

JOHN 12.27-32: THE AMAZING POWER OF THE SAVIOUR

[Chelmsford 10 April 2011]

1. JESUS CAME TO DIE ON A CROSS FOR US

Every religion and ideology has its symbol

- Buddhism has the lotus flower
- Judaism has the star of David
- Islam has the moon's crescent
- Marxism has the hammer and the sickle
- Christianity has the cross

Interestingly the cross was not the earliest symbol of Christianity

Initially it was regarded as too shameful a symbol – for crucifixion was a terrible punishment reserved for the lowest of the low.

So in the catacombs of Rome, where the early Christians hid from their persecutors, we find not pictures of a cross, but rather pictures of *peacocks*, which symbolized immortality – we find too pictures of doves and of athletes' victory palms.

In particular we find also pictures of *fish*. Why a fish? Because the Greek word for a fish (ichthus) was an acronym for the words 'Jesus Christ the Son of God Saviour.

A little later the *Chi-Rho* monogram emerged – *chi* = the equivalent of our 'ch', and *rho* is the Greek equivalent of our letter 'r' – i.e. the first two letters of the Greek word *Christos*, Christ.

But eventually it was the cross which became the symbol of the Christian faith – and rightly so, because it is *the cross* which *is at the heart of the Christian faith*.

Significantly it is an empty cross – the crucifix is a late development and was not used until the 6th century. The empty cross signifies we believe not just in a crucified Saviour, but also in a risen Lord.

The resurrection without the cross would make no sense – just as indeed the cross without the resurrection would make no sense either.

"We proclaim the crucified Christ" wrote the Apostle Paul, **"a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles"** (1 Cor 1.23)

The cross is at the heart of Christian believing.

And no more clearly do we see this than in John 12, the passage I want us to focus on this morning. There in John 12.27 Jesus declares with the cross in mind: **"that is why I came"**

Like any other 33 year old, *Jesus was not keen to die*.

In many ways Jesus feared dying.

Listen to Jesus revealing something of the inner turmoil he experienced.

12.27: **Now my heart is troubled**. JB Phillips: *Now comes my hour of heart-break*

According to one commentator, the Greek word (*tarache*) used here "signifies agitation, horror, convulsion, and shock of spirit" (GRB-M).

Jesus' heart – literally his 'soul' (psyche) – is *"in turmoil"* (REB)

Some have suggested that Jesus was quoting from Psalm 6.3: **"my soul is struck with terror"** (NRSV).

Jesus was already beginning to go through the agony of Gethsemane.

Already he was anticipating the horror of the Cross.

And what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'?

The GNB, like some other modern versions, expresses this as a question.

However, some scholars say that what we have here is not a question, but rather a cry for help. This was not what Jesus longed to say – but rather what he did say:

“Father, save me from this hour!”.

He wanted to be spared the pain & the torture of Calvary.

But then reality kicked in: **“But that is why I came – so that I might go through this hour of suffering”**

Make no mistake: *Jesus did not go to the Cross serenely & peacefully.*

Far from it. He knew he faced a painful death. Indeed, ‘painful’ is scarcely the word.

It is no exaggeration to say that crucifixion was probably the cruellest & most barbaric form of execution the world has ever devised.

Yet in spite of himself, *Jesus went to the Cross because he knew that only in this way could he affect your life and mine.*

When you and I come to die, *we will die our own individual deaths*

Nobody will be the better because of our deaths.

Or at least, nobody beyond a limited circle will be the better.

Our children or one or two close friends might feel the better - perhaps because at last we are no longer the burden we may have become; or perhaps because we have left them some money in our will.

But as far as the wider world is concerned, our deaths will be irrelevant - of no significance whatever.

But Jesus knew that the death he would die would be no ordinary death - it would be for others. It was for this reason chose to go the way of the cross.

“Father”, he cried out **“bring glory to your name”** (12.28)

We sometimes speak of children being a credit to their parents.

The way in which children conduct themselves can be a sign of good parenting

Jesus, in going the way of the Cross brought credit to the Father – he brought honour to his name. In the words of Sir Edwin Hoskyns: “This obedience is the glorification of the Father’s name and constitutes the foundation of the Christian religion”

In the words of the Philippian Christ hymn, Jesus **“walked the path of obedience all the way to death – his death on the cross”** (Phil 2.8).

What an amazing act of surrender to the Father’s will.

What an amazing act of love for you and for me.

Look to Jesus and see there one who came to die on a cross for you.

But why did he have to die? What is so special about the cross?

What did Jesus achieve through dying on the cross?

2. JESUS SETS US FREE BY MEANS OF THE CROSS

Listen to Jesus: "**Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown**" (12.31)

Brave words you may say - but hardly apt

After all, within a matter of days Jesus was nailed to a Cross. *To speak of the world being judged, of Satan being overthrown, seems somewhat ironic.*

Indeed, one could well claim that the day Jesus was crucified represented not the defeat of evil, but the triumph of evil. For on that day people rejected the Son of God - indeed, they murdered the Son of God. There can be no more heinous act than that. And yet we Christians call that Bad Friday *Good Friday*. Why?

i) *Judgment results in freedom*

Now is the time for this world to be judged

That is to say, the cross exposes the sin of the world

The cross points to the fact that we rejected and crucified the Son of God.

The cross reveals the wickedness of humankind

Before God we all stand condemned. Our guilt is there for all to see.

But amazingly the cross always reveals the love of God

For God in his love sent his Son to endure the judgment that should have been ours.

It has been said, "*The sentence of judgment passed on this world is endured by the one whom the world murders. This turns the awful news of judgment on sin at the cross into the good news of deliverance from condemnation through the cross*" (GRB-M).

Suddenly the tables are turned and a guilty verdict becomes a non-guilty verdict

As a result of Jesus taking our place, we have been set free.

"**There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**" said John the Baptist to his disciples (John 1.29). And in a way which John the Baptist and his disciples could never have guessed, Jesus did precisely that.

The Cross is the place where God dealt with our sin.

The Cross is the place where we have been set free from sin and all the consequences which follow from our sin.

ii) *Defeat turns to victory*

Now the ruler of this world will be overthrown

The cross is the place where Satan, the "**ruler of this world**", was dethroned.

As a result of Jesus dealing with our sin, enduring the judgment that should have been ours, Satan has lost his grip on us. Jesus by means of his death on the cross "smashes the chains of guilt and condemnation with which the evil one has bound the children of Adam since the fall" (Bruce Milne).

I.e. we need not be trapped by our past – there is forgiveness – we can begin again.

True, Satan still has some power - but that power is residual.

Defeat is staring him in the face.

Jesus has triumphed over the Evil One. Jesus has set us free.

3. **JESUS BY MEANS OF THE CROSS APPEALS TO EACH ONE OF US**

"When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself" (12.32)

The first step in crucifixion was to lay the cross flat on the ground and for the criminal to be laid on top of it. The criminal was forced to stretch out his arms, and nails were driven through his hands. Then in a moment of searing agony the cross was lifted up and set in its socket with the victim hanging on it.

Jesus was **lifted up when he was crucified**.

But almost certainly there is a double-entendre here

For the lifting up is not simply a reference to the Cross - but also to **the resurrection**

For the underlying Aramaic word Jesus used referred not just to a criminal being raised on a stake for his execution, but also to **lifting up one who is bowed down**.

In the words of the Apostle Paul: Jesus, who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross - was **highly exalted** by God.

Lifting up could refer to the humiliation of the cross, but also to the glory of the Resurrection

I.e. it is not just the Crucified Lord Jesus who seeks to draw all people to himself - **it is also the Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus who invites us** to respond to his love, to receive his forgiveness, to enter into the new life he has gained for you and for me

Yes, Jesus by means of his Cross appeals to each one of us

Suspended from the cross, some seven to nine feet from the ground, Jesus had his arms stretched out for you and for me.

Just think of those arms - think of them stretched out to embrace us all.

Jew and Gentile - black and white - educated & uneducated - rich and poor

Jesus said: **When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself**

It doesn't matter who you are - Jesus died for you

It doesn't matter what kind of life you've lived - he died for you

There is something magnetic about the power of the Cross

When Jesus is lifted up, people respond to him

For this reason the cross has been described as '*the universal magnet*'

There is something wonderfully attractive about the love of God.

But sadly it is possible to resist God's love.

It is possible to resist the magnetism of the cross

If we are determined, we can plant our feet firmly wide apart and resist the power of God's love. The fact is that "There is no limit to Jesus' saving power – except the resistance of unbelief" (Schnackenburg).

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son for us all – but he refuses to force his love upon us.

But please God, may there be nobody here this morning who is determined not to believe.

Look to Jesus – see his determination to go the way of the cross, in spite of the pain, in spite of the suffering, in spite of having to endure the horror of God's judgment against your sin and mine,

Yes, look to Jesus – and allow yourself to be drawn to him

When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself

In this run up to Easter, let us remind ourselves when Jesus died on that cross, he died for us all. He died not just for us – but for our families and our extended families.

He died for our neighbours, our work colleagues, our friends – he died for all.

But do they know they died for them?

Are there friends or family members who have yet to respond to the love of Jesus?

This Easter we have a number of opportunities to share the good news.

- We have our Easter labyrinth
- We have our Easter services

If you know the love of the Saviour, then let me encourage you to take an Easter invitation and invite your friends and family to come and experience the labyrinth – to come and share in our Easter praise. For Jesus did not come just for you & for me, & came for all. He calls us to share his love with all.