

THE PATH OF FORGIVENESS:
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Colossians 2:11-15

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Why was Jesus crucified? Clearly, he got caught in the machinery of Empire, chewed up between the cogs of Rome and Judean Temple powers. And they crucified him to discourage others from rocking the boat. But that's at a human level. At a spiritual, eternal level, something more was going on at the Cross. God has a way of taking our worst and making it God's best. So let's survey the wondrous Cross.

The Apostle Paul shows us some beautiful things in this Colossian letter. When I survey the wondrous Cross, I see a mirror, showing us the worst of our human nature, our violence and hate. "Dead in trespasses..." (v. 13, NRSV) is translated "incapable of responding to God" in *The Message*. Our selfishness enslaves us. In short, the crucifixion of Jesus shows us what kind of people we are. I heard a preacher say one time that the Cross is the only place where we can be fully known and fully loved at the same time.

But Paul goes on. When I survey the wondrous Cross, I see a big eraser, like a white board eraser. Or, if Paul were writing in our day, he might say the Cross is God's delete button. Read vv. 13b-14. If the crucifixion tells us what kind of people we are, it also shows us what kind of God God is. Tablets as we know them were precious and few in Paul's day, so a scribe would reuse the same slate over and over. He would wipe it clean so that no trace remained of what was written the last time. Paul says our debt, the list of charges against us, has been wiped out. Completely rubbed out, erased--that's our sins!

But the Apostle Paul isn't finished. He has yet another image for us. When I survey the wondrous Cross, I see a victory parade, displaying God's conquest over the forces of darkness (v. 15). In ancient days, after a decisive military victory, the captives would be stripped of their armor and forced to march in a humiliating parade as proof of victory. "He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets" (v. 15, *The Message*). We need this image this morning, because someone is here saying, "How could God forgive me?" You need to see the final victory over sin, the victory parade. Someone else here today is still bitter, holding a poisonous grudge because of some injustice. You need to see that in the end, God will have the last word. Because of the Cross, there will be a victory parade.

But when we think of the Cross, all analogies eventually break down and fail to plumb the mystery. For example, I've heard people use the comparison that God is the judge and Jesus is our lawyer, pleading our case. The problem with that is that we must never picture Jesus as for us and God is not. Because scripture declares "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to

himself..." (2 Cor. 5:19). You see, a judge is impartial. God is anything but impartial. At the Cross, God is friend. God is invested in us. God knows us and invites us to know Him. God invites us into relationship [I am indebted to C.E.B. Cranfield for this thought, cited in *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 86, No. 3, p. 402].

All through this sermon series, we've been saying over and over again--our forgiveness of others is rooted in God's forgiveness of us. So ponder this scripture passage about the Cross and see if helps you love God and others. I agree with Tony Jones who said that if your understanding of the Cross doesn't show you the love of God and if it doesn't provoke greater love for others, your view of the Cross is messed up! [*Did God Kill Jesus?*, p. 210]. When you don't "feel" like forgiving someone, just remember, someone else has already paid for that sin. It's all done! You don't need to try to get someone to pay more!

Years ago, a Christian therapist-pastor answered questions in a popular magazine column. One married couple wrote about their troubled marriage. They fought all the time and their young son was now acting out, getting in trouble at school, with friends, everywhere, in his own way, trying to keep them from fighting with each other. The pastor-therapist wrote several suggestions and at the end, he said, "Tell your son someone already sacrificed himself for his parents' sins. He doesn't have to sacrifice himself. And that's what we say to everyone punishing self or others for sins--the sacrifice has been made!

When I survey the wondrous Cross, I see God standing on a hill called Calvary and shouting, "I love you!" And God wants to stand beside us as we say that to others. I love you. I forgive you.