

Good morning everyone. This week I want to go back to the book of **Galatians**, You may remember we started looking into the book of Galatians about 6 months ago. The truth is we never got past Chapter 1 although we studied it for 4 weeks or more.

We covered subjects such as ‘watch out for false teachers’ and ‘not seeking the approval of man’ ‘The signs of a true apostle’ ‘The law vs. grace’ etc.....

But this morning I want to talk on a subject I have spoken about before and that is the **cross of Christ**. It is a subject the book of Galatians references again and again and I make no apology in speaking on it again as it is central to the gospel. In fact the cross is the cornerstone of our faith.

We could say it is, the principal representation of the Christian faith, recalling the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the redeeming benefits of his Passion and death.

There are so many sides to the cross; it has such depth and meaning. Like the - cross and forgiveness, the satisfaction for sin, the salvation for sinners, the revelation of God, the conquest of evil - I could go on.

However this morning I want to come at it from a different angle. I came across a couple of scriptures in Galatians this week that made me stop and think. They brought out another side, a surprising side to this great subject and that is the **offence of the cross** and **the glory of the cross**.

I can't say I have ever imagined the cross as an offence; the truth is it is an offence to many and maybe we are seeing this more and more in our times. **So just two verses firstly Galatians 5:11**

*“Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? **In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.***

And then Galatians 6:14 “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.

*There they are: “Why am I still being persecuted? **In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished” & “May I never boast (or glory) except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”,***

So how do you see the cross this morning? Either you boast or glory in it or you are offended by it - you think it foolishness. - There is no middle ground here you can't ignore it or sit on the fence. It forces a response.

The cross is the great divider, between the believer and unbeliever! How you respond to the cross is how you will spend eternity.

As Christians we should boast and glory in the cross, it's the greatest event in all of history, it symbolises being set free, new life, eternal life.

But for the unbeliever the scriptures tell us 'it's an offence - it is foolishness'.

I Corinthians 1:18 "for the message of the **cross is foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God".

I think it is a root of many of our problems as Christians the cross hasn't affected us emotionally, we just haven't grasped this great sacrificial act, down here in our gut, we do not really appreciate the ultimate sacrifice, we don't get moved enough by what He has done for us on Calvary's hill.

So let's briefly look this morning why the cross could be seen as an offence and why should we glory in it.

I think it is true to say that when we look on the cross, we can't imagine it causing an offence, we might correctly see it as an act of love, and for many people it is a harmless piece of jewellery hung around their neck.

It does make me wonder in what we are seeing regarding the persecution of Christians in the workplace for wearing a crucifix is more about the offence of the cross than what people actually believe.

The truth is the cross is a symbol of suffering and pain. A place of death, a place to hang criminals. If you think about it – if it's that, why would anybody want to wear a cross if they didn't have a living faith?

We have 2 painted crosses at the front of the church, how would people react if it was a 'hang mans noose' or an 'electric chair' painted into the walls, it would cause offence, it would be shocking, right? But it's the same as a cross, a cruel and humiliating method to die.

So why is the cross an offence - 2 things come to mind.

Firstly the cross puts us all in the same category ‘for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23) it is an offence to our pride **that we all equally have a need** - a need for a saviour.

What the cross is saying in essence is; it doesn't matter who you are, what status you have in life, **we all fall short, not one of reach the standard**, we all have missed the mark, and need the cross to rescue us. **It's a great leveller**

In our society the class system rules, status and position is still important. I remember the old 2 Ronnie's sketch years back, where you have 3 individuals standing next to each other in a row. One is working class, one middle class, and one upper class.

The upper class man says: “I look down on him because I am upper class” the man in the middle says “I look up to him because he is upper class but I look down on him because he is working class”. The working class mans says “I know my place!”

The gospel plants a level playing field, it puts us all in the same category, there is not ‘Jew or gentile, slave or freeman’ it is an offence to many that they are equally lost, we are all failures, we are all sick in need of a doctor.

“I'm not like that hopeless drunkard they would protest - how dare you say that - I have qualities, I have attributes, I have breeding, I have class, I have abilities, I have intellect, I have drive, I have money, I have looks, I have connections.

It means nothing to God; it is all as filthy rags. We all fall short.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all”.

They hated Jesus, he was an offence to them “away with Him, crucify Him” they said ‘a carpenters son from Nazareth! ‘Nothing good comes from Nazareth’ Jesus didn't fit their expectations; he didn't come up to their standard as the Messiah. Jesus was an offence to them and Jesus and the cross are an offence for many today.

Secondly the reason it is an offence is because the **blood sacrifice on the cross is abhorrent to many.**

And I make no apologies for bringing this subject to your attention, for we see at this present time, in our nation, in our churches, from our pulpits, erroneous & dangerous teachings that are undermining the very truths of our faith, held for 2000 years.

And one of these cancerous teachings argues this: ‘that a loving God would not send his son to die a cruel death on a cross’ – let alone to shed his blood as a human sacrifice for our sins! - No that sounds too medieval too barbaric to abhorrent for some - unbelievers - but believers too!

We live in a very squeamish world if anything has the least sniff of offence they look to close it down.

Jill was saying yesterday, they are trying to erase any acts of perceived violence from the Old Testament, it to dreadful thought to them that even an animal could die, that blood could be shed of a cow or sheep, that an atonement sacrifice could take place. We are heading the way of a ‘green bible’ that removes all traces of the ‘unpalatable’ from our ‘woke ears’.

The truth is the image of the cross & practise of the atonement in scripture is clear and violent – blood is spilt.

Scripture says: *‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins’*

And it is no surprise that it is a major tactic from the enemy of our souls: Satan, if he can’t stop Christianity advancing altogether what he will do is: dilute & distort the gospel message to take the very heart out of it, so that it becomes impotent and ineffective, a mere ‘shadow’ of what it is meant to be.

To make it anaemic - that’s what taking the blood out of the scriptures does, it makes an anaemic, impotent, sick and weakly gospel.

Satan loves to perpetuate this image through movies and the media generally, where blood is portrayed as gore, so that we are repulsed at the thought and sight of blood, so turning us off from God whom they maliciously portray as cruel and blood thirsty.

You think about it! Other than the bible, when did you last see, read or hear about blood portrayed in anything other than a negative way?

But God see's blood and the scriptures portray blood in the opposite way, as a positive thing - as **life giving**. In fact the definition of the word blood **is life**.

And we see in the natural realm, in our earthly bodies the importance of blood. Blood is the basis of life for the flesh. It is the blood which flows through the body, supplying food and oxygen to it, and when that blood is taken away life ends.

They can tell a great deal from the blood! - I'm told they can tell virtually everything about a person's health, just from a small sample of blood! Medical practitioners examine it more often than any other tissue, trying to determine the cause of a disease in their patients.

The brain for example, it's the major control point, It's responsible for everything you do, think, feel and say but it needs blood to function, in fact a small clot of blood to the brain is a serious problem, a stroke, that can kill or impair someone for life.

Or look at the heart! What is it but a pump? – supplying blood to the major organs in the body.

All the antibodies we have are contained within the blood, these little defenders attack viruses and diseases. The blood has also an incredible method of clotting itself to stop bleeding.

In fact when you analyse blood, it is so complex it reveals an **Intelligent Designer**, a Master Craftsman at work in blood design, the study of the blood cells alone can bring you to the only ultimate conclusion of a creator God.

And when we go back to scripture we see the importance of blood is everywhere from the OT to the to the NT like a golden (or crimson thread) - it is a recurring truth, a major topic throughout the bible.

Time & time again we see the sacrifice of animals throughout the OT as an offering for sin, rebellion & wrongdoing. And then it comes to the perfect sacrifice in the NT - the climax of all sacrifices, the blood of Christ Jesus.

We must understand, to God, blood isn't gore. **Sin** is what has made it gory. Indeed, sin is what perverted blood and equated it with death. **God, however, created blood to represent life**. This is what Scripture affirms:

Deuteronomy 12:23 “Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh”

Leviticus 17:11 “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement”

If the Bible is passionate about blood, with sacrifice, it is because it is passionate and fanatical with life. Maintaining life, restoring life, and giving life the only act that can resuscitate something from death is to infuse it with life. Equating blood with life will change the way we read the Bible, and thus, how we think about God.

God’s intention for blood in the bible isn’t gory or negative or abhorrent—it’s beautiful, and life giving and we certainly should not be offended, or scared by it. After all, there’s no forgiveness, healing, deliverance or salvation without it.

OK we can see where the cross offends, firstly by challenging our pride, making us all realise we are all the same, we are all sick and in need of the great physician.

And then secondly the thought of the ‘shedding of blood’ to our squeamish minds can be abhorrent. Yet it’s just the opposite in the Bible its life giving.

But how do we boast in the cross?

Nobody likes a boaster a bragger! Yet we all do it don’t we? Have you noticed when people boast it is usually about themselves, their achievements, their attributes? But true and humble boasting is not about ourselves or even those we are attached too, it’s completely outside ourselves.

The apostle Paul had every reason to boast, a Pharisee, a Roman citizen, power and authority, but all of these were all like filthy rags compared to boasting in Christ.

Have you noticed also it’s an exclusive boasting he said: “***I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ - it is a solitary boasting above anything else.***”

Only Christ could set him free only Christ could give eternal life.

Whenever I think about Christ's sacrificial death I recall the story of - Maximilian Kolbe who died Eighty two years ago now in Auschwitz after volunteering to take the place of a Polish man in the concentration camps starvation bunker.

Maximilian was a Franciscan priest and missionary, he was sent to Auschwitz in 1941. After a Polish prisoner tried to escape the camp on July 29 1941, the SS security forces selected 10 prisoners to starve to death as a lesson for the entire camp.

One of the prisoners chosen was Francis Gajo –win -Czech, who asked for mercy. He cried out that he had a wife and children. Maximilian heard this and offered to die in his place. "He told the German commander, 'I want to go instead of the man who was selected. He has a wife and family. I am alone. I am a Catholic priest,'"

In the starvation cell in Auschwitz, Maximilian is reported to have led other prisoners in prayer as the other nine died one by one. Though he was held without food or water for two weeks, he did not die of starvation. Instead the camp guards killed him with an injection of carbolic acid on Aug. 14, 1941 as the cell was needed for other prisoners.

The saved prisoner survived after the war and lived into his nineties. They say he went back to Auschwitz every year to give thanks to the man who had saved his life. He was humbled that anyone could do this for him, and certainly for a man he never knew. He boasted in this man's self sacrifice, he gloried, in this man's courage and bravery.

He humbly accepted life was given to him by another. And this is what we boast & glory in, realising our own destiny was as bleak, we were destined to be separated from God for eternity, to be lost and without hope and God in our world. Yet, as (1 John 3:16). Says "He laid down His life for us" He took our place

So in conclusion Let us boast in this one truth; our only claim to heaven –is through the cross, the blood of Christ.

Amen

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