

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Take It to the Cross

Scott Dudley

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Scripture:

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Galatians 6:14

¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Hebrews 10:11-12, 17

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

¹⁷ Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

Transcript:

Last week, Pastor Annie preached on sin. And she told us to spend the week praying: Jesus, show me my sin. So that was a fun week, wasn't it? And you all did that because you always do everything that your pastors tell you to do, right?

Yes.

Thank you. And so now you have all of these sins that you see in your life and you haven't even yet asked your spouse for their input, because they may have things to add or your friends or your colleagues. So what do you do with all of those sins that you see in your life? Take it to the cross. When you are troubled, confused, in pain or when you are seeing your sin, take it to the cross. The cross has set it all, solved it all, resolved it all. Now, what you don't do with all those sins is what a lot of Christians do, which is sin management. Work really hard to get rid of all of those sins, but that's never ending, right? Because as soon as you get rid of a couple of sins, other ones pop up like pride. You work really hard on your sins. Like I'm doing great, I'm working on my sins. Oh, dang it. Because there's pride, which leads to despair.

As I've shared with you, my oldest daughter got a job working in marketing for Disney and moved to Orlando. And when she was interviewing, she wanted to be the perfect candidate so that involved practice interviews with me, lots of practice interviews with me. So many practice interviews with me, right? And she kept saying, you got to be tougher on me, dad. I got to be the perfect candidate. You got to get tougher. So the last interview, practice interview before the real one, the night before the real one, I just got really tough on her.

And I said, give me an example of a time you resolved conflict in a work situation. And she gave me an example and I said, give me another example. And she gave me a second one. And then I said, give me a third example. And she said, I just graduated from college. I don't have that many examples. And then she burst into tears and started sobbing, I'm never going to get this job. I'm not good enough. My life is ruined. I am such a terrible father. So I had to kind of calm her down. It took me about 30 minutes. She did get the job though. Thanks to my awesome practice interview skills.

But that's kind of what sin management feels like, it's never good enough. There's always, you get take care of one or two sins, and then suddenly there's others that pop up and then you cry and think that your life is ruined. Take it to the cross instead, because Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sins and was raised from the dead. You've heard it before, but what does that mean? What does that really mean? What does that really mean? And how does it really

change how we live? Because it's different than the conventional wisdom of our culture that says, I'm a good person and good people go to heaven. No need for a messy death on the cross. The problem is that leads to sin management and shame.

So what does it really mean to say Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for my sins to reconcile me to God, because it's deeper than I think we think it is. And when we understand how deep it is, it sets us free from sin management and shame and free for deeper meaning, purpose, and joy. Our lives will only be as big as our God. So if we understand the bigness of the cross, our lives are going to get bigger. And the Bible talks about a couple of ways that Jesus' death on the cross saves us both here and now as well as so that we can go to heaven after we die. And the first is what theologians have called substitutionary atonement. Most common thing, the theory about the what's happening on the cross.

And it goes like this. God is a God of justice, which means he can't allow sin to go unpunished. And by sin, the Bible means those things we do or don't do that hurt us or other people. And deep in all of us is a sense of justice that if someone hurts someone else, a price needs to be paid, especially if the someone else that got hurt is me. A price needs to be paid. But God is also a God of mercy, so the solution is he becomes one of us in Jesus and on the cross takes the punishment for our sins as a substitute and reconciles us to God so that justice is served, but mercy wins. And I'll say more about that in a minute.

Second, the Bible says that at the cross, God shows us how much he loves us. The Bible says, God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The cross is an act of self-revelation where God is saying, see how much I love you. I would rather die than lose you. So I did.

Third. The cross helps us become more like Jesus. And this is what theologians call the moral influence theory of the atonement. The Bible says for Christ, love compels us. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them. In other words, the love of God that we see on the cross, demonstrated on the cross, compels us to be different people, not to avoid God's punishment, but to respond to his love. Because if it just stops that Jesus died to forgive my sins, that's not far enough. Because what about the damage my sin caused people? So we're not just forgiven. When we experience God's love, we become different people who repair the damage that sin does.

Dr. Tony Evans tells a story of a woman who was married to a terrible man. And he made a list of 25 things he wanted her to do to please him as a husband. And she hated the list and she hated her husband. And then he died and she met another man and they got married. And the second husband was the opposite of the first husband. He showered her with praises. He loved

her. He was always looking for ways to serve her, always looking for ways to help her out and just loved her to death. And one day she came across the old list from her first husband of all the things he wanted her to do. And she read it and laughed because she realized she was doing everything on that list that her first husband demanded for her second husband, only freely and with joy. The list didn't change, her motivation changed. Feeling loved, she loved back. The cross shows us how much Jesus loves us and we really get that not in our heads, but in our heart. It makes us different people.

So that's the theology. That's the what. So what? So what? So what difference does it make in our lives? How does it change us? A couple of things. First, the cross means that our sin is serious, so serious that Jesus had to die to pay the price for it. And we just don't get this as a culture. One of the reasons we don't see the need for a cross is we don't think we have sin anymore. We've kind of gotten rid of that in our culture. Or if we do have sin, sin's not really the right word. It's I don't know. It's charming little idiosyncrasies that are part of the wonder of moi. Even the Nazis thought they were good people because their narrative was not, we're committing genocide, their narrative was we're saving the father land from the Jewish conspiracy that's out to kill us. We all tell ourselves narratives that minimize our sin, or we blame other people for our bad behavior.

A few months ago, you may have read stories about the Facebook whistleblower who exposed documents that showed that according to Facebook's own research, they know that their algorithms are increasing anger and political division in our country and world. Their own research shows that whenever they put in front of us things that make us angry at people on the other side of us politically, we're way more likely to click on those things than we are well-reasoned sorts of articles that don't make us mad. And so Facebook puts those things in front of us because it translates into more ad dollars for Facebook. But it's causing huge damage, it's tearing families apart, marriages apart, churches apart, our country apart. And there's all sorts of pontificating in the press about how terrible Facebook is for doing this and how bad Facebook is and shaming Facebook all on and on which rather misses the point, don't you think, because who's doing the clicking?

It's not Facebook. It's you, it's me. It's like, Oh, this makes me mad at the other side, politically, I'm going to click on this. Oh, this one over here. It kind of contradicts my thinking, I'm not going to look at that one. Now, Facebook has some accountability here, but really honestly, they're just giving us what we want. If we were all clicking on videos of cats, that's what they'd be putting in front of us. Okay, that's not really better, so bad example, but you know what I mean. So easy to see Facebook sin, so very hard to see my own.

Everybody has a theory of why there's so much crime and poverty and suffering in the world. Everyone has a theory. They're all different theories. But the one thing they all have in common is, it's never me. I am never the problem with the world. It is always somebody else. And then there are all kinds of sin we don't even notice. Never have I ever had someone say to me, Pastor, I see all the places in the Bible that tell us to care for the poor, the immigrant, the widow, the orphan. And Pastor, I just need to confess to you my utter indifference to people in pain. Never have I ever had someone say that to me. Never have I ever had someone come and confess to me, Pastor, I just really like money more than I should like money. We call that wise financial planning instead of sin or greed. But all that does damage, our anger damages people's sense of self in ways that sometimes cripple them emotionally.

Our self-centeredness hurts our families, our friends, our communities. Our indifference to the people in poverty allows poverty to continue. And a God of love must be a God who hates sin because it hurts the people he loves and justice demands that it be punished. Because if we all took just our one little charming idiosyncratic sin into heaven, just one tiny sin, just give me the one little sin, like a carry-on on an airplane. Just one little sin into heaven, it's not heaven anymore, is it? If people are gossiping about you, is that heaven? Not so much. So God cannot tolerate even our "little" sins. And the cross shows us that God is serious about our sin, deadly serious. The cross shows me that my sin really is serious enough that Jesus needed to die for it and that his love for me was big enough that he did.

Which leads to the second thing the cross means and the way it changes our lives. And that is, life without shame. Shame is a very powerful emotion. It makes us insecure, always wondering if people really knew everything about me, would they love me? And if our theology is that God forgives me because he's a nice guy and I'm, after all, I'm really not that bad. And at least I'm not Hitler sort of a way. Then it doesn't stick. If that's our understanding of forgiveness, it doesn't stick, because deep down we know that price needs to be paid. And if it's not paid, we don't feel forgiven.

I've quoted to you before sociologist Brene Brown, who says that in order for forgiveness to happen, something always has to die. Our pride, our ego, our narratives about ourselves. And she says the problem with the way we do forgiveness in our culture is, it costs nothing. No price is paid. There's not enough blood on the floor, so it's not convincing to us. But Jesus died to pay the price for our sins, plenty of blood on the floor to convince us that we are forgiven. And that brings freedom.

Now some of you might go, well, yeah, I don't know, Scott. Every time I confess my sin or admit my sin, I feel worse. I feel more guilty, not less guilty. Well that's because you did it wrong, you didn't repent in hope. Believe God. In the Bible, when he says, as far as the east is from the

west so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Or when he says I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. Believe him. Have you ever known someone who apologizes too much? They maybe they do something, they say, I'm sorry to you. And you say, no worries. It's all good, don't worry about it. But then they just keep apologizing. No, no, I'm really sorry. I'm super duper sorry. I'm extra sorry with sorry sauce on top. It's irritating. Don't be irritating. If God says you're fully forgiven because of Jesus' death on the cross, who are you to argue with him?

The Bible says if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from some of the sins, but not the really big ones. Because those, he can't deal with. All unrighteousness. And the only thing he asked is that we admit our sin, which seems to be the sticking point and our need for Jesus' death on the cross. So admit it and forget it.

Amen.

Because God does. Because of the cross, he remembers our sin no more. My sin or the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord. Oh, my soul.

And that leads to my last point. The cross means freedom from the worries of this world. If you wonder if God loves you, don't look at your circumstances, look to the cross, which tells you that he loved you so much he was willing to die for you. And when you get that in your heart, not just your head, then you don't need to prove yourself to anyone about anything. Suddenly you don't need to look perfect or have the perfect Instagram post or achieve or anything else to feel worthwhile. God loved me enough to die for me, that's my security.

We are so much like ancient people thousands of years ago. They used to sacrifice goats and bulls and animals to kind of appease the gods, cover over all their bad deeds. And we don't sacrifice animals, but we do try to get into the best schools to impress people, try to get an amazing job to prove our net worth, spend all kinds of time and money trying to look as hot as we can. And all of that is like so many goats and so many bulls sacrificed on the altar of our lives saying, don't look at my flaws, look at my achievements. Don't you love me? Won't you accept me now? See, we think we're so much more advanced. We think, well, we got rid of sin. That was primitive so we don't really have guilty conscience anymore. Ours is not a crisis of sin. Ours is a crisis of meaning and existential angst. And we're so sophisticated, aren't we?

That dog don't hunt. That dog don't hunt because we do a lot of things to win approval of others, to cover over our shame and insecurity. The Bible says again and again, the priest offers

the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Jesus had offered for all time, one sacrifice for sin, he sat down at the right hand of God. See, back then priests did the sacrifices standing up and they never sat down because the work was never done. But Jesus sat down, because his work was finished. It's like when I was a kid and I'd be wrestling my brother or wrestling a friend or something like that. And when you won, you'd sit on top of them until they said uncle. And I never understood what my uncle had to do within anything, but it was this sign of victory to sit on someone. It's like this sign of victory, right?

Jesus sat down on sin. Jesus sat down on shame. Jesus sat down on fear and insecurity and death. And when you get that Jesus loved you enough to die for you, the anxious need to win approval leaves. And then your free you to do your best at school or work or sports. Do your best not to earn people's approval, but for the joy of a job well done. So when the worries of this world get at you, take it to the cross, literally. Picture yourself standing in front of Jesus on the cross and hand him the things you're worried about. Hand him, the shame you feel. Whatever it is, hand it to him and then let the Holy Spirit guide your mind. What does Jesus say? What does Jesus do in your mind?

I've told you before about a time when I'd been hurt by some gossip that was spreading around and it wasn't true. It was a lie, but it was spreading. It was hurtful for me. And I was praying about it. And I got a picture in my head of Jesus on the cross. And he said to me, they lied about me too, Scott. And I saw their sins against you and I have paid for their sins against you on this cross. I am your pain-bearer, for you to feel that now is redundant. And all of the hurt was gone because I realized how much he loved me. Look, people are going to judge us. They shouldn't, but they're going to judge us. They just will. But when the cross helps you experience how deeply God loves you, you don't care as much what other people think. It frees you. There's power, power, wonder work in power in the cross, power to change your life, power in the addiction, power to set the captives free. Power to break every chain.

So here's the action step for this week. Last week, the action step was, pray Jesus, show me my sin. This week's a little more fun. Pray Jesus, show me your life altering love for me not in my head, but in my heart. So that Jesus died for my sins becomes more than just a phrase for you. It's your lived reality.

I heard a woman talk about an experience she had with the power of the cross. She said she was watching a television show and it featured two parents and a young man who had killed the parents' son. The young man actually was their son's best friend. They were out one night driving. This guy was drunk, crashed the car he survived, but the parents' son was killed. And this woman said, what made this show so compelling was the parents who are Christians had not only forgiven this young man, the driver that killed their son through his negligence, but even

more than that, they'd taken him in as their own son. So this young man now sat at their table in the chair that their son used to occupy, slept in their son's bed. He worked with the father and doing seminars on safety. He shared their fortune and their downfalls and supported their causes. And this woman said, I just kept thinking, why did the parents do this? And why is it bringing them so much peace? And she's a Christian.

And she said, the interviewer was amazed. And I was amazed. And I kept trying to put myself in the parents' position, but I could not. And she said, and then the Holy Spirit was for to my heart and said, the reason you can't relate to the parents is because you have put yourself in the wrong position. You are not the parents, you, my daughter, are the driver. And she said, and then I thought about all my sin, how the selfish desire to get my own way had hurt my husband, had hurt my kids, had wrecked relationships, how my gossip had eroded reputations that took a lifetime to build, how my indifference to poverty and injustice allowed those things to continue and on and on. And I realized, I was the driver.

God was the parent who not only forgave, but also invited me to sit at his table in the place my savior has left me, because Jesus died to pay the price for every sin I've ever sinned. And she said, I started to cry because I felt so loved. And I had a new peace and a deep sense of God's presence and suddenly a deep desire to do everything he tells me to do, not to earn his love, but because I realized how much I am loved. There's power in the cross because the cross shows us just how far God will go to get us back.

We are constantly running away from God to do our own thing, that's called sin, but God runs after us to catch us. And then we run away again and he runs after us again. And we run away again and he runs after us again. And the cross is God doing an end round around all of our running to go to the farthest place we could go to try to get away from him, even death. And he says, even here, even in this place, my love is going to meet you. You cannot outrun God's love for you. God's goodness and mercy aren't just following you all the days of your life, like the Psalm says. They are chasing after you. They are pursuing you. They are running after you all of your days.

What is God like? What is God really like? The cross says it all. He is the loving father who will stop at nothing to get us back. He is the God who turns death into life. Who, when soldiers tortured him, he blessed them. He is the God who was willing to die for a retch like you and a retch like me with no guarantee that we would ever stop being anything other than retches. The cross shows us just how far God was willing to stoop, how much pain he was willing to bear, how despised, rejected, and abused he was willing to become just to reach you and just to reach me. There is no one like our God, there was no one like the God revealed in Jesus. And the cross proves that there is nothing you can do and there is nothing that you cannot do, there

is nothing you can do to outrun God's amazing love for you, because Jesus paid it all. All to him, I owe. Sin had left its crimson stain. He washed it, white as snow. So Jesus, thank you for that.

And as we come to prayer, those of you in this room, those of you online, if you have never asked Jesus into your life and you want to do that now, just silently pray this prayer with me. Jesus, I am a sinner and I need your forgiveness. So please come into my life, forgive my sins and lead me to be more like you. And if you prayed that prayer, now you're a Christian. And before you leave, just tell someone, tell a pastor, one of our elders, people here in the front, or a friend if you're online, let the host know so that we can pray for you and help you take your next steps.

Jesus, thank you so much for your amazing love for us. We don't deserve it. We didn't earn it. And yet you give it to us freely. God, thank you for that. Help the message of the cross, the power of the cross, the freedom of the cross to sink deep in us this week, not just in our heads, not just in the theology, but as a lived experience in our hearts that we can become people who live for you and glorify you. There is no one like you, Jesus. There is no one like you. In your name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question:

- Are you a night owl or a lark? A late-nighter or an early riser? Has it always been this way?

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about the cross of Christ in these passages?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Scott talked about bringing our burdens to the cross and how it can change our hearts and minds. Have you ever had a powerful experience like this where you felt, saw, or knew the power of the cross, and it changed everything for you? Share with the group.
- In the example of the woman who watched the TV show about the parents who forgave the driver who caused their son's death, the woman had a hard time imagining the kind of grace and forgiveness the parents demonstrated. She experienced the significance of the cross and Jesus' sacrifice when she was able to imagine herself as the driver and God as the parents. Can you relate? Is there a time that you can remember when you had a profound shift in your thinking and grasped the immensity of God's grace and your salvation? Share with the group.

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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