

Cross: Pardon by the Cross

by G. Campbell Morgan

G. Campbell Morgan's sermon explores the profound significance of the Cross as the source of pardon and redemption for human sin.

Scripture: Matthew 7:15, Acts 20:32, 1 Thessalonians 2:3, 2 Timothy 2:14-23, 2 Peter 2:6

Topics: "The Cross", "Gods Grace"

Description

Greek Word Studies preaches on the concept of 'ruin' (katastrophe), which signifies total destruction and turning things upside down. This state of ruin can be seen in the downfall of cities like Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as in the spiritual corruption and perversion of individuals. Engaging in word battles and controversies can lead to catastrophic outcomes, turning people away from the truth and causing harm to believers. The antidote to such ruinous behavior is found in focusing on the word of God's grace, which builds up and edifies the hearers.

Transcript

EVERYTHING A SINNING MAN NEEDS HE FINDS AT THE CROSS. Apart from the fact of human sin, the Cross is indeed foolishness, a veritable stumbling-block. To the Greek, seeking for the culture of uncultured man, "foolishness," something without meaning, a story that can have no moral effect. To the Hebrew, that is the degraded Hebrew, whose ideals are materialized, a stumbling-block, a skandalon, something that interferes with progress rather than helps it. And both are fight, unless we see the background of sin that makes the Cross necessary, and the foreground of redemption that comes by the way of the Cross.

Unless there is some profounder meaning in the death of Jesus of Nazareth than the end of His life, then the Cross brings me into the realm of the greatest mystery, the deepest darkness, the most unfathomable wonder I have ever known. I will put this as superlatively as I feel, and as carefully as I may; unless there be some meaning in that Cross for others than the One dying on it, then the Cross makes me an unbeliever in the government of God. I cannot believe in the beneficence and goodness and righteousness of God if the Cross is nothing more than the ending of the life of Jesus. We speak of the problem of evil; it confronts us everywhere, but that Cross is the crux of it. If Incarnate Purity must be mauled to death by vile impurity, and God never interfere; if a life absolutely impelled by love must be brutally murdered by devilish hatred, and God say nothing; and if that is all, then I decline to believe in the goodness of God. There must be some other explanation of the Cross if I am to be saved from infidelity. If

in the life of Jesus the Cross was an accident, then the world is handed over to chaos, there is no throne, there is no government, and we are but puppets, and none knows the issue.

But to see the Cross in its relation to the fact of human sin, intelligently to appreciate what the New Testament teaches us concerning it, to see how the experience of nineteen hundred years verifies the doctrines of the New Testament in the lives of countless multitudes of men and women, is at the Cross to become, not an infidel, but a believer. Then at the Cross I see, not chaos, but the dawn of cosmos, not a darkness and an anarchy that appall me and fill me with despair, but a light and a government that make my heart sing amid the processes of a new creation, for I know by that sign amid the world's darkness that God is on the throne, and that at last He must win.

I want to speak of some of the blessings, the advantages, the values that have come to men, and still are at the disposal of men by the way of the Cross. I propose to begin with the very simplest, to begin in the line of experience, with Pardon. That is only the first thing. It is not the last thing, it is not the deepest thing, it is not that after which some of our hearts are supremely hungry. In my next sermon I shall speak of another value of the Cross. Purity. Then I will speak of Peace by the way of the Cross, and after that of Power by the way of the Cross, and, finally, of Promise by the way of the Cross. In all this series of studies I shall do no more than touch the fringe. Every day I need the Cross more, and can talk of it less glibly. Every day I live this Christian life I am more and more conscious that I cannot understand the mystery of all Jesus did; yet more and more conscious that by the way of that Cross, and that Cross alone, my wounded heart is healed, my withered soul is renewed, my deformed spirit is built up, my broken manhood is re-made; and every day I live I sing in my heart with new meaning,

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,

Let me hide myself in Thee.

Let the water and the blood

From Thy riven side which flowed,

Be of sin the double cure,

Save from guilt and make me pure.

The first thing that a sinning man needs is pardon. The note of preaching may differ in the West from that of the East, but whether in West or East, North or South, amid high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, the first fact that attracts men to Christianity is the fact that it proclaims pardon for sin; and as a man begins to weigh his life by the infinite balances, and to measure it by the undying standards, the first consciousness that breaks in upon his spiritual conception is that he needs forgiveness.

In speaking of the work of Jesus, Paul declares that we have "our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." "Our redemption," "our trespasses." The former is the foreground, and the latter, background of the Cross. We will begin with the background, "our trespasses."

The particular word here translated "sins" or "trespasses" is a word that signifies actual wrongdoing, and we are restricted this evening, not by my own choice, but by the very terms of the text, to that idea of sin, actual wrong-doing, wrong knowingly, wilfully, done. Sin as a principle we shall consider in a subsequent sermon.

The apostolic word in the epistle to the Romans, which is the foundation epistle of the gospel of the grace of God, declares that all have sinned. The Apostle does not say all are sinners. That is true. He will say that again, and in other ways; but he says "all have sinned." I need take no time to discuss the question of how it comes that all have sinned. I am not speaking of the fall of man, of the fall of the race. I will not now discuss the sins of such men as have never walked in the light of revelation.

I speak of the actual sins of men who have broken law definitely, positively, wilfully. That is the aspect of sin with which my text deals. And before we can understand this subject we must go back to first principles. We do not begin to know what sin is until there is a recognition of the government and claim of God in every human life. Exile God from the moral government of His universe, and we shall no longer make our confession of sin or sins. Exile God from relationship to the moral, and then sin will be continuous abnormality, a perpetual infirmity, but it will never be trespass.

We must first recognize the throne of God, and the government of God. If you question that honestly and sincerely, then you will not follow my text. We must first take for granted that every man and woman, each one of us, is an individual creation of God, and that for every human life there is a Divine plan, a Divine purpose, and a Divine place. We must come to understand that the purpose of God in every human life is the purpose of perfect love, not merely for the race as a whole, but for every individual constituting a part of the race.

Therefore in the economy of God the race is imperfect in the imperfection of any individual, perfected only as every man, every individual, finds his or her place in the great whole, and contributes his or her share to the commonwealth of which God Himself is King. The race is suffering from break-up, and division, and spoliation. But why? Always because the units have broken law, fallen out of harmony, created the chaos. As a whole, the race has no great and immediate responsibility to God.

Individual souls have, and so we come down from the race idea, and think of this fact, that if I would contribute my quota to the well-being of all, if I would fill my niche in the infinite purpose of the infinite Creator, the unifying Originator, and the ever-present Governor, I must find what is His will for me and obey it. That is the prime necessity in every human life. Human life is created by God and for God, and the first question of every human life ought to be, What is God's will for me?

It is always a larger question than it seems. Find God's will for you, and you have helped to bring in God's will for the world. Walk in the way God has appointed for you, and keep His commandments, and you have made your contribution by so doing to His ultimate realization of the largest purpose of His infinite heart. I sin not only against myself when I break law, not only against God, but against the race. I postpone the golden age. I hinder the incoming of all for which my heart sighs in its holiest moments whenever I sin, for by the breaking of law on the part of the individual there is the postponement of the realization of the purposes of God for the race. Actual sin on my part therefore is not merely something that wrongs me and insults heaven. It is something that harms and injures and blights the race.

If this, indeed, be a fact, that the whole race is under the government of God, but is dependent for realization of His purpose on the obedience of the individual, then we have made one step toward understanding sin. Every human life, every individual life, is conditioned within law, and that law is simply the Divine revelation of the pathway along which the individual may move to fulfilment of personality, and so contribute to the realization of the largest purpose of God in the race.

Do we know anything of these things? We all do. You may never have phrased the thing as I have phrased it. You may have looked at it from the personal position, and never realized your relation to the whole race. But everyone is conscious of having met God, heard His voice, and disobeyed. And here is where some of you will challenge me. You will say, No, I have never met God. I have heard the voice of the preacher, I have read the statements of the Scriptures of the Christian, I have been made familiar with the ethic of Christianity, but I have never met God. Then let me state the case differently. Would you feel perfectly prepared to stand where I stand, and in face of this congregation of men and women, of like passions with yourself--would you be prepared to say, "I have never deliberately done wrong"? Has there never been a moment when you stood face to face with right and wrong, and chose wrong? There is not a man or woman that is honest but will admit the fact of personal wrongdoing. You say, "I was driven by the force of passion I have inherited." I have nothing to do with that now. You say, "The temptation was so subtle and strong I could not help it." I have nothing to do with that. I am asking you one question: Is there a trespass chargeable against you in the light of the infinite Order? For one single moment I will cease to speak of your relation to God, and ask you to speak of humanity as a whole. Have you sinned against your race? Has there not been one moment in your life when you knew truth, and lied; when you knew purity and descended to impurity; straightness and consented to crookedness? I need not labor the inquiry, for I take it I am speaking to those who are perfectly prepared, alone and in silence before God, to be honest; and if you are, though there is no terror in it to you yet, though you do not realize the tremendous meaning of what you have confessed, there is not one that will not have to say, "I also have sinned; I also have committed a trespass."

One step further. If you have submitted to this inquiry in simplicity, you have had to say more than once, "I have sinned." You have been compelled to say, "My sins as mountains rise." They may not have been the sins that society labels vulgar. The policeman's hand has never rested on you. You have not yet lost your character in the eyes of men. But you have descended to the low when the high flamed before you. You have chosen a pathway because it was easy, though you knew it was dishonorable, when the rough, rugged, heroic pathway was in front of you. We all have sinned.

Now I charge this home upon you-and not on you alone, beloved, but on my own heart, as we stand in the presence of this great fact. The moment I say I have sinned, in that very moment, solemn and awful as it is, in that very moment I have confessed that I have been guilty of something that I cannot undo, that I have put myself into relation with disorder, instead of order, that I have contributed to all over which I mourn as I look out abroad in the world to-day. In brief, I have said that I have done something that I cannot undo, and that I cannot forgive myself for doing, unless, perchance, by some mystery that is beyond me, it can be canceled, undone, made not to be.

Sin is not a small act. Sin is something which, once committed, cannot be undone. The broken law means a marring of the ultimate purpose. That is punishment beginning here, but not ending here, unless, by infinite grace, the sin is ended here. I am sometimes told that hell is here and now, and so it is. I am sometimes told that heaven is here and now, and so it is. Both axe here and now; but when I am told that hell is here and now, if the deduction I am asked to make is that it is only here and now, by the same reasoning I must decide that heaven is only here and now. If heaven be a condition into which a man enters now, and more largely in the after-life, hell is a condition into which man enters now, and more largely in the after-life.

Hell, according to Scripture is failure, with all that it means in the consciousness and experience of man. Literal fire? No, a thousand times no, nothing so small; but the actual positive consciousness that I have

failed, and have contributed to the failure of others. The fire is never quenched, and the worm never dies. The fire is no more physical than is the worm; but they are infinitely worse; they are spiritual, they are the natural outworking of sin. God's plan for man is the ultimate realization of high purpose in the spiritual places. I would not have it. I chose the wrong. I sinned. In that moment, by the irrevocable decree of my own will, I set my face toward the darkling void where God is alienated, toward the awful spaces in which there is neither fellowship nor light, but in which I, with an ever-burning capacity for the high, am doomed to the low I have chosen. That is the out-working of sin. That is the meaning of hell. And I sit, and glibly, quietly, say, Oh, yes, I sinned, I lied, I committed a theft, I dishonored some other human being. I sinned, but it is all right.

Man, it is all wrong! And, having once done the sin, it is not thy tears of repentance or prayer can atone. You cannot undo it. There it is in the past. Ten years ago, twenty-more for some of you-- but you cannot undo it. Disorder in the universe, and you created it. No, no, not twenty years, not ten, but yesterday, to-day-with God's golden sunlight bathing all this Babel, prophetic of a great resurrection, you sinned under God's sunlight to-day. You cannot undo it. You cannot overtake it. You have started discord, and the infinite spaces are catching it up and multiplying it.

Sin is never little. Never talk of peccadilloes--hellish word for the excuse of the thing that aims at the dethronement of God and the spoilation of all His infinite plan. Oh, man, man! if you could but see your trespass, your little sin, in all its magnified meaning, you would cry out to-night, "What must I do to be saved?" "Our trespasses"--and some-times one wishes only that one could persuade people to put into their prayer the tragedy that ought to be in it. In great congregations we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses," and there is the rustle of soft music about it. Oh, there is tragedy in it, there is ruin in it, there is hell in it. If you and I prayed that prayer as it ought to be prayed, it would escape us with a sob, and a wail, and a cry.

But, thank God, there is the foreground of my text! What is this thing that Paul writes? "Our redemption through His blood." Now again we must get down to the simple things if we would understand the larger things. "Through His blood." Whose? And it is the old, old story. I have no new Saviour to bring you--"Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you: Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay." So said Peter in his first Pentecostal sermon. "Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God," the perfect One, the sinless One, the One Who never deviated from truth, or touched impurity, or committed theft, or chose the low, or consented to the dishonorable--the One Who never trespassed, Jesus, the perfect Man; and, if I am tempted to debate it, or discuss it, or defend it, I will resist the temptation. After all kinds of criticism, the ages have set their seal on the testimony of His own age, the testimony of a man in His own age: "I find no fault in Him"; the testimony of a devil in His own age: "I know Thee Who Thou art, the holy One of God"; the testimony of God in His own age: "Thou art My Son: in Thee I am well pleased." Every rolling century has made deeper the imprint of that great truth, that Jesus was the perfect Man.

But I am not redeemed by His perfection. His perfection may lure me to something higher. As I talked of trespasses--and I talked of mine as well as yours--suddenly there came passing in front of my vision the radiant Person of Jesus, so pure, so tender, so perfect, that neither man, nor devil, nor God could find fault with Him. I look at Him and I say: Oh, if I could be such as He! Oh, if from this hour, in this church, I could take this life of mine and live it like He lived His! I will follow Him; I will try; and back out of the years there come to me my trespasses, and suddenly my heart says, It cannot be. His life was perfect from cradle to Cross--no flaw, no deviation, no deflection; and if even from now I could live all the rest of my life perfectly,

what am I to do with the scars and the spoiling of the past?

No, Jesus cannot save me by His perfection, Our redemption through His perfection? No. What, then? "Through His blood."

That phrase is not pleasant. It offends our sensibilities, Redemption through blood, and you shrink, you do not like it. You agree with the man who says that this is a religion of the shambles, and you object to it. God never meant that you should be pleased with that word, "blood." God reckoned blood so sacred as to say, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." It is not refined; it is vulgar, this shedding of blood! It shocks you, startles you, appalls you. God meant it should, and especially when you see Whose blood it is. Redeemed not with the blood of bulls and of goats--oh, soul of mine, how canst thou utter it?--but with the precious blood of the Son of God, the dying of the pure and spotless. What happened in that dying I cannot tell. I do not know the mystery. I cannot go into that darkness. Alone He trod the winepress. Alone He bore the pain. You and I must stand outside. Oh, behold Him, the Perfect dying, the Sinless suffering! God in Christ bent to bruising! And as I see the mystery of the human blood I say: What means it, for there is no place for such dying in such pure life?

And now the answer comes, and I dare not give it you in my own language. I will give it you in the language of Holy Scripture: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Who, His own self, bare our sins in His body upon the tree." "He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." Oh, God, give us a vision of it! A small thing? Unutterably great! One lonely soul in the centuries! Are you puzzled and say, How can that be for the race? Behold Him! See Who that is! Put thy measurement, if thou canst, on the infinite value of His purity; plumb the depth of His holiness, climb the steep ascent of all that wondrous life, and know that this is God incarnate,--and when the vision of it breaks upon you, and the stupendous wonder of it overwhelms you, then listen: "Our redemption through His blood"; and if you dare to take that blood away, you must forgive me if I am angry with you. You knock from underneath my feet the one rock foundation of my faith, you take from my bruised and broken heart its only solace. I come to the infinite mystery, and there, by that scene, by that token, by that unveiling of the Infinite passion and compassion, I know that the trespass I could not overtake is forgiven.

The joyful news of sins forgiven,

Of hell subdued, and peace with heaven.

You say, But you have not explained it. Again I say, I cannot, but I know it. I want to say one little word to you, dear man, honestly groping after some solution of this great mystery. If, somehow, you could persuade me that God could forgive my trespass, which was the breaking up of the order of the universe, simply out of pity, well, my heart could not rest in it. I could not forgive myself that way. I should always realize that the thing was there, that its issue could not be overtaken. How can I utter it, how can I tell it, when I see God in Christ stooping and catching that sin into His own heart, and bearing its pain, and exhausting its powers? Then, while the Cross shall ever fill me with grief on account of my sin, it fills me with joy that Christ has triumphed, and that "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." The forgiveness of our trespasses can come to us only through His blood.

But, then, there are unforgiven men and women, and to such my final word shall be spoken. How may we obtain the forgiveness provided by the mystery of the Cross? First, I think there must be a sense of need:

All the fitness He requireth

Is to feel your need of Him.

And now there are those who feel their need. You say, Of course, I need it; I need forgiveness, I also am a sinner, I also have sinned. That is the first step toward obtaining. And what next? There must be a recognition on your part of the supremacy and sovereignty of God, and that I think is included in your confession of a sense of need. What next? Now there must be on your part repentance, the renunciation of the wrong, the spirit willing, if only the power be given you, to turn from the sin.

Dr. Pierson once gave me a great illustration on this subject. He told me of how in one of the Southern States a man lay condemned to die for having murdered another man; and a brother of the condemned murderer, who himself was a pure, strong man, and had laid the State under obligation to him, went and pleaded the cause of his condemned brother with the authorities, and though the case was one of clear murder, though there was no question about this, for the sake of the brother who had saved lives they consented to pardon the brother who had taken life. Then he went with the pardon of his condemned brother in his possession. He did not tell him immediately, but presently in talking to him he said to him, "If you had your pardon, supposing you had it now, and you were to go out free, what would you do?" And with a gleam of malice and hatred in his eye the murderer said, "I would find the principal witness and I would kill him, and I would kill the judge." And that brother said nothing of the pardon, but leaving the cell he tore it to pieces and destroyed it, and you know that he did right.

Pardon for a man who is persisting in sin is impossible. It would continue the disorder, and make it infinitely worse. God will pardon you even though you cannot undo your past, pardon you without any merit on your part; but if in your heart you still cling to sin, He cannot, dare not, pardon you. And that is why the condition of receiving remission is repentance toward God. And repentance does not mean that a man quits sinning, it means that he is willing to quit if but the power be given him to do it. And that is the condition. You have committed sin. Are you willing to cease, if only the past may be dealt with, and power given to you by which you shall sin no more? That is repentance.

Yes, willing, more than willing, says some tired heart. Then what next shall I say to you? "Behold the Lamb of God." God will give you perfect and full pardon now if you will trust Him, if you will take it of His grace, if instead of attempting to win it, if instead of attempting to merit it you will just come as a poor, guilty, ruined soul-for such you are-and, kneeling at the foot of that Cross, will take God's pardon through Jesus Christ, that is all.

When may I have it? Now. All your sin may be blotted out now. Your neighbor will not know. God will know. But now, trust Him, sinning heart, not on the basis of pity, but on the basis of infinite righteousness wrought out in love ' I and rendered dynamic in the mystery of His Cross. "We have our redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins."

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