

The Revolution of the Cross

Foundations - Unit 319



Week 1 – The Centrality of the Cross

1/ Introduction

Symbols are important, they become, often, the doorway into the thing they are symbolising.

For the Buddhist it is often the lotus flower; for modern Judaism it is the Star of David; for Islam the crescent; for Marxism the sickle and hammer; for Christianity it became the cross.

It could have been many things; a fish, a dove, the manger in which Jesus was laid, a carpenter's workbench, a boat, a stone that was rolled away, a throne that was occupied.

Any of these seven symbols would have been suitable as a pointer to some aspect of the ministry of the Lord. But instead the chosen symbol came to be a simple cross. Its two bars were already a cosmic symbol from remote antiquity of the axis between heaven and earth. But its choice by Christians had a more specific explanation. They wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus neither his birth nor his youth, neither his teaching nor his service, neither his resurrection nor his reign, nor his gift of the Spirit, but his death, his crucifixion.¹

2/ NT use of the word 'cross'

The Greek word translated 'cross' in the NT is the word σταυροῦ or *staurou*. This refers to the way in which the Roman authorities often dealt with rebels.

In the NT there are 27 times that the word is used. The following is a list of these verses;

Mt 27:32	Lk 23:26
Mt 27:40	Jn 19:17
Mt 27:42	Jn 19:19
Mk 15:21	Jn 19:25

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 27.

Mk 15:30	Jn 19:31
Mk 15:32	Ac 18:27
Lk 16:26	Php 2:8

In all of these verses the reference is non-theological, as in referring only to the wooden structure itself.

The following verses use the ‘cross’ in a more theological way:

Mt 10:38

Mt 16:24

Mk 8:34

Lk 9:23

Lk 14:27

1 Co 1:17, 18

Scot McKnight defines the gospel;

“The Gospel is the announcement, the declaration, the heralding that Jesus is Messiah and he is the point and goal and telos (the end of the story) of the narrative. He is the Messiah and he is the Redeemer and he is the Lord. He lived and he died and he was buried and he rose again and he is coming again as the raised and ascended one and as the Lord of both Jews and Gentiles that is the whole earth.”

“So the *power* of the cross ends up being the restoring of God’s reign over creation, through the most counter-intuitive means imaginable. It’s the humiliation of the fake powers with all their supposed wisdom.” Allen Browne

Why is the restoration of the reign of God powerful? Because it brings to right all of the wrong in the world. If the gospel is only about me and my sins, my wrong doings, then where does that leave the world that is so in need of justice and mercy? If the gospel fails to move us to live as kingdom citizens, then the cross loses its power because nothing changes in the way we live.

Ga 5:11

‘The gospel’ is the announcement of the kingship of Jesus; ‘justification by faith’ reminds those who, abandoning their varied idolatries, have given their allegiance to Jesus, that this very allegiance is the only distinguishing mark by which the renewed and united family of Abraham is to be known. All other possible distinguishing marks undermine the gospel itself, implying that the crucified and risen Jesus is not after all the one true king. Allegiance and loyalty to Jesus, ‘faith’ in this full and rich sense, is not the gospel itself; it is what the gospel is designed to produce and, by the power of the spirit, does produce.²

Ga 6:12

Not only has the Messiah been crucified. Not only have Christians been crucified with him (2:19–20; 5:24). The world itself has been crucified. Calvary was the turning-point of history. The cosmos has had sentence of death passed on it—so that God’s new world, God’s new creation, can be born out of the old. This new creation began with Jesus himself at his **resurrection**, continues with the **spirit**-given new life which wells up in all those who belong to the Messiah, and will go on until, as Paul says in Romans 8, the whole creation will be set free from its own slavery and will share the freedom of the glory of God’s children.³

Ga 6:14

² N. T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 89–90.

³ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 82.

Eph 2:16

The point of it all, as he says in verse 15, was to create a single new humanity in place of the two. Today's church may no longer face the question of the integration of Jew and Gentile into a single family, though there are places where that is still a major issue. But we face, quite urgently, the question which Paul would insist on as a major priority. If our churches are still divided in any way along racial or cultural lines, he would say that our **gospel**, our very grasp of the meaning of Jesus' death, is called into question.⁴

Php 3:18

Col 1:20

Reconciliation was brought about through the event of Jesus' crucifixion and the result is peace.

What was being reconciled and how does this bring peace?

The importance of this will be realized when we see that if no objective work of reconciliation was done by Christ's death, the message of the cross ceases to be a gospel (that is, good news) and becomes simply an appeal.⁵

Finally, the scope of this reconciliation is universal. It takes in the whole created order. 'All things' will share the wonders of peace with God. Other passages fill in the time scale of this, showing how creation must 'wait' for the day when God's sons will be revealed.⁶

The relationship that was restored was the relationship that was broken in Genesis 3; the relationship of the realm to the king. While this obviously involves individuals, it is first and foremost a reconciliation of the kingdom to the king. This is why peace comes

⁴ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 27.

⁵ R. C. Lucas, *Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 56–57.

⁶ R. C. Lucas, *Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 57.

about. When the correct line of authority is re-established then peace follows as order is once again brought out of chaos.

Col 2:14, 15

Heb 12:2

He kept his eye on the joy that was waiting for him—the joy of doing his father’s will, of bringing his saving purpose to fulfilment—and he put up with the foul torture of crucifixion, a degrading and disgusting as well as excruciating and agonizing death.⁷

The fulfilment of the saving purposes of God is the final restoration of the kingdom of God – the new heavens and the new earth. The total reign of Jesus as king under God the Father and of humanity as the king’s regent in the world.

⁷ Tom Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 150.