

Youth Group Devotionals

Week 2

Reflections on the Cross

The purpose of this series of Lenten Devotions is to help us focus on the meaning of what Christ did for us on the Cross and to draw us into deeper reflection of our own lives. Each day we will be highlighting a different aspect of what Christ accomplished through the cross during his final hours. We will also be highlighting a different spiritual discipline each day that you can use to help you reflect on your growth in Christ and devotion to him. God bless.

Darkness, Death, and a Shattered Door

Read Luke 23:44-49 and Mark 15:33-41.

These are parallel accounts of the same scene. They are written like a movie – you can see the whole scene in your mind: the lighting, Jesus at the center, the people close by and those standing farther away. Now, did you notice that there is one verse that is obviously designed to stand out? It says, “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

This verse stands out because it does not fit the “movie scene.” It jumps us away from the scene for a moment to a completely different location. It seems like this verse shouldn’t be there, but it is. Why?

This verse is designed to explain the meaning of the whole scene. It’s very significant. It explains why this scene matters – to us.

Until that moment in history, you could never be close to God. You might even go to the temple where God was present, but you still could not go into His presence. There was a curtain that separated the place where God was present and the place where you were allowed to come. Only one person was allowed inside that curtain and that person was not you. Ever. So, you and I – even if we had gone to the temple – would still have been outsiders to God.

But the passages we are reading today say that when Jesus died, God ripped that curtain open. He literally ripped it apart, from his side in heaven down to earth. This is a demonstration that through Jesus’ death, God removed the barrier that stands between Him and us. There’s no more curtain. We are potentially no longer outsiders to God.

Now, if you are standing outside a locked door without a key, it makes sense that you don’t step inside. But if the owner of the building comes up next to you, says “Excuse me,” and proceeds to rip the door off its hinges and toss it aside, that seems like a pretty clear invitation to step inside. God is saying in this passage: “I’ve ripped the door open for you. What’s stopping you from being with me?”

The centurion – remember that he was there in the scene to kill Jesus – stepped through that open doorway when he put his faith in Jesus and said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

Pray: Think of yourself as having a conversation with God. God has initiated the conversation by saying to you the things in Luke and Mark. Now he’s finished talking (for now) and there’s an awkward pause while He waits to see if you’ll say anything in response. So, say something. Tell Him what you heard Him saying. Tell Him what you think it means and how you feel about it.

We All Crucified Jesus

Read Mark 15:21-32, John 19:16b-30

When I was little and I did something wrong (lie, get in fights with my siblings, etc), my mom would sometimes say that I was “nailing Jesus to the cross all over again.” She had a valid point that I understood back then, but she might have been more right than she realized. On reading different accounts of the crucifixion in the gospels, I see a plethora of different people and they all were involved in the crucifixion of Christ. Let’s take a brief look at where they all were:

Disciples	Herod	Pilate	Mob
Simon of Cyrene	Pilate’s Wife	Women	Soldiers (Roman)
Guards (temple)	Criminals	Joseph	Nicodemus
Scribes	Pharisees	Barabas	Sanhedrin council

And brief list is not even including Judas, the high priest’s servant, the girl accusing Peter, or the random guy in Mark that ran away naked. It’s a lot of people and quite varied at that. Some of their roles were more passive, while some had a direct hand in his death. Are they any different from us? If Christ were “crucified” today would you be a passive onlooker watching from the convenience of your tv or youtube? Would you have been the follower who ran away and hid so people wouldn’t link you two together? Would you be the helpless committed that watched on the side as he died? Would you be the unconcerned trying to nab a piece of Jesus memorabilia while you still could? Would you be the mob crying out for his death because your leaders told you to? Or would you be the one watching on the side secretly congratulating yourself that you’d rid the world of a menace to the social order? Sometimes I think we can judge those involved a little too harshly, we expect them to somehow act differently or better than us, when it comes down to the fact that everyone involved in Christ’s death was fallen, as are we without Christ. While we were not actually there, our sin did put him there, each and every one of them; and not just the ones that we have already committed, but the ones we will do today and every other day until we die. Everyone of those is another nail, another thorn, another splinter in the already marred flesh.

Fellowship

So how do we respond? All of us are involved in Christ’s death, but those of us who find our life in Christ are also involved in the body of Christ and our new life in him. I remember Michael Card saying something at a meeting where I heard him speak that has stayed with me, “When God gives a gift, he wraps it in a person.” God’s gift to us for salvation was wrapped in Christ. God’s gifts through the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ are each wrapped in Christians. People are created for community, and when we get together we can either do something terrible, or as Christians we can accomplish the will of God. Reflect today on how you’re working communally with the body of Christ. Are you allowing God to give his gifts to the body of Christ through you? Are you accepting the gifts he is sharing through others?

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace: give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Contradiction of the Cross

Read: John 12:20-32

Also read: John 19:1-2, 13-15.

John's gospel is a very murky gospel for Jesus often says things that aren't clear. But the great thing about John is that the murkiness clears away eventually, revealing the glory of Christ in the process! An example of this is Jesus' trial before Pilate. In John 19:13, we read that Pilate brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat (the *bema*). But in the original Greek, the word for "sat down" could mean that Pilate sat Jesus down on the judgment seat. Can you imagine the supreme irony of the situation? Here is Jesus, crowned with thorns and wearing a purple robe, sitting on the judgment seat before the chief priests and all. The chief priests think that they're the ones casting judgment on Jesus, when in reality it was Jesus who is judging them at that very moment. Any king with a crown and purple robe on a judgment seat gets accolades of "Hail to the King!" but Jesus gets (in 19:15), "Crucify him!" What a strange contradiction! The King of all Universe sits in judgment of those He created, and the response was not praise, but an angry call for his crucifixion.

But we see the greatest contradiction in the Cross, the instrument of execution reserved only for traitors and enemies of the Roman empire. It's interesting to note that only in John's gospel did he not record Jesus as having taken off his purple robe. Thus, the Cross was not a mere execution instrument, but Jesus' throne; his crucifixion was not his execution, but his coronation. At the Cross will the world know who Christ is!

Crucifixions – or, executions in general – are public events. Parents bring their children to crucifixions to tell them not to be like the people who are on the cross. But Jesus' crucifixion was different. The Cross no longer was a place where people come to shame the crucified, but the Cross became a place where people come to experience forgiveness and grace from the Crucified One. It is a place where we – we, who have put Jesus on the Cross – come on our knees and beckon to our Crucified Christ because we know that no matter our estate, only Jesus will never turn us away. It is a place where we are reconciled to God, not because we want it to happen, but because *He* wants it for us. What a King! What a Savior! What a Friend, who desires nothing more than to wipe the tears of shame away from our faces so we can look towards the sun and glorify God!

And, having all our shames washed away, we can honestly look at our neighbors in the eye and truly love them as God taught us to. That is why the Cross is a place of reconciliation. That is why we cannot truly love God and love our neighbors unless we are kneeling at the foot of the Cross.

Spend some time in thought. Imagine that you and your youth groupies are kneeling at the foot of a huge cross with Jesus on it, with his purple robe and crown of thorns. This is a holy place where God reconciles all to Him and to each other. Maybe we feel little compared to our brothers and sisters because they get all A's, and we only get A-'s. Maybe we feel distant from God because we feel cast aside, alone. Maybe we feel that our sins are so manifold, God can't possibly accept us. Or maybe we feel like we don't need to be at the foot of the cross because we've got our stuff together. May God reveal to all of us the utter depravity of our natures, but at the same time show us that the unfathomable nature of his love and grace covers a multitude of sins. May He wipe our tears of pride or shame which cloud our eyes, so that we can see and behold His glory.

Jesus Lifted on the Cross

If you were asked to summarize Jesus' death on the cross, explaining its complete significance, and put it into a nice, concise, and understandable paragraph or so, could you do that? That was a rhetorical question by the way. As much as we know of Jesus' sufferings for all of us, I don't think we can ever write a summary as well worded and packed with imagery as the prophet Isaiah did. So let's read what exactly did this prophet say about Jesus.

Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

Whoa. That was my initial reaction to reading this. Now the words used in this "servant song" may seem familiar to you – and they should – because many are quoted in the New Testament. In fact, by reading this entire passage, you essentially have the whole gospel of Jesus. Isaiah walks the audience through the rut of Jesus' mission to the eventual glorification of it. I know you probably already know the majority of this passage so let's focus on some key aspects of Jesus' death.

Look at verse 15: "so will he sprinkle many nations..." The word sprinkling is often used to describe ceremonial cleansing and/or consecration seen in the Old Testament. Okay, so what? The significant part of this verse is the "many nations" part. So put those two together and you get Jesus cleansing many nations. Many times, people take for granted that Jesus died for everyone. We say it so often, but do we really grasp that concept? Jesus purified *all* nations, which means *everyone* is included – even the looked-down-upon gentiles in the old days. Gentiles, during this time, were basically segregated from the Jews. They weren't the "chosen ones," so they had less rights to worship God than the Jews. But with Jesus' sprinkling death, everyone is included. The arms that were spread wide upon that cross covered all nations.

So what does this mean to me? Well, simply stated, Jesus died for everyone. Yes, I know that's extremely general, but can you put those words into action? Are you kingdom-minded, in that you seek to grow God's kingdom with *everyone* and not just the people you like? Remember, Jesus' death welcomed the nations, regardless of who the inhabitants were.

Pray and ask God to be help you be kingdom-minded. Pray that you would make disciples of *all* nations. The more genuine our prayers are in wanting to be kingdom-minded, the clearer God's kingdom here will be shown.

Gethsemane – Solitude – Mark 14:32-52

Read Mark 14:32-52

V 32-52 Jesus is troubled – His heart is heavy so he goes off to pray. What do you do when you are sad or upset? Bring your troubles to God first, and ask Him to bring you peace.

V35-36 Jesus calls out to God, in full faith that God is sovereign. Jesus doesn't ask God to give him what *he* wants, but he asks what God wants for him. Ask God for His will to be done in you, and have faith that God will take care of you if you trust in Him.

V 37-42 When Jesus returns, He finds his disciples sleeping – 3 times! Verse 38 says, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Be honest now; do you fall asleep during your quiet times with God? I remember last fall, my discipleship group met in the evening, and at every meeting, one of us would fall asleep. The evil one was trying to distract us from seeking God, the same way he interferes with your devotional time when you find yourself dozing off. But ask the Spirit to fill you with energy and passion for Christ so you don't become weary throughout your walks with God.

V 43-52 So even in Jesus' final hour, he was...alone. He had asked his disciples to stay awake and pray while he spent time with God, but when he returned, he found that they had fallen asleep. And then, one of his disciples betrayed him! Think of how Jesus felt during his last hour. Maybe he was alone in this world, but he was with the Father. In our lives, we often get caught up in doing things with others. Don't take for granted the time you can spend with God alone, in solitude. Plan out times during the upcoming week when you can turn off your phone, computer, and all connections to the outside world in order to sanctify your time with God.