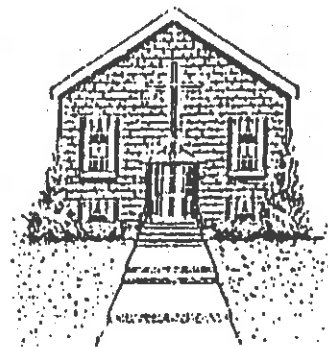


DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: The Cross of Christ
Scripture: Galatians 6:14; I Cor. 1,2

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 1 March 3, 1991

BOASTING IN THE CROSS

Introduction Twenty years ago I had the "baddest" car in town! I look at myself now and think, "how mundane," because 20 years ago I had a '65 Thunderbird convertible with a 390, four barrel, dual exhausts, and the coolest looking gauges you can imagine. I was proud of that machine...

As a boy I had a thing or two of which I felt boastful too. I was real proud of being on a rifle team. I had my shooting patches and medals on my favorite jacket and man, I would strut that stuff downtown and feel pretty high...

When you become a Christian you don't just automatically become immune to boasting. It is true, that right around the time of conversion there has to be a godly sorrow for sin, and a necessary humbling. But pretty soon "the old man" comes back to haunt you still. He isn't in overall *control* anymore, but he is still around. Pridefulness and arrogance can still crop up in my heart.

Churches seem to be *particularly* fertile soil for boastfulness sometimes... A good example of this is found in I Cor.1:12 where Paul identified at least four cliques or factions in the Corinthian assembly, ("Paul", "Apollos", "Cephas", "Christ")--factions which should never have germinated! Paul's rebuke is blunt (vs.13b):

"...Paul was not crucified for you, was he?"

This brings us to something else that Paul wrote--the thing I want to camp on today. It's found in Galatians 6...

Today we're beginning what I am planning to be, as the Lord permits, a series of six messages on the cross of Christ. It isn't because we're supposed to have some morbid fascination with that particular tool of execution used so effectively by the ancient Romans. But the thing that happened ON the cross, and 3 days later--that's the thing that is important. Today we're going to look at what Paul meant by "boasting" in the cross, and then in the weeks to come (as is listed in your bulletin) we're going to consider several other aspects of N.T. teaching about the cross of Jesus Christ.

Now in Gal.6:14 Paul wrote the Galatian believers, "*But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*"

The context is this: the fledgling Galatian churches (a part of modern Turkey), as a group, were starting to mutate, theologically. They were begun with a wave of excitement for Paul's gospel, but now were one-by-one giving in to leaders who lived closer to them, who thought a person first had to be a Jew before they could come to faith in Messiah. These other teachers did recognize Jesus' true identity, but they *interjected* a step in there that had to be taken, before a person could be born-again. That step was to become a *bona fide* Jew first, and the controversy centered on the rite of circumcision. Now as Paul read it, there was nothing whatsoever praise-worthy about circumcision, since Jesus had actually fulfilled all the requirements of the old Law of Moses for us.

We are, Paul said, in a new era, an era of pure grace. Now if ever anyone could boast of being a devout religious person, it was Paul. He had all the right credentials. But he said that was all garbage--in fact he used a more graphic word, "pig-dung" (Phil. 3:8) up against knowing Christ now... So boasting in the *accouterments*, in the *equipage* of religious activity held no attraction to Paul at all. In fact, Paul says, there's really only one thing about ALL of Christianity worth boasting over and that is that Roman crucifixion implement upon which the Son of God hung and died.

Now just a general boasting is really an unattractive and ugly thing. A person who feels compelled to boast and brag is really just revealing their *insecurity* that they have to verbally advance their esteem or accomplishments. But RELIGIOUS boasting should be even more odious to the Christian. To the day you and I die, dear ones, we have nothing to boast about. That I am a true disciple of Jesus, and that you are one (IF you are one) is only because in an act of God's sovereignty, He lovingly and mercifully chose you for redemption. That is a reality of which I shall never recover. And God has always had to just bestow His mercy in a completely undeserved way, so deep has the ruin of sin been on man...

So, religious boasting...

Look at OUR church...

Look at MY spiritual accomplishments...

Look at how many people WE'RE getting to come here...

Look at OUR music program...

...is really the *height* of absurdity! The most truly "religious" people are going to also be the most HUMBLE and self-effacing; NOT the boastful.

Paul's boasting WAS in the cross, though.

For many today, the cross is just a piece of sentimental jewelry or an emblem which is supposed to communicate, "Hey, I'm not a pagan; I believe in Jesus." But, IN CONTEXT, if we really knew the meaning of the cross, it would be like our *electric chair*, or a hanging gallows. It is in JESUS' EXECUTION that Paul says he glories.

In Gal.7:17 Paul identifies a little WITH Jesus' execution, for he often suffered physically and directly for the cause of Jesus. In that verse he says he has scars remaining from the persecutions he suffered. In 2 Cor.11:22-28 Paul chronicled his sufferings for Christ, and it is an impressive list indeed! But he is not boasting in those brand-marks, just using them to identify his own experience. It is in JESUS' execution that he takes pride, and that is what he preaches. It is what WE try to preach too.

But what is there about real cross-preaching that angers the world so much and stirs people up to persecute those who preach it? It is this: the cross tells us some unpleasant things about ourselves. It says that Christ became our curse FOR US because there was no other way to redeem us. John R. W. Stott writes,

"Every time we look at the cross, Christ seems to say to us, 'I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.' NOTHING in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves...until we have visited a place called Calvary.. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size." *Only One Way...the Message of Galatians*

That is why the cross is unpalatable to so many people. It is why for the Christian, it is the most blessed event in history.

Dear ones, every time we proudly exalt our own wills, either in our marriages, in our other family relationships, in the church, on the job or in the neighborhood, it is a direct contradiction to the cross we love. Every time we say something cynical about the local police, or about city hall, or about your mother-in-law, it is a sad evidence that we have freshly forgotten for the moment that WE have been bought with a price *ourselves...*

Paul would boast in nothing except in JESUS' EXECUTION. Jesus was innocent, and Paul was not. Jesus was wrongly tried, convicted and executed, and by comparison, Paul was not. Jesus was misunderstood and by comparison, Paul had it easy. Paul had no substantial basis to exalt his OWN case, though press his own case he did to get to Rome with the Gospel.

At the end of the verse, Paul says he and the world were dead to each other. Oh, that you and I can get to the place where that is true of us. To get to the place where the world just doesn't hold much fascination or attraction. That is where I want to be. Martin Luther, that great German Reformer wrote these words:

"Here is what Paul means by these words, '*through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world:*' he means, I judge the world to be damned. Thus we crucify and condemn one another. I abhor all the doctrine, 'righteousness', and works of the world. The world detests *my* doctrine and deeds, and esteems me to be [obnoxious], a pest and a heretic..." *Lectures on Galatians*

I have seen it happen more times that I care to count: a person becomes a Christian and for a season they really seek the things of the Lord. They read their Bibles with joy; they pray and pray. They tell anyone who will listen about Jesus. And then something comes along which begins to attract them away from Jesus Christ. And soon they're little more than church-goers...

"Between Paul and the world there was a cross...That should be the position of every believer today. That will have more to do with shaping your conduct than anything else. You will not boast about the fact that you're keeping the Sermon on the Mount, or that you belong to this or that church, or that you're a church officer or a ministry leader..." (J. Vernon McGee)

The cross brings me back to the central meaning of the faith. Whatever else goes on in my life, I can always return again to the foot of Calvary.

As we have the Lord's Table together now, let us humble ourselves before Him, and may we remember two things: the true JOY of knowing Christ; and what it cost HIM to give us that knowledge....

The world judgeth of Christians, not only that they are wretched and miserable men, but also most cruelly, and yet, as it thinketh, with a true zeal, hatred, persecuteth, condemneth, and killeth them, as most pernicious plagues of the spiritual and worldly kingdoms. But because they do not suffer for murder, theft, and such-like wickedness, but for the love of Christ, whose benefit and glory they set forth, therefore they glory in tribulation and in the Cross of Christ, and are glad with the apostles that they are counted worthy to suffer rebuke for the name of Christ. (Acts v. 41.) So must we glory at this day, when the pope, and all his hosts, persecute us, condemn us, and kill us, because we suffer these things, not as thieves and malefactors, but for Christ's sake, our Lord and Saviour, whose gospel we preach.

Now, our glory is increased and confirmed principally by these two things: first, because we are certain that our doctrine is true and sound; secondly, because our cross and suffering is the suffering of Christ. Our Saviour who is greater than the world, pronounceth us to be blessed, and willeth us to rejoice, when He said: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad" (St. Matt. v. 11, 12). Our glory, then, is a different glory to the glory of the world, which rejoiceth not in tribulation and persecution, but in power, riches, honour, and its own righteousness. But mourning and confusion is the end of this glory.

Moreover, the cross of Christ doth not signify that piece of wood which Christ did bear upon His shoulders, and to which He was afterwards nailed; but it signifieth all the afflictions of the faithful, whose sufferings are Christ's sufferings. As it is written: "The sufferings of Christ abound in us" (2 Cor. i. 5), and again: "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh" (Col. i. 24). The cross, therefore, signifieth all the afflictions of the Church, which is Christ's Body. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" asked the Lord from heaven; yet Saul did no violence to Christ, but to His Church, which is reckoned

as Himself, for he that toucheth it toucheth the apple of his eye (Zech. ii. 8). There is more lively feeling in the head than in the other members of the body. This we know, for the foot, or the hand, being hurt, complaineth forthwith to the head to feel the grief thereof. So Christ our head, maketh our afflictions His own, for we are of His body.

It is profitable for us to know these things, lest we should be swallowed up with sorrow, or fall into despair; but let us think with ourselves, after the example of Paul, that we must glory in the cross we bear, not for our own sins, but for Christ's sake. When we may say: "The sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Cor. i. 5); or, as is said in the forty-fourth Psalm: "For thy sake are we killed all the day long," then whatever sufferings we are called upon to bear will be not only easy, but also light, according to that saying: "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (St. Matt. xi. 30).

When Paul saith: "By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world," he meaneth, I judge the world to be damned, and the world judgeth me to be damned. Thus we crucify and condemn one another. I abhor all the doctrine, righteousness, and works of the world: the world detesteth my doctrine, and deeds, and esteemeth me to be a pernicious, and pestilent fellow, and a heretic. So also, at this day, the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world. For we curse and condemn all man's traditions concerning^s mass, orders, vows, will-worshippings, works, and all the abominations of the pope, and other heretics. They again do persecute and kill us as destroyers of religion, and troubleers of the public peace.

The monks dreamed that the world was crucified unto them, when they entered into their monasteries; but by this means Christ is crucified, and not the world; yea, the world is delivered from crucifying, and is the more quickened by the opinion of holiness, which they in monasteries had in their own righteousness. Most wickedly, therefore, was this sentence of the Apostle, wrested to apply to the entering into monasteries, or, as they call it, into religion. Paul speaketh here of a high matter, and of great importance; that is,

mentions that with this tremendous statement:

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world [Gal. 6:14].

Between Paul and the world there was a cross. That should be the position of every believer today. That will have more to do with shaping your conduct than anything else. You will not boast about the fact that you are keeping the Sermon on the Mount, or that you belong to a certain church, or that you are a church officer, or a preacher, or a Sunday school teacher. You will not be able to *boast* of anything. You will just *glory* in the Cross and the One who died there.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature [Gal. 6:15].

This brings us to the second kind of handwriting mentioned in these final verses.

Circumcision was the handwriting of religion and the Law. It was sort of a handwriting on the body. It served as a badge signifying that you belonged under the Abrahamic covenant. It never availed anything. Wearing a button or a pin, signifying that you belong to a lodge or a fraternity can become almost meaningless. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision"—uncircumcision is of no value either. These things carry no value whatsoever. There are folk today who like to boast of what great sinners they were before their conversion. Well, whether or not you have been circumcised—whatever was your state—is of no importance. The essential thing is: Has the Spirit of God come into your life and made you a new creature in Christ Jesus? This can come about *only* through faith in Christ.

You see, Paul would never have had any difficulty with the legalism of his day if he had presented the gospel as only a competitor in the field. Let me illustrate what I mean. We have an abundance of soaps on the market. Those who promote them tell us they will make you smell good or make you feel good or are kind to your skin. So let's you and me get out a new brand of soap, and we'll call it *Clean*, since getting you clean is the purpose of soap, and that seems to be the one thing the advertisers have forgotten. We'll start advertising it by claiming that it is the only soap that will make you clean. Our slogan will be "Buy Clean and get clean." Now that will get us in trouble

immediately when we claim that it soap that will get you clean. Many other soaps will really begin to hot is what Paul was claiming for the had said, "Judaism is good but Ch better," he wouldn't have been in cause that's what advertisers say product is better than other soaps ket. That's competition. No one say that their soap is the *only* soap do the job. Notice that Paul is n that his soap is only a little bett soap of Judaism; he is saying that *nothing*, that circumcision is *not* whether you are circumcised or cised is *nothing*. He is saying th writing of the Holy Spirit in your you a new nature, is essential. My is putting it on the line!

Now we come to the third and writing presented to us in this se

And as many as walk according to the rule, peace be on them, and mercy upon the Israel of God.

From henceforth let no man boast of his circumcision: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus [Gal. 6:16-17].

Notice the word *marks*. Paul is saying in my body the 'marks'—the *Græc stigmata*—meaning 'scar marks.' to see the handwriting of Jesus. Paul's body. In 2 Corinthians 11:23 us, "Are they ministers of Christ? (fool) I am more; in labours more stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews received I forty stripes save one. I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I was in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils of heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in wilderness, in perils in the sea among false brethren; In weariness, in watchings often, in hunger, in thirst, in fastings often, in coldness." The *stigmata* were the scars on Paul which he endured for the sake of Jesus.

In Paul's day *stigmata* was used in many ways. When a runaway slave was brought back to his master, he was branded on the forehead. Also soldiers who belonged to famous companies had the names of their commanders tattooed on their foreheads.

Series: The Cross of Christ
Scripture: Ephesians 2:16; Col. 1:20

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 2 Mar. 10, 1991

THE CROSS OF PEACE

Introduction Do you really want this pulpit to emphasize the themes that the New Testament emphasizes? If so, we may be talking about things sometimes that rub our fur the wrong way...

For instance, imagine with me for a couple of minutes, what would happen if we were to construct a set of three crosses out here on our church lawn. Let's say we thought to do this around Easter, and each cross was, say, about 10 feet high. We would use rough-hewn lumber and not finish the surfaces in any way. They might not even be in the typical shape of religious crosses--some Roman crucifixion-crosses looked more like an "X" and the criminal was nailed or tied between the cross pieces. Maybe we would splatter bright red paint on them and on the ground around them. And finally, maybe we would drape black cloth over the cross-pieces to dramatize their final effect.

If we did this, I wonder how the community would react. If we received any response at all, I think it would be **negative**. We might hear things like,

"What are you trying to do? Depress us?" OR,

"Hey, Easter is supposed to be a happy, bright time--what's your guys' problem?" OR,

"This is a *respectable* community...we don't like people trying to get *artsy* on their front lawns."

Today we want to think about what the cross is really a SYMBOL of... Twenty years ago, the *peace sign* was a symbol people used a lot to communicate their desire for "peace." Generally, they applied that wish for peace to mean a desire for a cessation of armed hostilities in Viet Nam, and that is what we saw in 1975...

"Peace" is one of those political and social "buzzwords" people use a lot, and of course, its simplest meaning is that no tanks are firing rounds at each other; no planes are dropping bombs, no troops are trying to wipe each other out. But political peace isn't the only kind of peace people hunger for... There is another kind of "peace", more *subtle* perhaps but no less REAL. I'm talking about *spiritual peace*, a cessation of hostility in the SPIRIT-REALM. All people need it, and no one comes into the world with it as part of their basic equipment. And today, we want to consider the CROSS OF CHRIST as a not-often-thought-about symbol of peace.

Now as I suggested, as it truly was, the cross of Jesus Christ is not the kind of thing people ought to view as cute and warm and cuddly. In its historical context, it was a grizzly implement of death. It would be as a hangman's gallows or an electric chair or even a handgun, for us. It connoted shame and humiliation and guilt--usually of a political and rebellious nature. None of those are particularly pleasant symbols and we do not wear them around our necks. In a sermon a while back, *John MacArthur* said this:

"Study philosophy for a few minutes and you'll find that every religion that man has ever developed (which is *all* of them, except Christianity)--is complex. They appeal to man's brain and to his ego. They are elaborate. Man will not crush his ego down to the level of simplicity of the CROSS...He doesn't like to come to that place. He doesn't like the cross because if you come to the cross you have to admit that you're sinner, and man doesn't like that either. That's the problem..."

But, of course, the cross was not the final chapter in the story of Jesus. And that is because Jesus didn't stay dead... And for that reason, let's consider the peacemaking effects of the cross of Christ. Paul spells out well this aspect of the cross of Christ in two places in his letters: Ephesians 2:16 and Colossians 1:22.

Now, being at war seems to be part of almost all people's experience. It is part of our fallenness. Groups of people are at war with one another; we read about some ongoing conflict in the papers every day. And classes of people are at war with each other. There is so much racial and social prejudice around, it is just hatred and "war." Families go to war with each other quite often--for every wedding ceremony today in this country, there is a divorce to match.

Jesus is calling out His Church from the world, as the company of the Redeemed, and His word to the Redeemed is to be "salt" and "light" to the world around us. We are to be "salt" as in having a preserving effect and to add flavor and vitality to the fallenness of the world. And we are to be "light" as in shedding the light of God's Word upon the confused darkness that encompasses the planet, and to be "lit-up" examples of God's Spirit, and of Jesus, who called Himself the Light of the world... But the Redeemed sometimes fall into conflict, too.

But when we come back to the cross of Jesus, dear ones, we bring ourselves back to the most basic effect of Jesus' death: it is a theological word--RECONCILIATION.

"Reconciliation" means a "making of peace" between two or more parties that were in conflict. As Paul uses it in EPHESIANS, he is talking about the peace made, the UNITY established between two groups of people--the Jewish people of God, and the new Christian people of God. Through Jesus' death on the cross, these two formerly alienated groups could come together and follow God together, in peace.

In COLOSSIANS, Paul uses the word "reconcile" in that special Greek verb-tense (which we don't have in English) called the aorist. Through Jesus' cross, God reconciled "all things," and the aorist tense flavors it as a DECISIVE act. It happened on Calvary--that great event that happened on a rough and cruel crucifixion "spike", actually "fixed" the whole universe. That boggles the mind! It is hard to imagine the colossal victory that was won at that place called "Skull," a place which you could visit today, if you took a trip to Jerusalem. The whole created order benefits from the sacrifice Jesus made on that Friday afternoon. Spiritual peace was made possible not only for man's benefit, but for all the inhabitants of heaven. Now, I don't pretend to fully understand all that this means--I am confident that Paul did *not* mean that something was wrong in heaven before 30 A.D.--but that the PEACE WROUGHT BY JESUS' EXECUTION was felt even there in heaven. It may have been that the whole angelic host felt a new and exciting wave of joy, since we know that they rejoice when even one sinner comes repents, and the only real basis for repentance can be found in the work Jesus completed on Calvary.

Well, getting back to how the cross makes peace...Let me suggest a few things that you can think about:

Colossians 1:21 lists three "acts of war" that they, the Colossians were enslaved by, before Jesus went to the cross...

- a. "alienated"--this means *estranged*, or not feeling like you belong. Before a person comes to faith in Christ, he may go his whole life and never really feel a welcome part of anything or any family. Frequently this is said in counseling, and the secular counselors are scrambling around trying to invent ways to make people *feel* connected and "whole," when in reality the feeling of "alienation" is a "natural-born" condition. But when a person has come to the foot of the cross, by faith, and been reconciled to God, they get "connected"--the Bible uses the terms "adopted" and "built-in" to the family of the Redeemed.
- b. Then Paul told the Colossians that before the cross of Jesus happened, they were "hostile in mind." This is where folks are enslaved to use their minds *against* God and His ways. They maybe would LIKE to quit thinking wickedly, but they cannot seem to. They feel hopelessly entrapped *inside their heads*.

I hear parents continually say, "My little Johnny is a good kid, you know--he doesn't really want to think rotten." Dad, Mom, little Johnny *isn't* a good kid. He IS rotten and he needs Jesus. And you shouldn't be so all-fired surprised when you see signs of Johnny's thought-processes turned to dark things. It comes natural for him. But if little Johnny will turn to Christ for *reconciliation*, for FORGIVENESS OF SINS and a new heart then he can escape that "hostility of mind." He can get OVER that volatile temper, that crafty selfishness that he or she is bound to...

- c. The third thing about their past that Paul told the Colossians they could get out from under, was their previous tendency to "engage in evil deeds." This could apply to a lot of things, but as often as not, Paul has in mind when he phrases things in this way, *sexual deviation and self-indulgence*. Having been brought into a full state of PEACE with God through the cross of Jesus Christ, there is now the potential to SAY NO to the flesh. Unless a person really has visited the cross personally though, it doesn't matter how much Scripture they know, how many consecutive weeks of Sunday School, how many Christian friends they have. It doesn't matter how many heavy-metal concerts they *don't* go to, now many beers they *don't* quaff, how many guys they *don't* go to bed (or wherever) with. Unless a person meets Jesus on the cross *personally* there is no work of reconciliation.

And my friends, there is nothing so sad as a person who THINKS he or she has been made into a Christian, when in actuality it simply hasn't really happened yet.

- d. In verse 22, Paul says that an immediate effect of the cross of Christ, is that He, Jesus, can then "present you" to the Father. There's nothing like being introduced in a favorable light to somebody important, by somebody else important...

We can look forward to an actual event when we are going to be introduced to the Father by the Son, our personal Redeemer, as people who are clean, perfect and with "no record." I fairly shake when I contemplate that day, don't you dear ones? But as sure as I am standing here, that day is coming for every individual on the planet who has visited the cross of Calvary.

- e. Verse 23 is Paul's *provisio*. As if he knew (and he sure did) that some would try to ride a one-time mere *profession* of faith into heaven, Paul says you've got to CONTINUE in the faith.

Its interesting to me how many people the talk-show host Bob Larsen gets who call him and say, "Well, Bob, I *used* to be a Christian." My friends, no one USED to be a Christian. There is no such thing as a person coming to the foot of the cross of Jesus, having that blood drip down on their life, and making them a new redeemed creature, completely freed of guilt and shame, and then them later deciding they didn't need it! It just doesn't happen!

People have to CONTINUE in faith, even when things get hard or confusing or *costly* to remain a Christian and keep trying to become like Jesus...

Dear ones, you and I can never USE UP to ability of the cross to make fresh peace between us and a holy God. We cannot USE UP the ability of Jesus death to give fresh LIFE to your relationships, be it your marriage, or your relationship with your kid or parent or boss...

The cross of Jesus Christ is a symbol of PEACE. When Jesus died on the "tree" He pulled together man and God, and man and man. The angels rejoiced to see it. And you and I plug into that peace every time we enjoy the Lord's Table. We freshly remind ourselves that war is over. Jesus death won peace for all who will seek it--peace of mind and peace of spirit and peace in personal relationships.

There doesn't have to be anger anymore.

You don't have to hold grudges anymore so that you can have
vengeance.

Because of Calvary you can let go, even as God the Father fully waged war on the Son, so that payment would be made in full.

however, apparently was a pole sunk into the ground with a cross-bar fastened to it giving it a "T" shape. Often the word "cross" referred only to the cross-bar.

Death by crucifixion originated somewhere in the E. Alexander the Great seems to have learned of it from the Persians. Rome borrowed the idea from the Phoenicians through Carthage, and practiced it as a means of capital punishment.

The Romans reserved crucifixion, however, for slaves, robbers, assassins, and the like, or for rebellious provincials. Only rarely were Rom. citizens subjected to this kind of treatment (Cicero. In Ver. 1. 5. 66). The tradition, therefore, which relates the beheading of Paul, and Peter's crucifixion accords well with this distinction between peoples.

Upon receiving the sentence of death the condemned person was flogged with a leather whip loaded with metal or bone so cruelly that it became known as the intermediate death. He was then required to shoulder the crossbar upon which he was to be extended and carry it to the place of his crucifixion (Pharac. De Ser. Num. Vind. 9.554A). He wore about his neck a placard naming his crime. At the execution site he was stripped and tied or nailed to the crossbar, which then was fastened to an upright post. A projecting peg gave the condemned a place to sit to relieve the strain on his arms. Death, therefore, was slow in coming, except when it was hurried by soldiers breaking the crucified man's legs (John 19:31).

According to Josephus crucifixion in Pal. was a most common sight (Antiq. 17. 10. 10; 20. 5. 2; Wars. 2. 12. 6. 13. 2. 14. 9. 5. 11. 1). The fact that two robbers were crucified with Jesus in Jerusalem tends to confirm this claim. The Jewish nation, unlike the Rom., did not crucify living persons. Frequently, however, they did suspend the bodies of the executed upon a tree to intensify their punishment and to expose them to public shame (Num 25:4; Josh 10:26; 1 Sam 31:10). Men thus hanged were considered accursed by God (Deut 21:22, 23).

Crucifixion, therefore, was abhorrent to the Jew (1 Cor 1:23; Gal 3:13), but no less so to the Rom. Cicero wrote: "Let me very name of the cross be far from me not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears" (Off. Rab. 5).

2. **Jesus' cross.** In the NT, when used of Jesus, the word *stauros* has both a literal and figurative meaning. Literally it meant that physical instrument by which Jesus was put to death. After being flogged (Matt 27:26) and forced to carry His own cross (=crossbar, John 19:17), which, though not a heavy piece of wood, was nevertheless, too heavy for Him in His weakened condition (Mark 15:21; cf. 2 Cor 13:4). He was fastened to it by nails (cf. John 20:25), and hoisted then with it up

onto the upright stake already in place at the execution site (Matt 27:35). Here He was left to die, a death which Jesus Himself had anticipated (20:18, 19), and from which He could not escape (Mark 15:32).

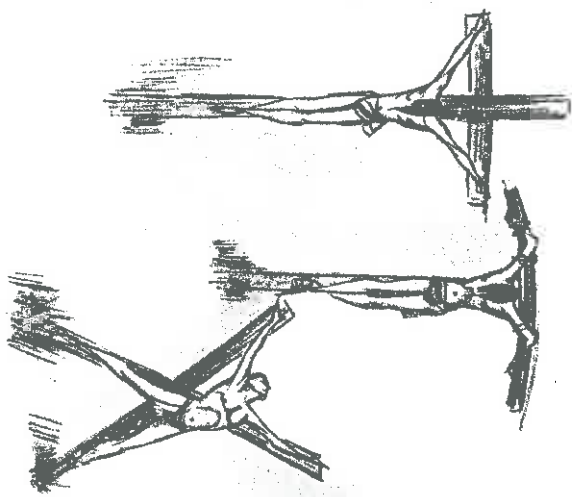
Figuratively Jesus' cross became the mark of God's redemptive action in history. It was symbolic of the means God employed for releasing into this world a power for good sufficiently strong to save men (1 Cor 1:18), to break down otherwise insurmountable barriers between man and man, thus making it possible for him to live at one with his brother (Eph 2:16), to bring everything back into peace and harmony with God (Col 1:20), to effect for mankind forgiveness of sins and a release from that which continually made him feel his guilt (2:14), and to free him forever from the cosmic forces of evil which everywhere surround him (2:15).

Since the cross was reserved for criminals and those accursed by God (see above), it symbolized, too, the suffering, shame and humiliation Jesus endured (Heb 12:2) for the human race, indicating the depths to which He was willing to go to lift up the worst and lowest of men.

Jesus' cross also stood as the symbol of God's unique purpose for Him. That is to say, since dying was planned by God as Jesus' supreme mission (Acts 2:23; cf. Matt 16:21 with 20:18, 19 and John 18:11), the cross, therefore, becomes a metonym for mission, a symbol both of the divine will for Jesus, and Jesus' voluntary submission to that will (Mark 14:36; Phil 2:8).

3. **The Christian's cross: crossbearing.** The cross was used also of the followers of Jesus, both literally and metaphorically. Because crucifixion was a frequent occurrence, and because the spectacle of condemned men carrying their crosses to the place of execution was common, Jesus' words about taking up the cross and following Him (Matt 16:24; cf. John 12:26) must first of all have been interpreted literally. These words must have been understood as a prediction of the same physical means of death for Jesus' followers as for Him (Matt 23:34). This prediction was soon fulfilled in the early years of the Church's history (cf. the tradition about Peter's crucifixion and see also Ignatius, Rom. 53; Hermas, Vis. 3:2-1).

Jesus also interpreted metaphorically the cross. His followers must bear it. It was for Him the symbol of their self-sacrifice: "If any man wills to come after me." He said, "let him deny (perhaps, 'lose sight of') himself, and take up his cross (Luke adds, 'daily'), and [continually] follow me" (Mark 8:34-36). "To bear the cross," therefore, means a continuing loyalty to Christ along with a continuing death to self. It means "we must refuse, abandon, deny self altogether as a ruling or determining or originating element in us. It is to no longer the regent of our action. We are to no more to think



Various types of crosses, particularly the type used in crucifying Jesus.

"What should I like to do?" but "What would the Living One have me do?" (George MacDonald).

If in the experience of Jesus the cross was a metonym for His mission, there is a sense then in which the cross also stands for that mission in life to which the Christian has been called. "To bear the cross," therefore, means further that the Christian is called upon to imitate Jesus' commitment to doing that particular task assigned him by God and doing it completely (Luke 14:27, noting esp. the words "his own cross"; cf. John 17:4). The cross is a symbol, then, of life lived under Christian discipline, marked by voluntary obedience to the will of God.

The cross is also a symbol of the shame and humiliation which the Christian must be prepared to endure for the sake of Christ (Heb 12:2 with 13:12, 13; cf. also 1gn. Tral. 11:2; Hermas, Vis. 3. 2. 1). It is a symbol, furthermore, of the destruction of everything which interposes itself between man and God, whether it be an institutionalized religion, as in the case of Paul (Gal 6:14), or material things, as in the case of Janatus (Rom 7:2), or whatever else there might be. The cross, too, is a symbol of that mystical union of the Christian with Christ, wherein one's old evil impulses are crucified with Christ, and new desires and powers are released in his life (Gal 2:19b, 20; Rom 6:6).

The Christian's cross is always a voluntary thing. Unlike the convict he never is compelled to carry it: "If any man wills to do so," Jesus said (Mark 8:34). Nor is there ever any

hint that the Christian, like Christ, by bearing his cross acts redemptively or becomes accused in behalf of others or thereby atones for another's sins. Yet there is a sense in which the Christian who bears the cross fills up (supplements) on his part the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ (Col 1:24), i.e. by continued acts of self-denial on the part of successive individuals through the years in the interest of God and humanity, the work which Christ began continues even to the present.

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G F HAWTHORNE

CROWN. See RAVEN.
1. **Non-symbolic use of crown.** As used in Job 2:7 (of the top of Job's head) and in Exodus 25:11, etc. (Of a part of the ornamentation of the Ark of the Covenant), "crown" merely connotes something of a particular form or shape, with prob. no symbolic meaning.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: The Cross of Christ
Scripture: Philipians 3:18

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 3 Mar. 15, 1991

THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

Introduction It is my deep desire for our church to be thought of in this community as a blessing FOR our community. To me, it is important that people think positive when they hear the name "Dartmouth Bible Church." In this I am not striving after winning the community's wholesale approval so much as I desire for us to NOT be thought of as irrelevant or an irritation because we're obnoxious, insensitive and worst of all: smug or self-righteous. We want the people in Dartmouth, etc. to look at DBC as a good thing to have over there on Morton Avenue...

And there are a lot of good things happening on Morton Avenue these days. We have begun to develop a reputation as a place where folks can send their children for good Biblical instruction and fun too. We are only recently starting to function as a place of healing, because of our counseling ministries. DBC is a place of sound theology and we have a growing resource library for Biblical study. The fact of this merger between DBC and EBC has not gone unnoticed, dear ones. That the Lord is pulling it off for us and IN us is a quiet testimony that HIS will and HIS priorities are sought after at 52 Morton Avenue. It is no small thing for the community--those who are aware of it--to witness the consolidation of two separate bodies into one. There are a great number of good things happening these days in DBC, and I believe we are getting "tooled up" to do a significant job for the Gospel in the Town of Dartmouth.

But although we are really in a time of blessing (and ought, therefore, to make the most of it), I want to ask you again today, do you really want to see this pulpit place its emphasis on the things that the New Testament emphasizes? Is that what you want? The problem is that the New Testament's portrayal of church-life is not always rosy and altogether pleasant. In fact, if we are honest we have to acknowledge that a fair amount of the experiences the NT Christians had were hard. They did not live under a theology of "health and wealth." They hammered out their Christian lives in the "sweat-shop" of ancient society, under the thumb of Roman occupation and really, a very dark time. I'm not saying they had no JOY; just that the circumstances in which the earliest Christians lived brought them face to face with many FOES--foes whom the Apostle Paul termed "enemies of the cross."

Today we are looking at the third aspect of the cross of Jesus Christ and how that cross comes to bear on our lives today. Consider with me for a few moments then, the notion that there are many opponents of the evangelical doctrines we hold dear and vital. They may not demonstrate

outside the church's front door, but they are there. Even under the "umbrella" of Christendom there are many who would strongly object to our creed. I do not mean to conjure up imaginary problems for you to face, but if we mirror what the NT warns us against, we must look with eyes other than those in these sockets. We must see what is going on around us spiritually. And when we consider the spiritual conditions in Bristol County today we must acknowledge--I think--that there is darkness all around and that we evangelical Christians are holding up our lanterns with the night wind blowing...

The Context...

Now Philippians is a wonderful book, and if you haven't read it lately I commend it to your reading schedule for this week. Paul loved this church which was in the ancient Roman colony of Philippi (now a village called *Filibeđjik* near the Greek-Bulgarian border). He and his mission-team planted the church there on their second missionary journey, and *Lydia* was their first European convert to Christ. Paul's later letter to those Philippian Christians was inspired by *friendship matters*. He loved this church that always stood by Him and as *Epaphroditus* returned to Philippi from visiting Paul who was probably then in Rome. Epaphroditus was a valiant evangelist and assistant to the Apostle, and Paul commends him highly to the Philippians. And using the occasion of Epaphroditus' return TO Philippi, Paul wrote them concerning a number of matters. Most of Philippians is happy, but in chapter 3 he mentions certain "enemies of the cross".

Identifying the "Enemies of the Cross"

Now, who are the enemies of the cross--people opposed to the theology of Jesus' substitutionary atonement for sinners? WHO would object to the preaching of free grace and the good news and the free gift of eternal life from the hand of a loving Father, and through the blood of the Son? Who would recoil at such news?

First, one large group of enemies of the cross is invisible to us. I'm talking about the demonic forces about which Paul wrote to the Ephesians when he said, "*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph.6:12). We should not be unaware that there are spiritual forces at work all the time, trying to *undo* the efforts we make to share the message of the cross. When Satan cannot succeed with a frontal assault on churches and individual Christians who are seeking to share the good news, he will employ a back-door approach. If he can get a church side-tracked with secondary doctrines; if he can get the people to make their church-message something other than the message of the cross; if he can seduce church members into selfish pursuits and get them to think primarily, "Hey, what AM I getting out of this ministry?"--then, he accomplishes a *de-emphasis* if not a complete neglect of the message of the cross.

Second, there are going to be everyday non-Christians who might oppose the message of the cross. Some of them might be demon-possessed, but many will not be actually possessed--but their minds will be darkened by the evil one, and their wills enslaved to the flesh. They will use their intelligence and their natural talents to OPPOSE the message of the cross. A good example of this was the tremendous oppression of Christians by the Kremlin and its puppet-governments from the 30's through just last year. Their vicious and unrelenting persecution of any Christian, male or female, young or old demonstrated the *fierceness* with which mere man can oppose the Gospel. In Paul's day, this would be like the opposition Paul received in Philippi and in Ephesus from the pagan businessmen. Paul confronted fortune-telling with the Gospel. He confronted the silver-smithery of Demetrius, who made his living off of the manufacture and sale of little statues of the Ephesian goddess, Artemis (Acts 18,19). It wasn't so much, I do not believe, that Paul specifically went after these businessmen. But as he preached the cross of Jesus as the single truly supernatural event of any redeeming power, it indicted all these other religions as worthless. As people responded to the preaching of Jesus' cross, their lives were changed. Their priorities were changed. How they spent their money changed. How they used their time, changed. And in that people's LIVES were being changed, the root cause drew public notice. And dear ones, as the root cause drew notice, Paul wasn't given the key to any of the cities of Asia Minor! Unless they were being drawn by the invisible work of the Holy Spirit, these pagan enemies of the cross drew a bead on the message of the cross and opened fire. It is still that way in the world, when Christianity starts impacting people to the extent that whole groups of people in a community start changing their life- styles.

In our day, if enough people were making the decision to stop drinking beer, to stop smoking, to quit buying pornography, or to quit shopping on the Lord's Day, then business would take a hit, and the local merchants would ask, "Why is this happening?" If they arrived at the conclusion, "Its this Jesus-stuff," would they take it lying down? If it meant, say, a 25% decrease in profits area-wide, what would they do? Just roll-over and say, "Whatever..." Perhaps. Perhaps not...

There is a third category of "enemies of the cross of Jesus," which is, in fact, the category Paul had in mind in Philippians 3:18. Specifically, who are the "enemies of the cross" that Paul had in mind as he wrote that line? In that verse he gives a hint as to their identity: "...of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping..." These were somehow people Paul cared a great deal about...even to the point of tears when he objectively looked at the end-result of their true condition.

By the way--when was the last time you wept over the chosen spiritual path of some person *other than a family member*? Who is the last non-family member that you were so burdened about that it drove you to your knees in tearful prayer? The implication, dear ones, is that you and I ought to be involved with people and we ought to care about people--so much, that if they happen to tragically chose the wrong path--the path of self-indulgence, it brings you to weeping even. THAT is a sensitive and non-calloused soul!

Well, it is not so easy to clearly see who Paul is talking about in Phil. 3:18. There are several specific camps of people that the commentators have gone 'round about... But clearly they are not from the community of pagans. They are people who, I think, were professing Christians. Probably they were not Philippian church members, but they were on the fringes of that church. They might have been *likable* people and people that at one point were OPEN to the preaching of the cross.

But when it came down to it, these people did NOT embrace the cross and all that it means. They may have made an initial move towards following Christ, but when the doors were shut they opted to chose for *themselves*. In verse 19 Paul wrote that their appetite was their real god. In Greek, the word is really "stomach." And I don't think Paul is just talking about a matter of diet--he is talking about a kind of person who sensually indulges all kinds of physical appetites, whose "glory is their shame." These "enemies of the cross" actually rejoiced in what actually should have been shameful for them. They devote great attention to earthly things, and the things of this world are what *really* captivate their affections, their energy and their time. This is the kind of person: a professing Christian perhaps, but a false-Christian nonetheless that Paul terms an "enemy of the cross."

The cross of Jesus Christ calls Christians not to live in "denial", that defense-mechanism so prevalent among religious people today--but to live in *self-denial*. The cross which Jesus endured for you and I calls us to live for a greater thing than just what I can get out of today. It calls me to make sacrifices. It calls me to exercise real love for my brethren and for my family. It calls me to endure suffering maybe, and hardship for the faith. It calls me to give myself to the flock to which I chose to be attached, just like Epaphroditus did for his dear Christian friends in Philippi. The cross of Christ calls me sometimes to a *hard* life, a life which the flesh doesn't like very often.

But my friends, there are far too many people going to churches around this country today, who SAY they are Christians. They may LOOK like Christians. They may listen to Christian music and carry a Bible and they may send their kids to evangelical kids' programs. But deep in their hearts they have not yet met Christ. Until they do, because they LOOK like Christians on the outside and yet are not really saved--Paul says they stand as "enemies of the cross of Christ." Ultimately, whoever is not FOR Jesus Christ, is against Him. There are really no such things as fence-sitters; as middle-of-the-roaders when it comes to knowing Jesus. No man can serve two masters, you know, and either he really is sold out to one or to the other. Who are you sold out to? ✓

Yes, things are going pretty good these days around old Dartmouth Bible Church. Lots of good ministries happening, and prospects for more to come. But when we open our New Testaments we see a "theme" that comes up a lot which maybe we would rather not think about. Even the best churches, with even the happiest ministries STILL are susceptible to having counterfeiting going on within *it*.

them

We will never become immune to this, dear ones, and we need to guard the integrity of our message and of our reputation. We need to do as Paul commended the Philippians:

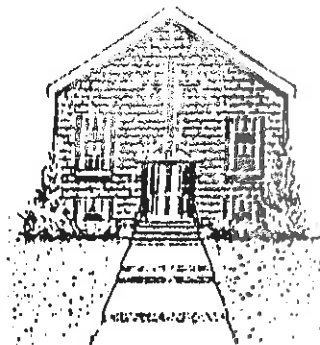
1. WATCH and not be completely devastated when some defect.
2. Keep your eyes on Christ.
3. Vs. 20 - have a long-term vision for your own faith.
4. Vs. 21 - rely on HIS power to change you.
5. Never stop clinging to the cross as the basis of your hope.
6. Vss. 16,17: *"keep living by the same standard..."*
"follow the apostles' examples..."
"observe others who follow their example..."

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: the Cross of Christ
Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-2

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 4 March 24, 1991

THE ACTUAL CROSS

Introduction The Catholic cable-TV station was offering a video tour of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome last week, and I found myself engrossed in the artistic beauty and majesty of what I was viewing... I was intrigued with the absolute seriousness and hushed voice of the narrator as he walked us through one hall after another, describing what is surely some of the finest ancient religious art in all of Christianity. There was the statue of Mary holding the body of her slain son, done by Michelangelo Buonarrotti in the 1500's, and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by him as well. But one little shrine in particular grabbed me--it is a shrine which allegedly contains some very special relics. Relics have always fascinated Christians in the almost-mystical connection they supposedly offer with the sacred past. A relic might be a piece of bone from one of the saints, or maybe a swatch of cloth from a piece of clothing said to have originally been worn by an apostle. There in St. Peter's there is supposedly even a rag that mopped the face of Jesus as he struggled on the Via Delarosa towards Golgotha, with the image of his face supernaturally burned into the rag. But this one little shrine especially struck me with its drawing power of intrigue. Supposedly it contains, hidden away, a few fragments of the true cross of Jesus. I'm not sure, of course, what tokens are really enshrined behind those curtains and doors...but the power of imagination invoked upon any passing pilgrims to that shrine must be powerful elixir, indeed!

But come with me now back 1,962 years (or so) TO that Roman-occupied Judea. The political atmosphere is tense. Judea teeters on the edge of rebellion, folly though it would be--no annexed territory has ever yet defeated the Roman legions. And the normal crowds in Jerusalem have swollen because it is the time of Passover and there are many visiting pilgrims in town. For three years the "point" of pending insurrection was met with the "counterpoint" of the ministry of a carpenter-rabbi from Nazareth. On the one hand, men like Barabbas were inciting the populace to riot and rebellion against Rome. On the other, Jesus of Nazareth was building a reputation as a healer, successful exorcist and deeply enthralling teacher. What He DID matched what he taught. And what He taught rung like a bell with simplicity and clarity. He was no simpleton, though. Every time the "intellects" tried to stump Him or entrap Him, He met their volley with remarkable insight and they were compelled to one of two reactions: they would marvel at His wisdom, or they would hate Him. Nicodemus, the scholar, marvelled. Caiaphas, the high priest, hated.

This is the backdrop for Jesus' last week. The cross has a political context. It has the prophetic context, because the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, indicated some seven centuries previous that Messiah would have to suffer. The cross had its profound irony too: they illegally and unjustly executed Jesus when Barabbas was freed. But I want to FOCUS IN today on an aspect of the cross far less cerebral, and far more "earthy." I want to focus in on the actual cross...

You see, there weren't any praise-songs to Jesus being sung that day. There were no church bulletins. No Easter dresses. No organ recitals. There was NONE of the pomp-and-circumstance we so fondly associate with Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, itself. When it HAPPENED, it was just JESUS, some soldiers, Simon of Cyrene, His Mom, His aunt, Mary Magdalene, John, and a couple of death-row inmates. None of the "principles" wore festive clothing. There was no music. Oh-- there was something else--the cross itself. And the cross itself, I am afraid, might offend some of our sentiments about Easter. It is not a pretty device.

Execution by crucifying was something the ancient Persians--nowadays Persians are called "Iraqis"--evidently dreamed up. Darius the Mede (whom we read about in the Book of Daniel) executed 3,000 Babylonians by crucifixion. Crucifixion was considered an especially barbarous way of terminating someone's life, and it was reserved for the most hated criminals and rebels.

It was common for the condemned to face a preliminary torture, first. And then, in weakened form to be forced to bear his own cross to the place of final execution. The cruelty offends us, I know. When we read today of the kinds of human cruelty that so commonly and effortlessly goes on in the world, HOW CAN WE BUT ACKNOWLEDGE the basic sinfulness of man? And few things could be more cruel than the cross itself, especially One so wonderful and innocent being forced to endure it. I am reminded of the words from Hebrews (12:1-3),

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, DESPISING THE SHAME, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

The cross was INDEED a thing of shame. It was such a fearful thing to use in criminology and in warfare that it became in time a very popular device among the nations. It originated in Persia, but its use spread to the Carthaginians and to Rome, and after that it was still used by the Celts, the Germanic tribes and the Brittanic tribes.

The cross itself was a stake, sometimes with a cross-piece (making a "T") and sometimes not. Other crosses looked like an "X" and the person was stretched out between the cross-pieces. In earliest days, there was

no seat attached, but it was the Romans who figured out that if there was a peg to sit on, called a "sedile", it would prolong the process of dying.

By the way, isn't it ironic that in cathedrals and large churches, the seat on the south side of the chancel is reserved for the officiating clergy, and it is often called the "sedile"...

The cross was much like our *napalm*, which underwent an evolution of development from WWII down to today. For men in absolute power, execution of their enemies never seems to be enough. There need to be *dramatic* and ingeniously barbaric ways to terminate the vanquished. The cross is a testimony to that tendency among men.

Then, the condemned was usually not simply tied to the wood. More often, as with Jesus, he was nailed to it with spikes 10 or 12 inches long. The wounds themselves were not fatal; just excruciating.

But beyond its scientific gruesomeness, the cross itself was psychological. By law, no Roman citizen could be crucified. Tradition tells us--and in both cases it is strong tradition--that Paul was executed by decapitation, but Peter by inverted-crucifixion (upside down). Paul was a Roman citizen; Peter was not. This is what the writer to the Hebrews means when he said that Jesus MET that psychological effect with great courage--that He "despised it", that is, that He *dismissed* it because of the JOY that was coming. The British scholar F.F. Bruce wrote,

"To die by crucifixion was to plumb the lowest depths of disgrace."

Paul wrote to the Philippians (2:8), "*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS.*"

Philip E. Hughes, another British evangelical scholar, wrote,

"Paul, himself a Roman citizen, had to learn not to be ashamed of the gospel of a crucified Savior, a gospel against which he had at first poured forth the full fury of his persecuting and blasphemous zeal."

Many would look at the notion of a *crucified* Redeemer and King and pronounce it "folly." We will look more at that next week (Lord willing), but the shame and humiliation of God's Son, near-naked on a cross, agonizing with all the sin of all those who would ever trust to Him on His person, and NONE of His own doing, met with the full and unrestrained wrath of God--well, it's just "mind-blowing", is it not?

The actual cross was taken down and probably discarded along with those of the two thieves, or they were stacked to be used again all too soon. I am quite sure John and Mary and Peter "and the boys" did not scheme to *obtain* those rude wooden pieces for posterity--OR the nails, OR the crown of thorns, OR the woven garment. It would be at least 36 hours

before they would be shocked OUT OF their utter defeat. And once Jesus rose, there was no need for physical tokens of Golgotha. The RESURRECTION was proof enough. It was exciting enough. It was REAL enough!

If we somehow knew we had the real cross available to us to see or even touch. I cannot imagine HOW we could really know we had the real one, but if we did and IF it wasn't entombed in some majestic though impenetrable shrine, and we could get at it--would it do anything for you? Ponder this for a minute--

Would having the actual cross, its ancient color darkened and faded with time, do anything to increase your faith? I admit it would be an interesting phenomena, but I do not think that something like that would give rise to any more faith at all.

Again, from the writer to the Hebrews--who, by the way, were struggling with faith:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (11:1)--a most interesting verse...

First, when you feel confident about "things hoped for"--that is a reference to certain PROMISES that Scripture makes...then, in that state of confidence, the Bible says you are exercising faith. It is the FUTURE-GAZING excitement and joy that evidences real faith.

Second, it is an intellectual decision too: being persuaded about certain REALITIES which are, as yet, invisible. We say to ourselves (and to anyone else who will listen), "Hey, I am convinced there is more to this world than just what I see. I am convinced there is plenty of evidence for another 'reality' which goes on longer than THIS planet and life, which I am being prepared for now by the invisible Holy Spirit of God."

I'm reading a fair amount into little-Hebrews 11:1, I admit. But that is the faith, dear ones, in a nut-shell.

It isn't in church buildings or souvenirs or relics that we draw our hope and assurances.

It is not in the visible things of religion that we ground our faith.

It isn't in pride or achievement of ministry or even in DOING the ministry with excellence that we fall back on.

Its in the *thing* that happened on Calvary. Jesus of Nazareth, a real man in every respect except that He was without sin, and truly God in every respect, endured that cross with all its cruel science, and the utter humiliation and shame, so that you might not have to endure your own shame before a holy God. It was a terrible price to pay, but one He paid willingly. Have you clung to the cross yet? I don't mean A CROSS around your neck. I mean the one Jesus hung on, was jabbed by, that scraped his

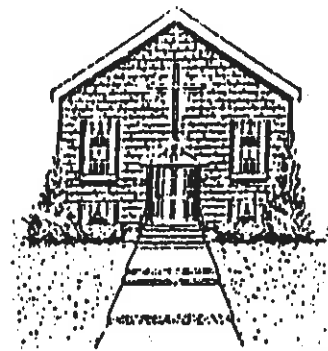
lacerated back, that thrust Him erect and helpless though His body screamed at Him for repair. To THAT cross, by faith alone, have you fled?

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Norton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: the Cross of Christ
Scripture: I Cor. 1:17,18
S.M.U. Main Auditorium

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 5 Mar. 31, 1991
Easter Sunday

THE LOGIC OF MT. SKULL

Introduction As the pastor of DBC, I am naturally concerned about the reputation of my church. (I would be less than honest, if I didn't admit that, yes, there are times when I ponder my own reputation too.) But more important than either of those two things, is the reputation of the Gospel. By "Gospel", I don't mean Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. I mean the Gospel; the good news. I would like to find some way to check up each week or so, on how the GOSPEL is doing in the community. I check up on my favorite baseball team each day. When I owned a little bit of railroad stock I liked to check up on how it was doing...How is the Gospel doing?

Now, the "good news" is what I'm going to try and point you each towards today. The good news is this:

Jesus died on the cross,
Bore the sins of all who would ever trust in Him on
His actual body--

in fact, the Bible says He actually *became* those
millions of sins--

And then, came back to life as a PROOF that He was
God's promised sin-bearer.

And the GOOD part of that news is that if you trust in
that transaction, you don't have to face the
justice of God or His wrath. In fact, instead,
you can live forever WITH Him in heaven.

Jesus became the Lamb of God to be YOUR sacrifice.

That's the good news, and that is the Gospel. That's it. Heaven is a free gift to all and everyone who will accept it as a free gift. That's pretty good news, if its true, wouldn't you say? That is, if its true...

Now, the reason there aren't far more Christians on the planet--or ONE reason--is that a lot of people don't *think* its true. Or, they agree intellectually that its *conceivable*, but it hasn't *zapped* them personally yet. They, themselves, haven't yet made the "transaction" of the Gospel THEIRS yet. They may consciously, or subconsciously say "Yes, that's true" to themselves whenever they see a cross... But they haven't PERSONALLY MADE the transaction for themselves yet. I wonder where you are with this...

Well, all of this is preliminary. I want you to consider the Gospel today, to be sure. But the two verses from the Bible I want to show you today, come from First Corinthians in the New Testament. The ancient city of Corinth would be maybe sort of like today's *Chicago*. There was a big Christian community there, with a fairly sophisticated ministry. In spite of Corinth's bigness and so forth, the gospel of Jesus Christ caught on there quickly and a lot of people became Christians in a relatively short period of time. The Apostle Paul wrote them three letters that we know of, and in the second (which our Bibles call "First" Corinthians), he wrote them these words...

For Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved [the original Greek is better translated unto us who are BEING SAVED] it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:17,18).

I've been doing a little series from the pulpit lately on the theme, "the cross of Christ." Today I want to say something about what these two verses say about the cross.

Now for starters, the apostle Paul says he was NOT sent to begin a cult of people baptized by him. It was not his purpose to create a faction around himself. His calling was to preach the gospel and to bring men and women to Christ. By "preach" I mean sometimes just that-- a simple, public proclamation of truth. That's what Paul so often did. But "preach" means ANY situation a Christian has, to share who Jesus is and what He has done. In my life, that opportunity happens more often one-on-one than in big meetings. The place where MORE people really encounter Jesus Christ is when someone personally shares with them the good news, and works with them, and helps them think through the issues. "Preaching" is simply TELLING.

So the first thing here, is that it was Paul's duty (and ours) to tell the Gospel.

Second, Paul *deliberately* stayed away from using clever speech or trying to impress people with fancy rhetoric. There was LOTS of that in his day, especially in Greece. There is lots of it today, too. Even Christians can fall into the trap of trying to dress up the Gospel and make it more palatable by watering down certain parts, and then showcasing other parts. But in Paul's message, the cross of Christ is the central theme. He would not let himself fall into the snare of too much emphasis on **baptism**, say...and too little on the death of Christ.

Today there are a great many churches and think-tanks which would grant that Jesus' death on the cross was a great example for us. But they will not accept that His cross is, in itself, the God-ordained INSTRUMENT of salvation for people. That, they would say, is going to far. That, they would say, is making TOO MUCH of the cross. This brings us to the third thing in these verses...

To those who perishing, the LOGIC of the cross is foolishness. This phrase is very interesting to me in the Greek. Where we read in English, the preaching of the cross, the Greek has the word "logos." Literally, Paul said the "WORD of the cross." *LOGOS* means the "reasoning behind" the cross, and in fact, *logos* is the root-word for our word "logic." To those who are in the process of perishing--

And Paul sees really only two kinds of people in the world, ultimately: those who are *already in the process* of being destroyed; And those who are in the process of being rescued.

--the logic of the pure Biblical gospel is foolishness. The word "foolishness" in Paul's original Greek is the word *moria*, from which we get the word moron. For people who rely in these things on their own wisdom, the logic of Mt. Skull is moronic--absolute nonsense.

When people elevate their own wisdom, they automatically lower God's wisdom and that makes HIS works seem like foolishness.

That God would take human form, be crucified, and be raised in order to provide for man's forgiveness of sin and entrance into heaven is an idea FAR TOO SIMPLE...and humbling for many to accept. That one man (even the Son of God) could die on a piece of wood on a nondescript hill in a nondescript part of the world and thereby determine the destiny of every person who has ever lived seems stupid. It allows no place for man's merit, man's attainment, man's understanding, or man's pride.

(John MacArthur, *Commentary on I Cor.*)

It is foolishness; absolute nonsense; moronic--to those who are already sliding towards oblivion and a Christless death.

I want to hammer the significance of HOW foolish this was in Paul's world, to you...

The intellectual *thinkers* of Paul's day assessed the Christian LOGIC of salvation as completely repugnant. From a political standpoint, anyone executed by crucifixion was, in addition to being killed, completely SHAMED and HUMILIATED. If you were a *hero-of-the-people*, you were a hero no longer if your life ended in crucifixion.

The ancient Roman historians write with great sarcasm and derision about the early Christians, and their claim that Christ's death actually had the power to get anyone to heaven. The religious people of the time listened to Paul talk about Jesus on the cross and they found Paul's hero on the cross AT ALL offensive enough, but then when Paul said that Jesus wasn't just his *mentor* but that he was actually GOD up there on the cross, well--that fairly freaked out the *thinkers* completely.

To those who are heading towards judgement, the gospel message is, in one way or another, foolishness.

The last part of these two verses tells us one more thing about the logic behind the cross of Christ. To those who are saved, who have made an introductory-commitment to follow Jesus, and who are therefore seeing their salvation manifest itself daily through being more LIKE Jesus with each day...to THOSE people, the logic of the cross; the WORD of the cross, the STORY of the cross is POWERFUL.

How is the "logic of Mt. Skull" powerful? Let's close with that question for you today...

The logic of the cross is powerful because it CHANGES LIVES. With anyone who opens themselves TO Jesus, the message of the Gospel offers radical change--change for the better, not for the worse. I don't know if you would LIKE to see anything in your life change, of course. Only YOU can look at your life and see if anything needs repair, renovation, healing, saving. A lot of people on the planet today are quite sincerely convinced that IF there is a God, and IF He requires any kind of accounting, He probably isn't all that holy, and I will do right well, thank you very much...

The cross is powerful first of all, because it completely takes care of your debt to God, if you embrace it. It doesn't atone for SOME of your sins and leave the rest up to you to negotiate with God. The cross of Christ is powerful in that it atones for the full debt of sin owed to a holy and just God for your whole life, and for the whole lives of all who will EVER embrace it by faith. Anything, my friends, which can do that is pretty powerful, don't you think?

Second, the cross of Christ is powerful because of the SIMPLICITY of its logic:

The logic of Mt. Skull is this:

THE FATHER NEEDED TO FORSAKE THE SON IN ORDER TO RESCUE THE BRIDE.

That's it; plain and simple... It's sort of like a little, mathematical equation. On the one side is MAN'S NEED (rescue from sin). On the other side is GOD'S NEED (a dual requirement: a just-retribution and yet His compassion).

In our little drama acted out here--the point was so simple, I hope: ANYONE can accept the forgiveness Jesus offers--you don't have to know how to read, you don't have to be cleaned up, you don't have to have anyone with you...

Our ad this week in the Standard-Times asked the community to consider Jesus' anguished outcry to His heavenly Father--**MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?** WHY would the Father for one instance for all time actually turn away from His own beloved Son? Where is the logic, the sense, the purpose in THAT? WHY must Jesus, completely innocent and sinless, experience the ultimate loneliness?

I do not think we can *imagine* the blackness and despair the Son faced on the cross. I don't even want to make an accurate or honest estimate on the depth of my own sin, and I'm just one person. What Jesus endured, WHO can gauge it?

Where is the logic in that? But my friends, that is the POWER of the gospel, of the cross. God loved this world SO MUCH that He was willing to sacrifice what would be NEEDED--Oh, what a terrible sacrifice--to win back the Bride of Christ--that is a biblical expression to mean all who would ever embrace the cross by faith--the Bride of Christ...

God cared so deeply and UNAVOIDABLY, that He was willing to make that sacrifice for us.

What can we do with a God like that, but love Him?
What can we do with a God like that but give our whole lives over to Him?

...IF we are the "being saved"...

Which category are you in? On the authority of Scripture, you are pronounced in either one or the other. If you are NOT among the "being saved" because you have never yet ASKED to be--asked HIM to bring you into that category, won't you ask Him?

If you ARE in that category, do you love the Lamb of God? The song we so humbly sang for you today, does it echo your sentiments...here are the words of the chorus, once again:

O LAMB OF GOD, SWEET LAMB OF GOD, I LOVE THE HOLY LAMB OF GOD.
O WASH ME IN, YOUR PRECIOUS BLOOD, TILL I AM JUST A LAMB OF GOD.

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: The Cross of Christ
Scripture: Luke 14:25-33

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 6 Apr. 7, 1991

THE "BAD" NEWS

Introduction It was my fantasy as a kid to become a front line combat officer in the Army when I grew up. I was nurtured on such TV shows as "Combat", "Twelve O'Clock High" and "The Gallant Men" as well as plenty of battle stories from my Dad who was a combat engineer in Europe. While the facts of death and suffering on the battlefield or in the skies were always acknowledged, obviously, Hollywood's portrayal (at least) of combat wasn't even a good approximation of real life. On TV, nothing was said of the terrors, the smells, the confusion, the politicking or the DEFEATS of combat. Up until about '65 at least, I just knew I wanted to join the Army, go to OCS like my Dad did, and become a career officer--my Dad had said to me one time when I was maybe 10 or 11, "Boy, someday you're going to be a leader" (and I guess that made an impression on me).

In Luke 14:25 we read that *"great multitudes were going along with"* Jesus. Jesus' program looked real good to a lot of people--early on.

Jesus was healing people right and left.
Jesus was commanding spirit forces with ease.
Jesus had answers for the intellectuals and skeptics.
Jesus was just good to be with...as long as you didn't get too carried away with it...

But definitely, Jesus was the best show in town and lots of folks wanted to check it out. The few things the general public knew about Jesus mingled with *their* fantasies resulted in "great multitudes going along with Him"---for a season.

It was ON one of these days when Jesus was out and about, (ministering both with intent and also as He spontaneously ran into people)...that He found Himself with quite a crowd trailing after Him. He turns, and stops, and what He says to them is what we want to focus on today, because at that moment He uttered one of His most famous "sayings" and it had to do with the cross...

We have spent five messages up to today talking about various aspects of the cross of Christ:

We talked about Paul's comment about "BOASTING in the cross."
Then we looked at how Jesus' cross brings PEACE to people.
Then we considered those people who Paul, with tears, called
"ENEMIES of the cross."

Then (on Palm Sunday), we talked about "the ACTUAL cross." And last Sunday, on Easter, we looked at "the LOGIC of the cross" and my prayer has been that if anyone in our assembly has not yet made the business of the cross theirs, that they might be led of God to make it so in these weeks. I wonder if that has happened with anyone?

Today, we want to look at one more aspect of the cross--what Jesus said to the crowd that day when they were all so eager to follow Him and partake of the benefits of His kindness and power.

Now, at the moment, I'm sure you'll agree with me when I make the observation that in this country, religion is big business. From several angles, it is apparent that conservative Christianity is riding a crest of popularity and at least in terms of sheer NUMBERS, conservative religion has never done better. A few brief statistics will show you what I mean. From the March 11th *Christianity Today*:

"In the mid sixties, an unexpected and massive [nationwide] change began. Many of this country's culture-affirming "mainline" denominations began to experience membership *declines* for the first time. The declines were sudden, dramatic and persistent. Between '65-'85 for example, the "mainline" Presbyterian denominations declined by 24%, the Episcopal Church declined 20%, the United Methodist Church declined by 16% and the Disciples of Christ denomination declined by 42%. In the meantime, the Assemblies of God tripled. The Church of the Nazarene grew by 50%, the Southern Baptists grew by 34%..." (The most dramatic growth came within the ranks of the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, which only *further* illustrates that religion is becoming BIG, BIG, BIG in this country).

Last Sunday I mentioned that I wonder how the Gospel is doing right here in Bristol County... If we could really tell, I wonder what is the real status of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as symbolized by the cross...

So, getting back to Jesus' words to that crowd that day, let's look at it together in Luke 14:

Verse 26 In this verse Jesus hits them right between the eyes. Anyone wishing to be called a "disciple of Christ" must make Jesus first in his or her life. Now I didn't make up that rule, dear ones, JESUS did. And the competing loyalty that Jesus *targets* is FAMILY loyalty. I've no doubt that as Jesus looked into the faces in that crowd, He knew some of those people and their situations in their families. In the convenience of checking out the fad, it was fine to come after Jesus looking for blessings of various sorts. But, if you wanted to be His disciple--His student--His understudy--His friend--you had to make Him more important than any family loyalty. In fact, even one's own LIFE needed to be subordinate to one's devotion to Jesus, IF---and I say "IF"---you were going to call yourself a "disciple" of His. Pretty demanding, right?

I entitled this message "The 'BAD' News". The word "gospel" means simply the "good news." The good news is that you don't have to pay for your own sins. You don't have to go to hell. You can be redeemed, saved,

born-again, regenerated and given the absolute promise of eternal life in heaven, AS A FREE GIFT, simply by trusting in Jesus and inviting Him to personally come into your life and be YOUR Savior. That's not just good news; that's fantastic news!

But receiving and experiencing God's grace and redemption is not cheap. The Bible goes out of its way to make it plain that no one can simply "buy into" God's forgiveness without submitting his life to Jesus' Lordship too. Nowhere in Scripture that I know of, is anyone saved who is not changed.

Becoming a real Christian is not like getting a perm.
Its not like cleaning out your cellar.
Its not like having a cyst removed, and its not like painting the living room. All of those things are little changes we might make in our lives, but no ONE of them completely restructures your whole thinking. No ONE of them completely realigns your priorities and loyalties, indeed, the very CORE of who you are as a person. But coming to know Jesus as Savior does...becoming a DISCIPLE of Jesus means subordinating even your closest relationships to Him.

Verse 27 This set that crowd up for the next thing Jesus was going to say--the real "kicker"--and then He's going to illustrate and explain exactly what He means in this verse 27.

This is the "bad news", my friends--or, "bad" at least to anyone who just wants a casual relationship with Jesus--sort of a "C and E" relationship (Christmas and Easter). When that person hears these words from Jesus the good news turns sour.

Verse 27 is phrased in the negative. Jesus turned, and looked at the eager, willing-enough crowd, and immediately DISQUALIFIED a good piece of that crowd. Unlike so many of our churches who want to make it so EASY to become a church member...so EASY to say "Hey, I'm a Christian; I'm a member of this or that church."

In this verse Jesus told them there were two necessary and inseparable QUALIFICATIONS to be a disciple of His. You had to carry your own cross, and you had to come after Him.

On the first thing, this is where we get back to the cross. Before Jesus Himself went to the cross, He was talking about it. He knew He had to endure it and deal with its shame. And when He looked at this crowd He was looking forward to the time when to be a follower of "Jesus, the crucified rabbi" was going to cost you something. It was going to cost their reputation, their safety sometimes, their families' love and affection, maybe...

And Jesus said that real disciples had to carry THEIR OWN crosses. They could not carry His cross, although Peter may have thought he could. Peter would have to carry his own cross. He would have to bear the weight and shame of his own course in following Christ. It was not the same as Paul's was. It wasn't the same as Luke's or Stephen's or Mary's or

Priscilla's. Each of them had their own, unique salvation to work out with fear and trembling, and for each of them their own sacrifices for Christ would have to be made.

Dear ones, this is why I feel so reluctant (sometimes) to suggest TOO MANY applications in a sermon. I believe that as you grow more and more deeply devoted in your hearts to Jesus, YOU must discern what His will for your life is. A preacher makes a mistake if he tries to fine-tune the will of God too much for the sheep in the pew. I know its easier for the sheep to simply go someplace where they don't have to think for themselves, and just let the boss-up-there-in-the-pulpit tell them what decisions to make...But you know Jesus Himself was very careful to not spend all His time in detailed "negotiations" with each and every person whom He bumped into.

Of course, when He DID detail someone's course for them it was very, very specific.

To the rich young ruler He said, "Go and sell your possessions and give to the poor."
To the woman at the well in Samaria, He revealed that He knew she had lived with five men previously, and *implied*, at least, that she should change her sexual life-style.

Most of the time though, I think, Jesus spoke in principle. He wasn't interested in a people who just ran on "automatic." He wanted a people whose HEARTS were His; who made HIS PRIORITIES THEIR PRIORITIES. Who thought through their discipleship towards Him, and intelligently counted the cost.

In fact, that is the way He illustrated what it means to "carry the cross." In the next four verses He gave two illustrations about *intelligently sizing up what it was going to mean to follow Him*: one was architectural and one was military.

You don't start a building project without projecting costs and seeing if you can afford it. And, you don't whip all the troops up for battle and then go out and get blown away. Any wise person calculates the wisdom of making decisions. He considers all factors, weighs them against each other and then acts based upon whether he wants to pay the price.

We can't do this, I guess... But if we somehow were to be able to get everyone who is associated in any way with our church together for one meeting. Everyone is there--100% attendance. And we said this to them, sort of like when Moses came down from Sinai and confronted the whole nation at once, WHO WANTS TO KEEP FOLLOWING JESUS, WHATEVER THE COST. IF YOU HONESTLY DO NOT, LEAVE NOW with no fear of shame--you're just not ready. And if we could do that somehow, and if we knew that everyone would honestly respond, one way or another, how many would get up and depart. How many on the other churches around here?

My friends, that's what Jesus did. He was not very interested in having a big crowd of people watch His miracles or even benefit from them personally, and then scatter at the first payment!

In verse 33 the cross is applied. His disciples must give up all their own possessions. This had immediate and literal application for Peter and John and James. They needed to drop the nets right there.

For us, the application is a little less literal. I think Christians have been abused by church leaders, at times, who at the bottom of their hearts are greedy and power-hungry, and have sometimes been coerced into giving up their possessions TO THE CHURCH. Jesus never told any of His disciples that they needed to liquidate their assets and give the proceeds to Peter.

But to EVERY one of His disciples, He made the demand that in their hearts they must give the stuff away. They must not feel that their car or their house or their tools or their bicycle or their computer or their radios and TVs are so important that Jesus' kingdom must come second.

Its not like the Olympics and it IS like baseball. Second place gets nothing. You might argue that second place is pretty prestigious. Not in baseball. Who remembers who the second place team in each of the four major-league divisions was last September?

My friends, the bad news isn't really bad news. Following Jesus and being His disciple--

even if you lose some friends or some reputation
even if you have a little less money than the guy across the street
even if your work associates think of you as slightly "nerdy"
even if your wife or husband thinks you're screwy

--is the most wonderful thing in the world. In Him you will never find any disappointment. You might get disappointed with other Christians or with churches, but that's not HIM. Determining to be a more devoted disciple of Jesus will only result in JOY, ultimately. And dear ones, JOY is something which money cannot buy!

May the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, the Lamb of God become the most important thing in your life. May He be your passion, your occupation, your favorite hobby, your first love.

As you remember what HE endured on Mt. Skull, may you be willing to bear your won cross, however that defines itself for you.