



THE CROSS

There is no more central symbol of Christianity than the cross. Paul declares the cross the very core of the Gospel. The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John spend a third of their time on the passion, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus. How we understand the Cross of Christ changes everything about how we understand God, the world—even life itself. When we consider all that Jesus did there, we stand amazed.

THE CROSS • Hebrews 2:9–17 • Katie Fowler • March 24, 2019

I remember the first time I saw it. It was about 6 years ago. It was May the 4th. I was familiar with it. It's hard to live in this country and not be at least familiar with it. I knew certain, iconic lines—lines like, “Luke, I am your father.” I knew the major players—Darth Vader, Han, Leia, Luke. I knew there was some droids of some sort—although the word “droid” was definitely not part of my vocabulary. I had no idea what Chewbacca was—I am still a little shaky on that. But somehow I had walked this earth for 29 years without seeing any of the Star Wars films.

But six years ago, I had started dating my now husband, Chuck. I don't want to say this was some sort of litmus test for Chuck, some sort of marker as to whether or not there was a future with this woman. It wasn't like Chuck was asking God if this was His will because she hasn't even seen Star Wars!?! But it mattered to Chuck that I saw it. I think you could say that I have embraced Star Wars.

Has anybody never seen Star Wars? Let me bring you up to speed. The basic plotline goes like this: good vs evil. The dark side and the light side. Those who are about peace and freedom and those bent towards destruction and oppression. Those on the side of life and those on the side of death. You see this plotline all over the place. It's in many of our favorite stories: beloved fairy tales, Lord of the Rings, the Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter. But it's not just the stories we love to read, the films we love to watch. It's actually the plotline found in our story, the story of our world, the story of God and God's creation, the story we find in Scripture.

The plot goes something like this—God, Creator God, God who is good and holy and beautiful, lovingly made us for life, for life with God. But there was an uprising in God's good creation. And when the battle lines were drawn, we chose our side. The side of “not Yours God.” We want anything but You, God. That's what sin is—rebellion against God.

Jesus clarifies the sides of the battle like this—“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). We chose our side. You, me, the entire human race. And in our rebellion, we became captives. In Star Wars the good side is called the rebellion, but for us, rebellion leads to chains. Imprisoned to the power of sin, locked in the grip of death, the tyranny of evil and darkness. Is there a way out? Is there a way out of this mess?

What we need is a complete rescue. What we need is someone to set us free. To break the chains. What we need is Jesus. Jesus sets us free from our captivity. My prayer for you this morning is that you would clearly see Jesus. The author of Hebrews says early in chapter two—no, not everything is set right—but it will be. We are headed towards that day. And in the meantime, what we do see is Jesus. Here again in verse nine — “But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).

As we study God's word, may you see Jesus. In the midst of fears that you carry into this place, hurt and ache over a world so broken, pain over your own sin—may you see Jesus. See Jesus who shares in our humanity and enters into our suffering. See

Jesus who pays the price for our freedom. See Jesus who is the Victorious One. Jesus sets us free from our captivity.

First: **See Jesus—who shares in our humanity.**

Hear again the beginning of verse 14: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity” (Hebrews 2:14). Jesus becomes fully human. That's the astounding claim of Christianity. Jesus, the second person of the trinity, God who is three in one, Jesus takes on flesh. Jesus becomes fully human.

Have you ever gone through something—a deep sorrow in your life, a painful loss, hurt? And your first thought is just that there is no way anyone could understand. You come to this place of thinking, I am all alone in this. Friends, Jesus knows. The Lord knows your pain. You are not alone. For Christ the burden was just as heavy, the pain just as sharp.

The author of the book of Hebrews says this: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Christ was like us in every way, fully human in every way, tempted in every way, but without sin. To set us free, Jesus becomes like us.

Secondly: **See Jesus—who enters into our suffering.**

Sin and death ravage God's good creation. I think we feel the wrongness of sin, of death, every day.

I hate horror films. I can't stand them. I have to cover my eyes, I have to look away. A *commercial*, just a *commercial* comes on advertising an upcoming horror film and I run from the room. It's the only time I am a fast runner. But hear me now, in the horrors of sin, a world ripped apart by violence, hatred, racism, selfishness and greed, in the pain of death—God does not look away. The Lord does not avert His eyes. In Jesus, we see that God enters into our pain, enters into the horrors of sin and death.

To set us free, God moves towards us. To say it another way: God is not like the person on their phone in a meeting or restaurant who has completely checked out. You know that person I am talking about. Maybe you are that person—I definitely am at times. With their head buried in their phone—all the action is going on around them but they are oblivious. Someone calls their name, but they don't hear it. Someone asks them a question, but it's radio silence and they don't respond. They are checked out, oblivious, unengaged. Let me be very clear. That's not God. That is not the God revealed in Scripture and ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ.

God shows up. God shows up in the flesh to rescue us. Yes, how dim and dire our situation is in a fallen and broken world. But God shows up. The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy. But Christ has come that we may have life, and have it to the full. And let's be very clear—this is not a battle between equal opponents. The Lord is the Lord Almighty. And greater is He.

“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered” (Hebrews 2:10). The word “perfect” here in our passage means not that Jesus became perfect; we have already established that Jesus was without sin. The word “perfect” is referring

to the fact that through the suffering of Jesus God's plan was being brought to its completion, its intended end.

It's in the death of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus that we are bought back from slavery. Jesus sets us free from our captivity. How?

See Jesus—**Who pays the price for our freedom.**

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus gives this sort of manifesto, why He is here, what He has been sent to do. He stands up in the synagogue to read the Scriptures. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah is handed to Him. He unrolls it and found these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1).

Freedom for the prisoners. The Apostle Paul in Romans 3 says that all of us are under the power of sin. In our sin, we are like the addict, who says one thing and does another, who is not actually in control. No, there is another controlling power at work in our life. The Apostle Paul says, what I want to do, I can't do. What I don't want to do, I end up doing. I have the desire to do what is good, but I can't carry it out.

The startling reality of sin is that we become enslaved to sin. And we can't break these chains on our own. We are powerless, which is why the message of the Christian faith has never been that you need to try harder, but rather, you need to be set free. You need someone to set you free.

Jesus Himself says this in the gospel of Mark: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). To set us free, Jesus pays the price.

How does Jesus do this? Hear all of verse 14 and 15: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14, 15). How do you overcome evil? How do you overcome the power of sin and death? Do you come in with brute force? Is this an action hero moment? Is this a Vin Diesel situation? Is this where the Rock comes in running in to save the day? Where Captain Marvel is called upon to defeat the Villain?

But see Jesus hanging from the cross. The hero Jesus doesn't overwhelm with force; He doesn't overpower by violent means; He surrenders to the violence brought upon Him. He doesn't dominate. He dies. Jesus dies in our place, tasting death for us, taking all that the enemy can throw at Him.

But the enemy had no claim on this man—the sinless spotless lamb of God. Yes, Death and Satan made a just claim on humanity because of our disobedience to God. But Jesus was without sin, remember? Fully human in every way but without sin. As a human, Jesus could suffer death but death could not contain Him. Death could not hold Him. Jesus was not justly subject to death because He was without sin. When dark powers brought death to Jesus, they thought they had won. But in the defeat of the cross, Christ defeats the powers of death.

The power that gets the last word is not death but love. The Love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. For the Crucified Christ says to

a rebellious humanity—I bought you back. I purchased you with my blood. And I have disarmed the powers of darkness. Did you think I was going to abandon you? Did you think I was going to leave you to rot in your chains? The very powers of hell will not stand against the Lord.

Some of you have heard of the work of International Justice Mission. IJM is an organization of Christian lawyers, social workers, and other professionals working for freedom for those trapped in modern day slavery. Perhaps, you hear me talk about this cosmic battle—good vs evil, the devil at work. And maybe you want to say—aren't you being a little dramatic? Go watch a romantic comedy for a change and calm down. But then you look at something like modern day slavery, human trafficking in all its forms. There are more slaves today than in any other period in history. How warped we have become in our sin, how rampant is evil, that we could reduce people—people made in the image of God—to throw-away possessions. But in Jesus' name, the people at International Justice Mission are doing something about modern day slavery.

I want to share with you one of their stories. It's the story of Damru and Hemanthi.¹ When Hemanthi first became pregnant, they were overjoyed. But when their little one was just three months, she developed a high fever. Medical care was not easily accessible. By the time they got to a doctor, it was too late. Their grief increased all the more, when their second child died shortly after birth. It's hard for me to imagine that level of pain. They decided to borrow money, build a new home and have a new beginning.

And then Hemanthi became pregnant again. Durga, their beloved boy, came into the world. But Damru and Hemanthi needed to pay back their loan so they sought work. And what they thought was a dream job turned into a living nightmare. Damru, Hemanthi, their baby boy and their nephew went to work at a poultry farm. It was 1,000 miles from their home. Once there, they were put to work cleaning bird droppings from the coop. The owner of the farm made them live right there in the coop. The baby Durga was constantly getting sick from all the cleaning chemicals. At night, they slept surrounded by scorpions and snakes. Hemanthi said this, "every night we used to go to sleep not knowing if we would wake up the next morning."

When Hemanthi's mother-in-law got sick, she asked the owner of the farm if she could go to her. Astonishingly, the owner agreed. Her son and nephew were allowed to go with her, but Damru was not allowed. While traveling, two IJM informants spotted Hemanthi. They recognized the signs of human trafficking and began to ask her some questions. But she was reluctant to share—was this just another trick? But her nephew spoke up.

Hear now as I read the rest of the story exactly how the folks at IJM share it: "The race to rescue Damru was on. Hemanthi managed to reach him on a mobile phone and told him about the plan to rescue him and reunite their family, but in his mind he only imagined two or three men would arrive for the rescue. He says, 'I was awestruck at what I saw. Three vehicles full of people reached the farm. There were so many of them. I cannot forget that moment. Hemanthi had come to save me.' If you were to meet Damru and Hemanthi today, you would walk down a narrow, dusty road in the Indian state of Odisha. Their village is small and their home is plain and clean. Hemanthi carries little Durga on her waist and drops him off at preschool before heading to work at

a local farm. Durga yells, 'BYE-BYE' in his sweet, high-pitched squeal. Today, you would meet two brave, resilient people. Free from slavery, Free to raise their child in peace, Free to live a joyful life."

This is the sort of rescue we are talking about. When it seems so dark, so dim, so hopeless. Do you see Jesus!? The Son of God has come for our rescue!! The Son of God has come to set the captives free. And so finally friends, see Jesus.

See Jesus: **Who is the Victorious One.** Christ is the Victor.

Theologian and author N.T Wright writes: "When Jesus is crucified, something happens and the result is that the powers that have locked up the world in corruption, decay and death are overthrown. And Jesus is, from now on, running the show—even though it doesn't look like it because we have the wrong idea of what power is and how it works."²

When Jesus is crucified something happens! What a wonderful understatement! Nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God—not even the powers of hell. For by His death Jesus has broken the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Fear can have this death grip on our lives. I struggle so much with fear; maybe you do too. I have felt fear kicking up in my life all the more. And the remedy is not to just say, "stop it, Katie." The remedy is to see Jesus. Do you see Him there? Do you see what He has done? Do you see how complete the victory was?

Before you leave this place, simply ask Jesus to help you to see Him. In the midst of the circumstances that are causing such fear in your life, ask Jesus to help you to see Him. See Jesus there with you. Fear is silenced in the presence of Jesus.

You might wonder—why do I still see all the evil in this world? Why does death and darkness still seem to hold sway in our world? That is a good question and I don't want to gloss over it. But let me say: We see the victory of Jesus now. But we don't yet see it in all of its fullness. It's a hidden victory. We await that day when Christ returns and sets all things right again. But make no mistake, the decisive victory has already been won in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

See Jesus, crowned with glory and honor. And all who call on His name, you belong to Jesus. You have been purchased with a price. The Lord, the Mighty One is with you.

¹ <https://www.ijm.org/stories/damru>

² <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/faith/this-changes-everything/>

STUDY GUIDE

THE CROSS • "Hidden Victory"

Hebrews 2:9–17

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

1. Read Psalm 8 aloud. What reasons does the psalmist, David, give for why the Lord's name is majestic?
2. What would you add to this list?
3. Read Hebrews 2:9–17. What connections do you see between Psalm 8 and this passage?
4. Reread verse 9. Jesus came to be a substitute for humanity. He died so that we could have life. How does this passage inform our understanding of what Christ accomplished on the cross?
5. Reread verse 17. The author of Hebrews explains that God became fully human in order to free us from the snares of the devil. How does this serve as an encouragement for us in the coming week?
6. This is a highly theological passage, but what practical implications do you see for us today?

IN: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

When would it make sense to talk about this passage with someone who is not a Christian?

OUT: Connect with Each Other

Take time to pray for our church in this season. Pray that we would effectively communicate the love of God with all who enter the building. Pray for our Lenten journey together, that we would continue to grow in our understanding of Christ's work on the cross and that we would be moved to communicate this good news with our city.