

We come this week to the fourth of five steps of our Savior's suffering. Having seen His arrest in the garden, trial before the Jews, trial before the Gentiles, we now come to His crucifixion.

Now, I know I need not remind you, brethren, how sacred and central the cross of our Savior is. It's the very heart of His work, the Holy Scriptures, and the Christian religion. In fact, there are three important reasons or purposes of the cross:

(1) It's through the cross God and man are reconciled. It's on the cross, that Christ bears our sins and satisfies God's wrath. (2) It's through the cross God has made Himself known. It's at the cross that God's justice, holiness, wisdom, mercy, and love are most clearly displayed. (3) It's through the cross God has given an example of love. That is, Christ's sacrificial death not only serves as a motive for us to love others, but the perfect example of what that love looks like.

Thus, the cross is in the first place a means of redemption, secondly, a revelation of God's character, and thirdly, it's an example of perfect and selfless love. As a result, the cross is something that must be embraced, proclaimed, and imitated.

Dear brethren, it is all about the cross. Yes, we must never sever the cross from the manger, empty tomb, and throne. Christ came, He lived, He died, He rose, and He reigns. But, the cross is central to all else and gives meaning to the rest. He came to die, He lived perfectly to be a perfect sacrifice, He rose again revealing His offering was accepted, and He now sits on a throne, mediating the merits He purchased or secured through His death.

- I. It was Brutal (vv17-18)
- II. It was Public (vv19-22)
- III. It was Foretold (vv23-24)

I. It was Brutal (vv17-18)

1. We learned last week, after his attempts failed at releasing Jesus, Pilate gave Him over to the desire of the Jews, and the Romans led Him away.
2. V17—"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha."
3. It's evident from the other gospels, that at some point, our Savior stumbled under the beam's weight, and needed assistance.
4. Matt.27:32—"Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross."
5. It seems evident, as we compare these two texts, that our Savior began by carrying His cross outside the city.
6. As they "came out" of the city, in route to the place of execution, our Savior must have collapsed from fatigue.
7. As a result, Simon was forced to carry Jesus' cross for Him, a detail that John has chosen to omit from his gospel.
8. It was a part of the shame associated with crucifixion, that the criminal carried his own cross through the city.
9. This made it plain for all to see that he was condemned, and as a result, was on his way outside the city, to die.
10. It's likely that they forced the condemned to carry the horizontal beam, which would be attached to the vertical beam (which likely was already prepared for them).
11. Thus, let me briefly suggest three things about Jesus's crucifixion, that underscores it was brutal and ruthless (its location, company, and nature).

12. (1) Its location, v17—"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha."
13. This place was located just outside the city walls. It was the place where people were commonly crucified (executed).
14. It's referred to as "the Place of a Skull" likely because of the numerous people that were buried there (or nearby).
15. The Greek word for "Skull" is translated "Calvary" by Luke (23:33), which is taken from a Latin word meaning "skull."
16. John further describes this place as "Golgotha" which is a Hebrew term meaning "skull"—these all say the same thing.
17. The place where our Savior was crucified, was a place outside the city of Jerusalem, called "the Place of the Skull."
18. Again, the point being, it was a place where numerous people were killed, and no doubt, likely buried nearby.
19. (2) Its company, v18—"where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center."
20. They likely crucified Him in the middle of two thieves, as a means to further shame Him. He was crucified among sinners.
21. I suggest, there's a sense in which it was right for Him to be crucified among sinners, and that for two reasons.
22. (a) It fulfilled prophecy, Isa.53:12—"He poured out His soul unto death, and He as numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many."
23. To be "numbered with the transgressors" means to be counted as a sinner—He was viewed and treated as a sinner.
24. The primary reasons being—"He bore the sin of many"—He was treated by His Father as if He were a sinner.
25. (b) It allowed Him to perform one last miracle—according to Luke 23, one of the criminals repented and believed.
26. I have often thought it very instructive, that our Savior returned to heaven, with a saved sinner under His wing.
27. And thus, it was fitting for our Savior to be die between two sinners, because He came into the world to save sinners.
28. There is a sense in which we could say—our Savior died doing the very the thing He came into the world to do.
29. (3) Its nature, v18—"where they crucified Him"—it's rather interesting to notice how simply the Bible states this.
30. While all four gospel accounts record that Jesus was crucified—they all fail to give any great details of that crucifixion.
31. I believe one reason this is so, is because the Scriptures do not want us to fixate ourselves on His physical sufferings.
32. As I mentioned last week, His physical sufferings are important to notice, and they form a part of His atoning sacrifice.
33. But, even with very little said about His physical suffering, certain parts of the church have overly focused on it.
34. They simply make too much of the physical suffering, to the point where they overlook or neglect the spiritual.
35. There is a sense in which our Savior's physical suffering was the outward shell, that housed the kernel of His spiritual suffering.
36. And yet, dear brethren, surely, we don't want to err on the other side, and overlook or neglect His physical suffering.
37. Death by crucifixion, was a very slow, painful, and shameful death—it was the worst way to die at that present time.

38. Though the Romans didn't invent crucifixion they perfected it, and used it only to execute slaves and the vilest of criminals.
39. James Montgomery Boice—"The horizontal bar of the cross was bound to the condemned man's back. He was then led through the city to the place of crucifixion accompanied by a centurion and four soldiers who made up the execution party. A sign describing the crime for which he was to die was carried before him. Arriving at the place of crucifixion, the victim was stripped of his clothes, which became the property of the soldiers. The crossbar was then hoisted upward to rest upon the upright bar which had already been prepared to receive it. The victim's hands were nailed in place. In most cases the feet were also nailed or bound to the cross. As a result of the strain upon his arms and diaphragm. After hours or even days of such torture the victim would die of shock, exposure, loss of blood, or suffocation. This death Jesus died."
40. In short brethren, death by way of crucifixion was a painful and shameful death—a death reserved for the worst of criminals deemed the least significant.
41. Children's Catechism (Q.49) – "What kind of death did Christ die? The painful and shameful death of the cross."

II. It was Public (vv19-22)

1. Crucifixions were intentionally conducted in public, the purpose being, it was a deterrent against further crime.
2. The Romans always crucified criminals openly and publically, so that others would see it and fear and dread Rome.
3. It was an evident and open testimony of Roman power—each crucifixion was a warning not to rebel against Rome.
4. Now, it's interesting to notice the things that John points out that the other three gospel writers omit or overlook.
5. For example, only John mentions the fact what Pilate wrote on Jesus' sign, was written in three languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.
6. These were the three major languages of the known world—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—this included all men.
7. James Montgomery Boice—"John's intention in providing this detail (sign written in three languages) is to show that Jesus, while dying as a Jewish King, nevertheless had a relationship to the world beyond Israel. Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were the languages of the then known world. So John is actually declaring that Jesus is a King for everyone. He is not merely a Jewish Savior, though He is that. He is the Savior of the Greeks and of the Romans as well. He is the Savior of the world."
8. It's evident the Jewish leaders didn't appreciate what Pilate wrote, v21—"Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but 'He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"
9. V22—"Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written'"—in other words, he was unwilling to change it.
10. I don't believe this means Pilate believed what he wrote, but, he simply was fed-up with the demands of the Jews.
11. Thus, it's apparent that God used Pilate to write truth upon the plaque, even though he likely didn't believe it.
12. God even uses the wrath of man to praise Him—He uses evil and wicked men to fulfill and achieve His purposes.
13. As a result, our Savior is identified as a King upon a cross. Perhaps we can say, His cross was in a sense a throne.
14. For the Scripture teaches us that it was through the cross, that Christ defeated His enemies. He triumphed over them through the cross.
15. Brethren, the fact is Pilate wrote the truth—though he didn't intend to preach the truth, he was an unlikely prophet.
16. In addition to writing the title in all three languages, John tells us—"the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city."

17. That is, it was near the city of Jerusalem, that at present, was swollen with hundreds of thousands of people for the Passover.
18. Dear brethren, there was hardly anything God could have done, to make this event more public than He already has.
19. He was crucified in a public place, outside one of the largest cities of that time, that was overflowing with people from every location.

III. It was Foretold (vv23-24)

1. Within verses 23-24, we find the soldiers dividing our Savior's garments among them, dividing them into four pieces.
2. The tunic or inner garment, according to v23b—"was without seam, woven from the top in one piece"—this rendered the garment rather costly.
3. As a result, the soldiers agree not to tear the garment but instead to cast lots, this way one man would get the whole garment.
4. John informs us, that ultimately, this was done—"that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says, 'They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.'"
5. This of course is a quotation from Psalm 22:18, a Psalm that foretold our Savior's suffering in specific details.
6. John wants us to be reminded, the events taking place that Friday morning, were foretold a thousand years before.
7. Furthermore, this also reminds us, it was the common practice for the soldiers to strip the criminal totally naked.
8. This of course, added to the shame of the man—to be lifted up on a cross, beaten, bruised, ridiculed, while naked.
9. John Calvin—"Let us also learn that Christ was stripped of his garments, that he might clothe us with righteousness; that his naked body was exposed to the insults of men, that we may appear in glory before the judgment-seat of God."
10. And so, here is our Savior. Hanging on a cross. Bleeding, beaten, bruised, and dying. And yet, reigning as a King.
11. Thus, what I want to do at this point is, in closing, suggest four personal exhortations in light of what we've learned.
12. Dear brethren surely, we must know by now—the reality of the cross must be brought to bear upon our own souls.
13. Exhortation 1—Let every sinner see in the cross a world-wide salvation—that is, the cross speaks to every sinner.
14. The cross is the great leveler of men—it puts all men on equal or common ground—it fundamentally says three things.
15. (a) All men are created by God—the cross teaches us all, there's an essential dignity true of men as God's image.
16. This is seen in that the Son of God did not take to Himself the form of an angel but man—He died FOR MEN.
17. O my friends, we must never ask the question—Does every man possess a native dignity and worth, as long as we look at the cross.
18. The cross is the great enemy of every form of prejudice and bias—it casts a shadow over every tribe and nation.
19. It casts its shadow over every social class of people—over the rich and poor—over the educated and ignorant.
20. Perhaps I can even go as far to say—The cross not only provides all men with a sense of dignity but a sense of purpose.
21. Why was I created—What is my purpose in life—Well here at the cross you answer all of these questions (I was created by God and for God).

22. (b) All men are fallen in Adam—the cross teaches us all, that we have together rebelled against our gracious Creator.
23. Remember, we must always view the cross from two perspectives—on one hand it was a wicked act of rebellion (on the other hand it was the eternal purpose of God).
24. Thus, the title—Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews—was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—because all men had a hand in His death.
25. This is what we all have done to our King—this is what we natively think of God—this is how we treated His Son.
26. (c) All men are loved by God—the cross teaches us all, that God has provided a means of salvation for all men.
27. I mentioned earlier there are three purposes of the cross—reconciliation (it reconciles God and man), revelation (it reveals God's character), and imitation (it's a perfect pattern for selfless love).
28. And while the first of these must always get the priority, we must always allow each three to have their place.
29. My dear friends, the cross is a means whereby God reveals to the entire world their sins, His holiness, and His love.
30. The cross is a pulpit from which God preaches His love for the world—the cross as it were, speaks to all men.
31. It tells them they are unique as God's image-bearers—it tells them they are sinners—it tells them GOD IS LOVE.
32. There are many ways we learn about God's love, but nowhere is this more evident and clear, than at the cross.
33. John Owen—"There is no property of the nature of God which He does so eminently design to glorify in the death of Christ as His love." Augustine—"The cross was a pulpit in which Christ preached His love to the world."
34. Exhortation 2—Let every saint see in the cross a call to carry his own cross—the cross, remember was an instrument of death.
35. Lk.9:23—"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."
36. Thus, our Savior is here calling every follower to carry his cross, in a similar way that He carried His own cross.
37. How did Christ carry His cross? He carried it to His death—this is what Christ is calling us to—to DIE DAILY.
38. Every single day Christians must put to death self-trust, self-preference, self-ease, self-honor, and self-satisfaction.
39. This is how Christians put to death the deeds of the body—they do so by taking their cross and following Christ.
40. Hymn—"Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me; help me walk from day to day with its shadow over me."
41. O my dear friends—how can we put our eyes on that evil thing, when the shadow of Christ's cross is over us!
42. Or else, think of the wife whose husband at times speaks unkindly toward her, and she is tempted to respond in turn.
43. She opens her mouth to repay evil with evil, and then what happens—she sees the shadow of Christ's cross over her.
44. How can I look at this evil think, or speak that evil word—in light of the fact that Christ shed His blood for those sins.
45. Christ carried and then died on His cross—I too, will carry my cross and die to self—self-satisfaction and self-defense.
46. This was the original idea behind Christians wearing crosses as necklaces—to remind them what Christ did for them and what they are to do for Him.
47. It reminded them that Christ bore His cross and died for our sins, and thus, that we must bear our cross and deny self.

48. My dear brethren, there are many lawful motives to assist us in fighting against the deeds of the body and lust.
49. But, none of them are more powerful and effective as walking day to day, with the shadow of His cross over us.
50. Exhortation 3—Let every saint see in the cross a call to share in Christ's shame—He endured the shameful death of the cross.
51. Christ carried His cross outside the city gate—this was a picture of Him being rejected and despised by the city.
52. This of course was in fulfillment to the OC sin offerings, which having their blood shed, were burned outside the gate.
53. Heb.13:11-14—"For the bodies of those animals...are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."
54. O my friends—don't think it a strange thing if this wicked and evil city rejects us, for it rejected our Lord before us.
55. Let us follow Him outside this city, bearing His reproach, knowing here we have no continuing or lasting city.
56. O my dear friends, let us boldly stand for the truth in our schools, workplaces, neighbors, and extended families.
57. What can they do to us but what they did to Him—remember, the reproach (criticism), we bear is His—"bearing His reproach (it's ultimately against Him not us).
58. He bore reproach for us, let us bear reproach for Him—He suffered alone outside the city, let us follow Him there.
59. Our Savior's walk from the city to the place of execution was very lonely, and at times, we must walk a similar path.
60. Exhortation 4—Let every saint see in the cross a cause for joyful adoration and praise—it's not wrong brethren, to look at the cross as something to imitate.
61. But, I want to end by reminding you, the cross is not primary something we imitate, but something we trust and adore.
62. Must Christians carry their own cross—YES—but, remember, Christians are not saved by carrying their own cross.
63. Horatius Bonar—"Thy cross, not mine, O Christ, has born the awful load, of sins that none in heaven or earth could bear but God. To whom, save thee, who canst alone for sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?"