Then the prosecuting attorney approaches the bench and turning, he points his finger at us and says, "Those are the ones whose lawless actions are being played out before you now."

"God, you are holy and just, you must punish their sin!"

And as the video plays out our lives, our thoughts and even our motives, in contrast with the law that has been read, it becomes devastatingly clear.

We have sinned against the law of God and the God of the law.
And we know the verdict - guilty!

The Bible declares it:

All have sinned and fall short of the holiness of God."

"There is none righteous, not even one.

There is none who understands,
none who seeks for God,

There is none who does good, not even one.

But to our amazement, the judge does not sentence us.

Instead we watch as he introduces his son and appoints him attorney for the defense.

The Son approaches the bench on our behalf and says, "Father, these are mine. I went to earth for them, I lived a sinless life for them and I went to the cross to pay the penalty for their sin."

As God says in 2Cor "God made Jesus, who had not sinned, to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ."

At that the Judge pronounces a verdict very different from what we expected: "Justified!"

He looks at us and says, "Your guilt has been borne by another."

This is not "amnesty".

Amnesty means to forget, and I am not just forgetting about your sin.

This is justification!

I am not simply declaring that in spite of the evidence you are really a good person.

I am not saying you didn't do what you did.
 I am pronouncing you free of any liability for your
 sin, because my son, Jesus, bore the penalty for
 your law-breaking. (Stott p 190)

That is what the cross is about: the guilty are justified.

What then is our relationship to God?

Through Jesus' work on the cross we stand before God not as
 guilty condemned sinners but as justified children of God.

II. I want you to see a second scene - this one is a throne room.
 An awesome King is seated high above the marble floor where
 we stand.

We have been convicted of crimes not only against others but
 against the king himself.

We have broken his laws.
 We have defiled his name
 We have robbed his assets
 We have rebelled against his authority in our lives
 and worst of all we have spurned his love.

And so we wait, knowing that the right, fair wrath of the king is
 about to be poured out on us - the sentence of death carried
 out.

As the Scripture says:
 The wages of sin is death.
 The soul that sins will die.
 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the
 presence of the Lord.
 The wrath of God abides on them.

Because of our sin we are going to be banished from God forever.

Because of our sin, what is God's stance toward us? It is anger!
 God is holy and we have willfully violated his holiness and God
 is angry.
 That is God's relationship to us.

Most don't like to hear that.

We are told that God loves everyone and wouldn't hurt a fly.

But are we told that God is holy and hates sin and is righteously angry with sinners?

Are we told that in his anger he will forever punish sinners?

But leave the throne room for a minute and go to a hill outside Jerusalem.

The King's son, the prince of Glory, hangs on a wooden pole - his body nailed in place, suspended above the ground.

And as I watch I see all the King's anger that should have been poured out on me, poured out, instead, on his own son.

Here is how Bible puts it: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

"Atoning sacrifice" is actually a paraphrase of a more technical term – propitiation.

"Propitiation" is a 25-cent word found in the dictionary.

It means "to cause someone to become favorably inclined" toward another.

In pouring out his anger on his own son God rendered himself favorable toward us.

He bore the brunt of his own righteous wrath - and by doing so He can justly look on us with acceptance rather than anger.

And so because of Jesus' Cross-work we can stand before the King no longer filled with fear but now filled with security and joy - We have been found acceptable because of Jesus death in our place.

Once guilty - now justified.

Once the objects of his wrath, now accepted.

III. But I want you to see yet a third scene - a slave market?

This market is out in the open air.

There are ropes around a dirt arena.

I just finished reading the account of the life of Henriette Lille in the 1830s.

Henriette was a free mulatto young woman in the slave culture of New Orleans.

She was a Mother Theresa 170 years ago, serving the dying among the slaves.

Men and women were herded into the slave market, paraded before potential buyers, stripped, prodded, poked and forced to do feats of strength or other more demeaning things.

Slavery was so entrenched in that time and place that thoughts of freedom were impossible.

Slavery is a terribly condition.

We were in that place - chained to our masters – bought and sold among them with no chance of escape.

One day the master may be pride, the next days the masters may be ego, greed, folly, hopelessness, or lust.

But into that slave-market comes Jesus announcing that He is about to buy us – to redeem us out of that slavery.

But so costly and powerful is that bondage that nothing but Jesus' death is price enough or power enough to redeem us - to buy us out of it and buy us back for himself.

And so the Son of God dies on the cross to purchase our freedom.

Here's how the Bible says it: "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold from your futile way of life, you were redeemed with precious blood as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the precious blood of Jesus."

The scene ends with the shackles that bound us broken from our wrists.

Now with cords of love we gladly follow the Son of God who loved us and died for us.

I was guilty now I'm justified
 I was under God's anger now I'm accepted.
 I was in slavery but now I'm redeemed, free

IV. The fourth scene to give us a picture of the cross-work of Jesus is a large country home.

(It's one of those pictured in "Country" magazine or "Ideals".)

But we're not in the picture, instead we're far from that place.
 We're the Prodigal Son, in a far country, doing our own thing
 until we realize that what we thought was freedom was simply
 slavery to our own passions.

We're pictures of success on the outside but inside we know how
 long we've been gone from home,
 how wrong we've been living.

We've built all kinds of barriers between ourselves and our
 father.

We have alienated ourselves from home and broken the
 heart of our Father.

I want you to see the country home again -
 This time you see that the Father is God.
 And he is sending his Son, the Lord Jesus, out to bring us
 home – to break through our alienation.

As the Bible says: "Jesus came into the world not to condemn
 the world but that the world, through him, might be saved."
 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son."

The song is now a decade old but it still speaks to the situation:
 Once there was a broken heart, way to human from the start
 All the years left it torn apart, hopeless and afraid
 Walls I never meant to build, left this pris'ner unfulfilled
 Freedom called but even still it seemed so far away
 I was bound by the chains of the wages of my sin
 Just when I felt like givin in
 Mercy came a runnin' like a pris'ner set free
 Past all my failures to the point of my need
 When the sin that I carried was all I could see

And when I could not reach mercy
Mercy came a runnin' to me

Sometimes I still feel so far-
So far from where I really should be
He gently calls to my heart-just to remind me
Mercy came a runnin' like a pris'ner set free
Past all my failures to the point of my need
When the sin that I carried was all I could see
And when I could not reach mercy
Mercy came a runnin' to me

And what you see next is Jesus coming to us, putting his arms
around us and saying,

I have removed your guilt by my death - you are justified.
I have taken the father's wrath against you – you are accepted.
I have bought you out of slavery to sin – you are redeemed.
and I have removed everything that stands between you and
the father - you are reconciled! I'm taking you home.

That's what Jesus did on the cross for you and for me!

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing
but to those who are being saved it is the power of God."

That is what we celebrate today in our communion service:

Justified
Accepted
Redeemed
Reconciled.