

July 5
The Cross, *Daily Disciple*, page 195



[Psalm 2:1-3](#)
[Luke 23:44-47](#)

Questions for Discussion:

1. How do you see the passage from Psalms contributing to or connecting with the theme of the cross?
2. In what way does the cross represent the rebellion of the religious leaders of Jesus' day?
3. In what sense is the phrase "Christ and him crucified" representative of the gospel?
4. What does it mean to "preach the cross?"
5. What does it mean to be a "cruciform church?" that is, to allow the cross to shape us as God's people?
6. Can you list the 7 different phrases that Jesus utters while dying on the cross?
7. Explain the significance of each one.
8. According to Luke what did the centurion say when he saw what had taken place?
9. When we take time to contemplate the cross of Christ today, what significant thoughts and themes emerge?
10. Compose a prayer centered around the theme of the cross and share it with your group members.
11. Practically speaking, how has the reality of the cross changed your life?
12. What does it mean to pick up our cross and follow Christ?
13. The ancient practice of capital punishment by crucifixion was excruciating and painful. How does this help us understand [Galatians 2:20](#)?
14. How can we keep the image of the cross before us daily?
15. Be sure and read the devotional message on the back of this sheet entitled "The Cross."
16. What 5 main points are made?
17. Can you think of another major point about the cross that has been omitted?
18. Discuss why the cross was such an irony in Jesus' case. Why do you suppose he never sought to make things right and demand justice?
19. Discuss the ways in which you can see how Jesus' ministry became passive after his betrayal. Is it possible for us to be involved in God's great work of ministry in a stance of passiveness? Why do we think we always have to be working in order for God to work?
20. There are 27 specific passages in the New Testament that mention the cross. Can you locate them all?
21. Which one is your favorite and why?
22. Also, in the study guide on the back, we mentioned that there are 25 songs in our songbook that are composed around the image of the cross. Find the other twenty-four that I did not mention, and write down what you learn from those songs about the cross. Is there anything in this collection of hymns that is overlooked about the teaching and the power of the cross?
23. Has the cross helped you look at suffering differently and how to handle it?

THE CROSS

The cross is more than just wood. It is a symbol of punishment that was the most extreme irony of human history in Jesus' case. At the same time, the work of Christ for human redemption was accomplished on Golgatha. As a metaphor, it has important implications for the Christian life. Many of those implications have woven their way into our hymnody and have been a part of our musical tradition.

In the Roman world the cross was the most extreme **form of capital punishment**. It was designed to serve as a deterrent to crime, revolutions and betrayal to government. Access this website for more details as to method, practice and history of crucifixion in the ancient world: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion>

The crucifixion of Jesus was such an **irony**. Since it was reserved for the most notorious law-breakers and criminals, and since Jesus was crucified among thieves, from the perspective of the crowd he looked like a common criminal. But as readers of the gospel narrative, we have four gospels that convince us otherwise. We get the inside picture with his disciples so that we know how innocent Jesus was. He did not sin, nor did he break any laws, nor did he lead any revolutionary movement against the government.

Because Jesus did not call down ten legions of angels, he allowed himself to become an unjust victim of human cruelty, political aspirations and fear. Of the thousands of people crucified during the Roman Empire, Jesus was the only one that was sinless. But because he was passive and did not resist, **his pure sacrifice of himself** took away the sins of the world. This is in stark contrast to the rest of his ministry. Just think of all the activities of Jesus' earthly ministries: healing, traveling, teaching, engaged in conflict with the religious leaders, encouraging, leading, stilling storms, feeding the 5,000 etc. This busy ministry is replaced with a passive submissiveness that allows everything unjust to be done to him without retaliation.

Crucifixion, then, becomes a **metaphor for the Christian life**. This is particularly true in two areas: suffering and following Jesus. The cross in early Christianity was not meant to represent a heavy burden. Rather, the cross represented the suffering that went along with denial of self and the dying of self. To take up one's cross and follow Jesus meant that you would be following him straight into the path of pain, suffering and sorrow. The cross is not meant to be a nice charm for a bracelet or necklace. It was not to be adorned, rather the cross is meant to transform us. We end up on the cross instead of it ending up on us!

The cross and what it represents is important in **our musical tradition**. I picked up our hymnal, *Praise for the Lord*, and looked at the "Topics" index in the back. Under "cross" there are 25 songs listed. Song #5 entitled "A Hill Called Mount Calvary" was written and composed by the Gaithers in 1968. As I read the verses of this song, several things stand out: the cross has a way of forcing us to look at life's priorities; the crucifixion of Christ is part of my core beliefs in the historical Jesus; the cross has the power to change lives today; the cross has completely changed me and I am a new person; the cross unlocks the keys to life's mysteries because one day I will be with my Friend Jesus who died there. The theology of the cross in this song along is powerful and it reminds me of how central it is to my faith.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). The author of Hebrews challenges his readers to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. He is the one who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He blazed the trail that led to the cross, and completed the demands of the law so that he could take those demands away at the cross, completely satisfying the requirements of justice. Jesus endured the cross, and the only thing that got him through it was knowing that there was a joy to be had on the other side of being restored to the right hand of God. This joy enables us today to overcome the pain,

suffering and crucifixion of self because we, too, know that we will be in the presence of God. Simply put, the cross gets us ready for God.

The cross, then, is a central symbol of the Christian faith. It represents how God could use the most unlikely of human devices for death and use it for life. Christ's work at the cross. His pure sacrifice took away the sins of the world. Thus, it has become a symbol for the Christian life of self-sacrifice, denial and acceptance of suffering joyfully for the fulfillment of God's will on earth. Our musical tradition has been enriched by it.