

as a result we have this vivid description of how Paul preached.

1. Verse 22 shows us what Jews and Greeks expected of religion. Look at Galatians 3:13 to see what the Jews would have thought of the cross. For the Greeks 'wisdom' was insight into the nature of God and the world. How does the cross conflict with what they would have expected of religion (see especially verse 23)?
2. What do your non-Christian friends think of the gospel? (Can you remember what you thought when you first heard it? - if you can remember a time when you weren't a Christian) Are they more like the Jews or the Greeks?
3. From this passage how can anyone understand the 'message of the cross'?
4. What are the implications of that for the way Paul preaches?

How do you feel if anyone asks you about your faith? Is it anything like how Paul felt at Corinth? Do your feelings put you off saying anything? From this passage, how should you react?

Weekend

1. You've probably got lots to follow up or finish off from the studies this week!
2. If you want some extra material to look at, many of the sermons in Acts refer to the cross (Acts 2:36; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39; 13:29). Choose one of these verses and read it in its context. What does it say about the cross? How does it fit in with the rest of the sermon? How do the hearers react?
3. The cross repays a lifetime's meditation. An excellent way to continue your application of what Christ has done is to read through John Stott's major, lucid and inspiring biblical study, *'The Cross of Christ'* (IVP).

Notes



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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week 34: The cross (A word study)

The cross is one of the commonest symbols of Christianity (you may well wear one), and one of the key events at the heart of our faith. What does the Bible have to say about it? We shall look at passages which contain the word 'cross', 'tree' (a poetic word for the cross) and 'crucify' to find out.

It would be a useful introduction to read something about crucifixion, for example, the article on the cross in the *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (IVP), or the *Lion Encyclopaedia of the Bible*.

The cross is an enormous subject, and some of these studies contain too much material for one sitting. The material is included so that you can follow up things that interest you. Don't try to tackle too much at once (better to learn one thing properly than have a vague knowledge of a wide area!) - save the rest for the weekend.

'Any really serious attempt to understand the Christian way must begin with the cross. Unless we come to see what the cross means we do not understand Christianity, real Christianity in the sense the New Testament writers gave to it. The cross is absolutely central. We must give time and attention to our understanding of what it means'.

Leon Morris, *The Atonement* (IVP).

Day 1. Jesus on the cross

Luke 23:26-49

Many of the occurrences of the word 'cross' in the New Testament come in the account of the crucifixion -the obvious place to start this study.

1. Read the passage slowly and prayerfully. Before going on to the rest of the study, thank God for sending Jesus to die for you.

Hallelujah, my Father, for giving us your Son;
Sending Him into the world to be given up for men,
Knowing we would bruise Him and smite Him from the earth.
Hallelujah, my Father, in His death is my birth.
Hallelujah, my Father, in His life is my life.

Tim Cullen, 1975, Spirit of Praise.

- Now try to put yourself in the place of some of the characters in this account. What would these people have thought was going on: (1) the women (verse 27)? (2) the people and Jewish leaders (verse 35)? (3) the two thieves (verses 39-43)? (4) the centurion (verse 47)?
- How does Luke show that Jesus was innocent in his death?

Day 2. Following the cross

Luke 9:18-27; 14:25-35

The idea that the Messiah would suffer was unexpected - both to the crowds in yesterday's study, and to the disciples in today's. But Jesus calls his disciples to follow him - and that includes the experience of the cross.

- Read both passages. (1) Make a list of all that carrying his cross means for a disciple (see especially 9:23-26 and 14:25-27, 33). (2) What attitude does Jesus want his followers to have?
- Discipleship can seem hard and costly at times - but the New Testament points us to Jesus as our inspiration, example and encouragement - see Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 Peter 2:20-25. What do you find difficult about being a Christian? Does Jesus' example help? Meditate on one of these passages.
- If you have enough time, go on to see what Paul says about discipleship and the cross. Look at Romans 6:1-7, 11-14 (there are similar references in Galatians 5:24; 6:14). What attitude does Paul expect the disciple to have?

Why not commit Jesus' words in Luke 9:23-25 to memory?

Day 3. The cross: God's plan

Galatians 3:1-29

Paul had problems with the churches in Galatia! After he had been there and preached the gospel, others had come along to tell the new Christians that they should be circumcised and keep the Jewish Law, as well as believing in Christ. The implication was that the cross was an afterthought - a bonus for pious Jews - not God's age-long plan of salvation.

You've studied this chapter before in week 6 - it might be helpful to look back at your notes on that. Read through the chapter, and try to trace the stages in God's plan. The following questions are to help you on your way - they need only brief answers!

- We start with Abraham, the founder-member of the people of God before the Law was given (see verse 17). How was he put right with God, or justified?
- God made Abraham a promise. What can you find out about that promise (see verses 6-9,15-18)?
- The Law was obviously an interim measure (see verse 19). What could the

Law achieve (see verses 19, 23-24)? What could it not achieve (see verses 10-12)?

- How was God's promise to Abraham fulfilled (see verses 13-14)?

Note: Verse 13 quotes Deuteronomy 21:22-23. The Old Testament custom was for the criminal to be stoned, and his body would then be hung up as a warning to others.

- How can people today inherit God's promise through Abraham (see verses 26-29)?

Day 4. Explaining the cross

Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; Colossians 1:20; 2:15; Ephesians 2:16

The Bible, in many ways, tells us what the cross achieved — both in putting us right with God, and in the other effects which follow from that. Choose one (or more if you have time) of the following verses, and try to get the drift of the passage of which it is part, then answer the questions.

- Galatians 3:13
- 1 Peter 2:24
- Colossians 1:20
- Colossians 2:15
- Ephesians 2:16

- What does your verse say the cross achieved?
- What difference should that make to your life?
- How would you explain the verse to someone who knows very little about Christianity, and doesn't understand religious jargon?

Note: 1 Peter 2:24. Though the context of this verse is Christ's example, Peter characteristically draws out the doctrine of the cross - Christ's atoning death as our substitute - as he also does later in 3:18.

The Bible has lots more to teach about the death of Christ (in passages where 'the cross' does not appear explicitly) and its place in the whole work of Christ. To follow that up, you could read the appropriate section of a book on Christian belief (e.g. 'The atonement: biblical teaching' pp.150-163 of *'Know the Truth'* by Bruce Milne (IVP), or Leon Morris' helpful and readable book, *'The Atonement'* (IVP).

Day 5. Preaching the cross

1 Corinthians 1:17 - 2:5

It seems that the church at Corinth was split by personality cults (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-16). Paul tackles this by reminding them that it is the message of the cross, not the preacher, which is the basis of their faith. The problem was mundane - but