

The Cross at the Center - Part 1

by Derek Prince

Derek Prince emphasizes the centrality of the cross in Christian faith as the all-sufficient sacrifice that releases God's grace and power in our lives.

Duration: 28:22

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1

Topics: "The Cross", "Gods Wisdom"

Description

This sermon by Derek Prince delves into the significance of the cross and the message of Christ crucified, emphasizing the contrast between human wisdom and the power of God revealed through the sacrifice of Jesus. The speaker highlights the all-sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, explaining how it provides total provision for every human need and releases God's supernatural grace in our lives. Through biblical references and personal testimony, the sermon underscores the essential role of the cross in bringing us to the end of ourselves and leading us to rely solely on God's wisdom and strength.

Transcript

Derek Prince Ministries. Proclaiming the inspired Word of God around the world. Derek Prince is an internationally recognized Bible teacher and author.

Through books, audios, videos and radio broadcasts, Derek seeks to reach the unreached and teach the untaught. In over 50 years of ministry, Derek has reached over 100 nations in more than 50 languages. And now, Derek Prince.

In order to introduce this subject, I would like to read some words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 1 through 5. I particularly enjoy the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, because in them essentially Paul is dealing with the difference between the wisdom of this world and the message of the cross. And when he speaks about wisdom, he had primarily in mind the philosophy of his day, which was Greek philosophy. And before I became a Christian, a committed Christian, for seven years I was involved in the study of Greek philosophy at Cambridge University.

And so I feel I am particularly in a position to understand how true and appropriate Paul's words are about Greek philosophy, and then philosophy and human wisdom in general. But I have to testify that it's very clear from Paul's writings that he had a very thorough understanding of Greek philosophy. He was in fact a highly educated man, because he was also extremely well educated in the teachings of Judaism in his

day.

And yet here in these verses that I'm going to read, he makes a most astonishing statement. He says, I'm determined to know nothing. That's an unusual statement for any kind of person.

But I'd have to say for Jewish people it's astonishing. Because if there's one thing that the Jews have comprised historically through the centuries, it's knowledge. And to find a highly educated Jew saying, I'm determined to know nothing, you have to ask yourself whatever could have made such a man make such a decision.

Let me read the words now. 1 Corinthians 2, 1 through 5. And I brethren, when I came to you, that's the church at Corinth, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. We need to give this a historical setting.

If we were to turn to the book of Acts, we'd find that Paul's ministry in Corinth is described in Acts chapter 18. But in the previous chapter, chapter 17, we have the record of Paul's ministry in Athens. Now Athens was the university city of the world in that time.

It was the center of philosophy and human wisdom, the source of what we have come to call humanism. And Paul, rather surprisingly I think, adjusted himself to his audience. He spoke to the upper level of the intellectual and social life of Athens.

And he talked in terms of philosophy. And he even quoted a Greek poet. And at the end the results were pretty meager.

It says a few people believed. I don't know whether Paul was right or wrong about this message. But then he went on from Athens to Corinth, which was a large port city.

And a typical port city, full of all sorts of vice, prostitution, homosexuality, immorality and extortion of every kind. And in the meanwhile, somewhere between Athens and Corinth, he made this decision. When I get to Corinth, I'm going to forget everything I knew except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Now the results in Corinth were tremendous. The whole city was stirred. The whole city was impacted by the news of the gospel.

And historians estimate that quite early on there were probably 25,000 believers in the city of Corinth. Totally different from the response and the results in Athens. What made the difference? The message.

Jesus Christ crucified. Going back for a moment to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, I want to read some verses there because they are my personal testimony. As I've already said, I spent seven years studying Greek philosophy and other forms of philosophy, modern philosophy.

What was fashionable in those days, which is about 50 years ago, which was called linguistic philosophy, logical positivism and all that. If you've ever been involved in philosophy, I was a pupil of Ludwig Wittgenstein at Cambridge for two years. He was known as the father of linguistic philosophy.

A very brilliant man, but definitely not a Christian. So this is my personal testimony. 1 Corinthians 1 verses 18 through following.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, and this is quoted from the Old Testament, God says, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where then is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

That's my testimony. In the wisdom of God through wisdom I never came to know God. But when I heard the foolishness of the message preached and responded to it, I was saved.

Now I want to give you a number of different reasons why we need the cross at the center. Why nothing else must ever be allowed to take the place of the cross in the church, in general, and in our own lives in particular. I'm going to present to you six aspects of the cross.

Three in this session and three in the session to follow. First of all, let me explain for the benefit of possibly some people who are confused, what I mean by the cross. I realize for people with certain backgrounds, the cross is a piece of wood or metal that they hang around their necks or that they put on the wall of the church.

Now I want to say I'm in no sense criticizing that. I can perfectly accept it. In fact, in some of the circles in which I move in strongly anti-Christian social environments, I always am glad to see somebody with a cross around their neck.

Because it has a lot to say in that environment. But when I talk about the cross, that's not what I'm talking about. When I talk about the cross, I'm talking about the sacrifice that Jesus made of himself upon the cross.

His sacrificial death and all that it accomplished for us. But rather than use all those phrases again and again, I condense it to the phrase, the cross. The first aspect of the cross that I want to present to you is that it represents one perfect all-sufficient sacrifice.

This is stated in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 14. For by one sacrifice he, that is Jesus or God, for by one sacrifice he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. What the writer is saying is, by his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus made total, perfect, all-sufficient provision for every need of every human being at any time and in any place, forever.

He never would have to do it again. If you read the preceding verses, the writer is contrasting the priests of the old covenant with Jesus as the priest who offered himself as a sacrifice. He says about the Old Testament priests, they never sat down.

They always remained standing because their job was never finished. They could offer any number of sacrifices but always another sacrifice was going to be needed. But then he says about Jesus, but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin forever, sat down at the right hand of God.

Why did he sit down? Because he was never going to have to do it again. By one sacrifice he had made total, perfect provision for every need of every human being. The nature of the sacrifice is prophetically

described 700 years before it took place.

In the prophet Isaiah chapter 53, this great preview of the atonement of Jesus. Although Jesus is not named, he is the only one that answers this description. In verse 6 Isaiah says, All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him, that is on Jesus, the iniquity of us all. That's the problem of the whole human race.

It's one thing we all have in common. We may be Europeans or Americans or Russians or Asians or Africans. It doesn't make any difference.

This statement applies to all of us. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way.

We have turned our back on God and his requirements and gone our own way. The Bible here calls that iniquity. That is a very strong word.

I think the best, most helpful modern translation would be rebellion. God has made to meet on Jesus the rebellion of the whole human race. But that word that's translated rebellion also means the evil consequences and the punishment for rebellion.

And that's why it is a perfect sacrifice. Because God visited upon Jesus the rebellion of all of us, all its evil consequences and all the judgment that was due to it. In very simple language the truth is this.

All the evil due by justice to us came upon Jesus. That all the good due to the sinless obedience of the Son of God might be made available to us. Very, very simply.

All the evil came upon Jesus. That all the good might be made available to us. That's all that Jesus needed to do.

He did it all by that one sacrifice. In Isaiah 53, verse 10, the prophet takes this picture one step further and says, Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise or crush him. He has put him to grief.

When you make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. There incidentally is a clear prediction of the resurrection of Jesus. Because in the previous verses it has stated that his life was taken from him.

So when it says he shall see his seed he shall prolong his days, that could not be without his resurrection. But it says there that God made the soul of Jesus the sin offering or the guilt offering for the entire human race. This is something that our human finite minds cannot really comprehend.

That when Jesus was on the cross I believe personally our sicknesses and our pains were visited upon his body. But our sin came upon his soul. And his perfectly righteous holy soul was made sin with our sinfulness.

And by that sacrifice he carried away our sin. See the whole Bible has one consistent message. There's only one remedy for sin.

It's a sacrifice. And every sacrifice of the Old Testament looks forward prophetically to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. But by that one sacrifice he removed sin forever.

Really it's important in this context to study the epistle to the Hebrews. And the writer of Hebrews says about the sacrifices of the Old Testament. In those sacrifices there was a reminder again made every year of sins.

That they could not take away sin. Take for instance the chief sacrifice of Israel, the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement. It was only valid for one year.

It did not take away sin, it covered sin. It covered sin for the year until the sacrifice was due again. In a sense it was a reminder of sin.

Every year they were reminded you've got to deal with the sin issue. They could only deal with it for one year. But then the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Consequently no more sacrifice is needed for sin. Paul interprets this in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. Many Christians reading that verse in the New Testament would not immediately understand that Paul is quoting Isaiah chapter 53, verse 10.

You only understand that when you realize that according to the law of the Old Testament sacrifices the animal sacrificed was identified with the sin of the person who sacrificed it. So when Jesus was sacrificed on the cross he was identified with our sin. Paul expresses it like this in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21.

For God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him. You see the very simple exchange but very profound. God made Jesus to be sin with our sinfulness that in return we might be made righteous with his righteousness.

That's God's remedy for sin. There is no other. Let's look at one other statement by Paul in Romans chapter 8, verse 31 and following.

Again, Paul emphasizes the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Jesus. Romans 8, 31 and following. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? So that's what's provided through the sacrifice of Jesus.

God having given Jesus will not withhold anything but also with him freely give us all things. I'm going to say that again because it's a staggering thought. Also with him freely give us all things.

So the one sacrifice of Jesus releases the total abundance of God's mercy and provision. We do not need any other basis. In fact, there is no other basis.

This is the one and only and all-sufficient basis for the release of God's mercy and grace. Very important to understand this. Because if you come to God for mercy and grace on any other basis but the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, God will not meet with you.

Because it's a false basis. It's not true. And God is a God of truth.

We can't come to him on the basis of our good works or our religiosity or our family background or our nationality or our talents because God is not impressed by those. They do not release the mercy and

grace of God. The only thing that releases God's mercy and grace is the fact that Jesus was made sin with our sinfulness, died in our place and rose again from the dead.

And I want to urge you never to pass a day without meditating on that. Never to displace this truth from the center of your thoughts and your words and your life. Because as soon as the cross becomes displaced you'll find that you're not any longer enjoying the abundance of God's grace.

You'll find yourself struggling. You'll find yourself perplexed, confused and very often you'll find yourself feeling guilty. And you won't understand what's happened in my life.

Why has things gone wrong? The answer is what has happened in your life is that the cross has been displaced from the center. All right, the second aspect of the cross that I want to speak about is that it's through the cross that God's supernatural grace is released in our lives. You see, Christianity is not a set of rules.

I remember saying this to quite a large audience somewhere. I think it was in the United States but I forget. And I wasn't really expecting to astonish people but I said to them casually of course Christianity is not a set of rules.

And they looked at me in astonishment. I think they would have been less shocked if I'd said there is no God. To me this is something that's become obvious over the years.

Christianity is not a set of rules. It's not a set of laws. Israel had had a set of laws for fourteen centuries given by Moses.

And Paul tells us that the law is perfect. It's righteous, it's holy, it's good. We can never improve on the law of Moses if it comes to a law.

If that would do it, there would have been no need for Jesus to come. I smile sometimes because it seems to me that Christians who talk the most about grace sometimes know the least about it. I think of the people who say we're not under the law and then they construct their own set of religious rules.

Which is sometimes quite complicated. Let me tell you, dear brothers and sisters, if the law of Moses wouldn't do it, Baptist law won't do it, Pentecostal law won't do it, Catholic law won't do it. We can never improve on the law of Moses.

But the law of Moses failed. Not because there was anything wrong with the law, but because there was a problem in us. We were unable to keep the law because of the weakness of our fleshly nature.

I'd like to read some words of Paul on this theme in Galatians chapter 3, verses 11 and 12. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith. Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who does them shall live by them.

So Paul says no one can ever achieve righteousness with God by the law. Actually, the translators have put in the word the. The law.

Which is legitimate because he has primarily in mind the law of Moses. But if you leave out the word the, it's still true. No one can achieve righteousness with God by keeping any law.

There is no law that can enable us to achieve righteousness with God. It's not the way we can ever become righteous with God. Now I'm sure I can see some of you looking puzzled.

I'm not surprised. I think this is one of the most frequently made statements in the New Testament, which is the most persistently ignored by Christians. There must be at least a dozen places in the New Testament where it says in one way or another you can never achieve righteousness with God by keeping a set of rules.

And yet the majority of Christians that I move amongst have somehow got the idea that if I keep the right rules, I'm all right. It doesn't work. God doesn't accept it.

It doesn't produce the results that God wants. As a matter of fact, it tends to produce the exact opposite. Because people who focus on keeping laws become what we call legalistic.

And then whatever particular section of the church they belong to, they say our laws are right and we're righteous because we keep them. And those people over there in that section of the church don't keep our laws so they're not righteous. So actually legalism tends to split the church up into a lot of different groups according to the particular set of laws which one group is keeping.

Then what is the purpose of the cross? How can we avail ourselves of it? I want to say something that's very easy to say but not always easy to live. Which is, the purpose of the cross is to bring us to the end of all our wisdom and all our strength. And to show us that they are totally of no avail whatever.

And we can only begin to enter into the grace of God when we've come to the end of ourselves. A lot of you at the present time are going through problems and pressures in your lives. And you're saying, what's God doing? The answer is God is gently but firmly bringing you to the end of yourself.

Where the best you can do doesn't even begin to be good enough. And you've got to come to the end of all that and release something that's totally from God which is good enough. Again I go back to 1 Corinthians because as I've said I particularly love these chapters.

1 Corinthians chapter 1. I dare say God in a way prepared me to teach this kind of truth by letting me wallow in philosophy for a long while. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 22 through 25. For the Jews require or demand a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom.

That's just as true today as it was when Paul wrote it. And I will offer this comment. I don't believe we really have a right to offer the Jews a gospel which is not supernaturally attested.

I won't go into that but I don't think there's any New Testament basis for it. For the Jews require a sign and Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified.

What do we preach? Not just Christ. It's easy to preach Christ as the great teacher and the wonderful healer. But it doesn't get the job done.

We have to preach Christ crucified. To the Jews a stumbling block, still is today. And to the Greeks foolishness, still is today.

But, thank God for the but. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. But when do we find Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God? Only when we've come to the end of our own power and our own wisdom.

And then Paul makes this marvelous statement. The foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. In one word, what is the foolishness of God and what is the weakness of God? The cross, that's right.

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