

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

DECEMBER 4, 2022 | WALKING WITH JESUS | JOHN 12:27-50 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Father, as we come before you now and open your word, we do so asking that you would give us practical applications that apply to our own hearts this week. We ask you to touch us deeply. We're not just looking for academics. We're looking for heart change. So we ask that you speak to us in a very specific way today. In Jesus' name, amen.

I think there's something inside of all of our hearts that loves superheroes. I think that as I was growing up, I really liked the Old Testament Bible stories of Samson, David, Moses, and Joshua. Those are great stories. I can imagine the Jewish young men growing up, the disciples themselves growing up, hearing those stories about Joshua knocking down the walls of Jericho and David killing Goliath, Gideon taking 300 men and conquering this huge battle. Just all of these superheroes in the Bible are attractive to us.

Maybe that's one of the reasons that the disciples were so attracted to Jesus because He was the ultimate superhero. He can feed all these people with just a little bit. He's the one who can heal people. What an amazing person. So they're all in. They want to serve Christ with all of their hearts. I think that's why it's so difficult for them to grasp this idea that Jesus is going to die. I mean, He's only thirty-two years old. That's pretty young. They're imagining He has this reign that He's going to set up. A reign of righteousness, His kingdom that He talked about. Now He's going to die? It was hard for them to grasp this and understand how could a superhero die.

But Jesus knew that the death on the cross that He would experience was really the purpose that He came. It would really be the important part of His mission here. That's what He was doing. He came to die. The disciples didn't understand that until later. John now is writing about that in John 12 and He's helping us realize that Jesus came to die.

So we're going to open our Bibles. First, I want to take you to a passage that I think is an application of John 12. It just helps us get a feel for why the cross of Christ is so important on a practical level. Today, tomorrow, why is the cross of Christ so important?

Would you stand with me? I want you to listen as I read this passage of scripture. We stand in honor of God's word because of its awesome respect that we have for it.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 reads this way: *But we have this treasure in jars of clay.* In other words, we have God inside of us. We have the Holy Spirit inside of us. We're just jars of clay. We're nothing. But that's where our power comes from. *To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.* Here's where the hope comes. The hope comes from this power that God provides. *We are afflicted in every way, but not*

crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Today as we come before the Lord, we recognize our weakness, our frailty, the pain that we're experiencing. We're so grateful for the death of Jesus Christ because that's what provides the life that we can enjoy in the midst of our pain and suffering and so on.

You may be seated.

So as the scene unfolds in our story in John 12:27 and the curtain comes up, we see Jesus talking to the Father. Notice the conversation as Jesus is talking to the Father because He's experiencing in His own heart some anguish. He says these words: *"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"*

Jesus was fully human and fully God. Here we see His humaneness wrestling with the pain that He's about to experience. The cross experience, I just can't even imagine the pain that would be associated with that. As Jesus looks toward that, it's just very painful to think about. It creates this anguish in His soul.

Now the word *soul* is the word *psuche* where we get our word 'psychology' from. If you go to a psychologist or you go to a counselor, it's usually because your soul is troubled. This idea of troubled is it's anguished, it's upset. You want some resolution in the midst of that. Jesus describing here that His soul is upset.

I'm so grateful that we have Jesus who can identify with our challenges. We don't come to God only when everything's nice and tidy. We come to the Lord when our soul is upset. We come before Him. Jesus is modeling that for us. He says – *"And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"* From the pain of the cross?"

There are two kinds of pain I want to draw your attention to. One kind of pain is the pain of aversion. That is, I touched the hot stove and my hand says, "Scott, that wasn't one of the brightest things you've done. Don't do that again." It's this aversion. "Stay away from that" kind of experience. That's one kind of pain. The other kind of pain I experience is when I go to the gym and I exercise my muscles, and later that afternoon I feel pain in those muscles. I say to myself, "That's a good kind of a pain," because it's a pain that has a bigger story to it, a bigger perspective. It's taking me somewhere new in my life. It's a good kind of pain because of the perspective and what it's doing.

I think that sometimes we mix up those kinds of pain, not only physically in our lives, but I think we mixed them up in our other kinds of pain. Like relational pain. Someone is in a relationship and they get hurt by that, and they end up saying, "Oh, boy. I'm not ever getting into a relationship again." Or they go to a church and, unfortunately, there are sinners in churches. Pastors are sinners and sometimes people get hurt in churches, hurt by pastors, hurt by other people. And they say, "I'm never going to church again." They misunderstand the two kinds of

pain here. Much of our life is a growth experience. God uses the pain that we experience in our lives to grow us to the next level.

I think that's why the New Testament writers pick up this idea. James says – *Take joy, my brothers when you experience various trials*. Because the trying of your faith builds patience. Paul picks us up when he says *suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope*. There's this element of suffering and pain that we have in our lives, that has a bigger perspective, something else going on. When we understand that bigger purpose, it's easier for us to endure the current moments that are very painful and challenging that we experience in our lives. It has to do with purpose.

That's why Jesus says in this verse – *But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*” That’s really the goal. Whatever we're doing, whatever pain we're experiencing, whatever suffering we're experiencing, we want God to be glorified in the midst of all of that. That is the ultimate goal.

Next something happens that only happens three times in the Bible. It happens once here. It says – *Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”* There's a sense of affirmation that comes over of Jesus saying, “You're doing the right thing.”

When Jesus was transfigured and He turned this brilliant glowing white, signifying the glory of God, the voice was heard out of heaven that said to those around, and they could hear the voice – *“This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. Listen to him.”* When Jesus was baptized, the dove came down and sat on Jesus’ shoulder, and the voice from heaven said – *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”* There is a sense of affirmation.

I would just suggest that when you're doing the right thing, even when it's painful, you will experience the affirmation of God in your heart, in your very soul, that, yes, you're doing the right thing. That allows you to be able to continue, even though it's a painful experience. But sometimes the people around you won't understand the pain. They won't hear the message the same way you hear it. You just need to realize that God wants to do something in your heart. When you're doing the right thing and you experience pain for doing the right thing, there's this commendation that comes from the Father that says, “Yes, you're doing the right thing.” We need that in our lives to just help us get through the days, the challenges, the painful experiences of our lives. We need the affirmation of God.

But some other people don't get it. They don't hear it. That's what happens in the passage. Notice it says – *The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”* They heard something but it was fuzzy. Sometimes when the affirmation of God comes on your heart and it's going forward, other people don't get it. They won't understand. They don't realize what you're going through, the pain, and they don't realize that you're doing the right thing, and they don't realize that God's affirmation is on you. They kind of hear it in a fuzzy way.

I just love that picture because it's so real for us in living our daily lives that we need to recognize that even when things go difficult, even when things are bad, even when we go

through painful experiences, our goal is to glorify the Lord. There's this statement of affirmation on us that we need that keeps us going every day in our lives.

Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world." I think we're going to see three examples of the power of the cross in our passage today. This is the first example. It has to do with judgment. He says – *Now is the judgement of the world.* See, He's going to die on the cross. The cross is going to be this symbol, as it is for us, of separation. Because the word *judgment* comes from the word *krino*, which means to divide or separate or to decide between. That's the idea, to separate. The cross is going to be this symbol that's going to divide people into two different groups – those who welcome the cross, love the cross, embrace the cross and those who reject the cross. That's what this idea of judgment is. So one of the powerful things about the cross is that it creates a sense of judgment that separates these two groups of people.

When you think about it, the cross is a challenging emblem to have for Christianity. I mean, it's death. It's execution. I wonder if they had in the early church some challenges choosing an emblem that they would carry with them. They had the fish, of course, that would symbolize where they were going to meet on that little fish. They could have had a heart. That would have been nice to have a heart. Or maybe even an empty tomb. That would have been a cool emblem to carry forward. Or maybe the bread and the wine, that kind of thing would be great. But they chose a cross. The cross is carried forward because I think people fell in love with the cross.

They fell in love with the cross because of its power. They realized the significance of the cross, and what it is, and how powerful it is. The cross really is this emblem that separates the judges between those who receive Christ and those who don't. It's at the foot of the cross that we all stand. So we fall in love with that cross and appreciate it. It is powerful. It is powerful to judge. That's the first thing he says.

The second thing He says is – *"Now will the ruler of this world be cast out,"* referring to Satan, who's running the world, so to speak, the world system. He's going to be cast out.

There are some things that are going to happen in regards to sin. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, it did some things to our world. The first thing it did was that it removed the penalty for sin. So the penalty for sin is gone for those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. We come to the cross and we receive the freedom that comes from forgiveness because Jesus paid the penalty. The penalty for your sin is now gone. That's amazing.

The second thing that happens in regards to sin is the power of sin is diminished. It's not gone; it is diminished. What I mean by that is that the power of sin no longer has its talons in us. It no longer has power over us because now we have the cross inside the jars of clay. We have the Holy Spirit who gives us power to overcome sin. So now there's this wrestling that takes place in my heart and in your heart with sin. We wrestle with it. But we have the strength to overcome sin that happened because of the power of the cross.

And then the last... So we have the penalty of sin, we have the power of sin. But the presence of sin doesn't go away yet. That's yet to come when the presence of sin will be gone all because of the cross. But that's yet to come in our history or in our future.

Now the ruler of this world be cast out. That's the second powerful thing that takes place with the cross.

Jesus then goes on to say – *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* Now that's a reference to the story in Numbers 21. It's the story of how the people complained, so God sent snakes out after them and bit them. Many people died and they cried out to the Lord, “God save us.” So God told Moses, “Build a snake and put it in a serpent on a pole and stand it up. Anybody who looks at it, anybody who comes out of their tent who's dying can look at that pole, can be healed.” Jesus is taking that illustration and saying when He's lifted up on the cross, all people can be drawn to Him. That's what Jesus is saying here. So this is all Jesus' conversation that He's having as He's talking here.

But now we're going to look at John's commentary on this and see what's actually going on. So John says – *He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.* The disciples didn't really understand this at the time. It didn't make a lot of sense. Here's this thirty-two-year-old man who was doing so many great things, He's going to die at this age? John is saying, I just got to help you understand. Jesus told us these things because He wanted us to know the value of His death. He wanted us to understand that He'd be lifted up on the cross and all people could come, and that the cross would be that judgment for each one of us that we all of us wrestle with in our own hearts.

So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

I can imagine if you're not a believer yet in Christ, you haven't come and reckoned your own heart with the cross, that you have questions. Why did God allow this bad thing to happen in my life? Why does God allow evil in the world at all? What's going on around here? Is God really in control? Is God good? Does God love me? There's all kinds of questions we have. I just want to tell you that it's okay to come to the Lord and ask Him your questions. He's big enough to manage all the questions you have. There's no question you have to be embarrassed about that God won't have the answer. You can go to Him and ask the questions. The crowd had questions.

So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

I was proud of my grandson. This last Thanksgiving as we were talking, he said to his younger brother, “Did you know that darkness isn't a thing? Light is a thing. Darkness isn't a thing.” I think he was just talking about science. He wasn't talking about spiritual things. But he said that to his younger brother. And that's kind of interesting. My ears are perked up because I know that's true. It's true about spiritual things too. The darkness isn't a thing. You know that, right?

Darkness is absence of a thing. If you don't have Jesus in your life, then you have absence of the thing of Jesus. So Jesus is using this analogy that's helping us kind of wrestle with it. So Caleb, my grandson, had the right idea here as he's talking about it. But it has so much spiritual ramifications. Because you go in and out in life, and it's dark. You're bumping into things. You're missing things. You don't understand life, you don't see what's happening. And you end up hurting yourself in the dark. Yet Jesus is saying there's light. He's describing himself as the light of the world.

You need to believe in the light, He says, and then you become sons of the light. So now you walk around, and you can see what's going on. It's so beautiful to just enjoy the light. Jesus describing that for us so we get it, we can understand that. We make the decision to embrace the cross because we know that the cross is what produces that light inside of our lives. Inside of our jars of clay is that treasure. That treasure is the light.

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. We're going to look at some of the responses now to people.

Because when you have the cross of Christ, people have to make a choice. Are they going to follow Jesus? Are they going to embrace the cross and allow God to run their life? You know every time a person becomes a Christian, they have to leave something? To the disciples He says, "Leave your nets and follow me." I don't know what it is for you. When you become a Christian, you have to leave something. Are you willing to leave that something?

We're going to see here that there are some people who believed in Him, but some people who did not. This first group are the ones who *did not believe in him. so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe.*

That's a really interesting statement. *They could not believe.* It's one thing to say they would not believe, but now they could not believe back. Let me read the next verses and we'll wrestle with this just a little bit.

They could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." What an interesting statement.

I think we can look at this in two ways, both of which are true. One, we can recognize that a person who rejects Jesus over and over and over again, comes to the place where they cannot respond to the Lord. God hardens their heart. They just can't respond. I think it's because if you do respond to the Lord, you get to know Jesus and you love Him. You're going to spend the rest of your life with Him...in fact, past your life into eternal life. You're going to spend the rest of your existence with Jesus. If you've rejected Him over and over again, you don't want to spend time with Jesus. You don't want to spend time and eternity with Jesus. So God turns off that opportunity to respond.

The second way we can look at this is just from God's perspective, the recognition. This is fascinating. The recognition that although we choose to follow the Lord, God gives us the grace to make that decision. That's big. We sometimes think we do it all by ourselves. But God even gives us the grace to trust Him. What an interesting thought. That doesn't mean that we don't choose Him, that we don't have a responsibility, as we're going to see in the next verses. We have a responsibility to choose and believe and to respond.

The call is really going out by Jesus and John, as he's writing about Jesus, that we all need to respond to Jesus. But there's this beautiful picture that God gives us the grace to even come to Him. You might be saying, "Oh, I wonder if He gave me that grace? Am I one of the ones that He gave grace to?" Do you know how we know that a person has that grace? Because they choose to follow the Lord. A person who's choosing to follow the Lord has that grace to come. So if you're following the Lord, and you're embracing the cross, and you're saying, "I want to serve the Lord, I want to be a disciple of Jesus," then you know that God has given you the grace to do that. What an interesting picture John is describing here for us so we can understand this.

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him. So this is, again, fascinating. These are Pharisees. These are religious leaders. Many of them are responding and they're believing.

There's a kind of person who believes, yet still wrestles in their hearts with worldliness or with some other competing thing. Watch what happens here. It says – *but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.*

Wow. It just reminds me again that when we come to Christ, there's always something we have to give up. Because we love the Lord. Some of those things aren't even bad things. Certainly there are bad things we need to give up. But sometimes because we want to follow the Lord wholeheartedly in our lives, there are good things we say, "Those aren't the most important things. I'm going to serve the Lord with all of my heart. The cross is something I love in my life."

It gives a further explanation of this. It says – *for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.* Wow.

As you see, the word *glory* has been used over and over. It was used in the words that Jesus prayed, *glorify your name*. And then the Father confirms that and says, I have glorified it. I'm going to glorify it again. This word *glory* is really the picture in this passage. When you embrace the cross in your own personal life, you embrace the glory.

Glory is the Greek word *doxa*, where we get the word 'doxology' from. It's revealed greatness. It's the light that we get to see that's all part of this passage.

Now we come in verse 44 to the final words of Jesus in His public ministry. Because it's after John 12 that we move into John 13, where Jesus comes into His private ministry with His disciples. It's as if John 1-12 are helping us understand how to become a disciple, and John 13 and following show us what it means to be a disciple and how to live that disciple making life.

We will not get there in this study. I hope that will encourage you enough to read ahead, and to read along. Someday we will come back to the rest of John, I'm sure. But this is a beautiful passage going on from here about the private ministry that Jesus has with His disciples in the upper room, and then the crucifixion, and then the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the rest of John.

But in John 12, these are His final public words. This is the call that goes out to the world. This is the call that goes out to every one of us today. If you're wrestling with Jesus Christ and the value of the cross, these are the words that go out.

He says (notice He cries it out in a loud voice) – *And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.*

This is the third power of the cross that we see here. That Jesus Christ came into the world to save the world, save us from sin, but often save us from ourselves. Because we find ourselves moving more and more towards selfishness. We find ourselves moving more and more away from God. God comes in and saves us by giving us the light, drawing us to the cross, glorifying the cross, so that we can embrace it and fall in love with the cross of Christ. There's power in the cross.

Let's finish off this chapter. He continues by saying – *The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge.* If you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you need to know there'll be a day when you stand before the Father. There's really one question He's going to ask. And the question is really this: On what basis should I allow you to come into my kingdom in heaven?

Now, there's some people who think that the answer is, “Well, my good outweighed my bad in life.” But that's not the answer. The answer is “I've trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior. I come not on my own righteousness, I come on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.”

That's the message that Jesus wants them to know. There's going to be a judgment. You're going to be asked that question. Will you have the answer that, yes, I gave my life to Jesus Christ, that I embrace the cross in my heart. I recognize the power of the cross. I want that treasure inside this jar of clay in my life.

“The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.” These things about judgement and the cross and about the light are all this message that goes out to everyone, every person. It is the message. It says – *“A commandment—what to speak. Notice that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me”.*

This is the climax of Jesus' ministry. This is the message that's going out so that everybody has this chance to respond. It's the message that all of us have to respond. There's a cross that divides

us between those who are not saved and those who are saved, those who are in darkness and those who are in light, those who become disciples and those who reject the faith. That's the decision we make. It's a very, very important decision that we make in our lives.

The power of the cross is so great that we've chosen to make this cross the emblem. We look at that cross and we don't just think about death, we think about life. Because it's the death that we experience in our lives because of Jesus Christ's death that brings us the life that Christ provides for us. It's a beautiful message. It's the message of Christianity. It's a message of salvation. What a great day for us to celebrate communion.