

Maximum Impact – Part III
Pastor Ty Blackburn
John 12:28-33
April 13, 2014

Amen! Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 12. We are continuing a series of messages from this section of John 12, Verses 20-36, and we've been talking about Verses 27-33 under the title 'Maximum Impact'. I borrowed that title from Dr. Mack, and when I started the series I wasn't sure he was going to be here, so here he is catching me using his title. He wrote a wonderful book on love, which you make your maximum impact by loving, you know? "I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I'm nothing," right? Well, we've borrowed that title, and looking at another way that we maximize our impact in a fallen world is by lifting up the cross. That the cross is the locus of God's power. It is the access point for the power of God that transforms.

Last week when we began, I mentioned the verse in Psalm 11:3 where David is recounting how his companions are encouraging him basically to give up, "You say to me, 'Flee as a bird to your mountain.'" You know, when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? That question, such a profound question that seems to resonate so often. When the foundations are destroyed, what *can* we do? We look at society, we see its decay, we see the spiritual decline, the moral decline, and we wonder, "What can be done?" We look at lost people, individuals who we care about, or whom we get to know, whom we wish would come to faith, and we talk with them, and they are so far away intellectually, spiritually. How do you get there from here? You have that same feeling. When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? Their thinking has been so undermined, their lives are such a mess. What can be done? Family relationships break so easily, and so fundamentally that we can again wonder, when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? And our own hearts, that question sometimes grips us, "Things are such a mess, what can I do to change it?"

We've seen that in this passage we have the Lord Jesus Christ telling us that it is the cross which unveils the glory of God with the greatest clarity. It is the cross of God which unleashes God's power in the most profound way. It is the cross, the power of God, so what can the righteous do? Well, the righteous can lift up the cross. The righteous can preach Christ and Him crucified. The righteous can speak the word of the cross. The righteous can walk in the way of the cross. And as we lift up the cross, it has tremendous power, and God's power is unleashed in our lives, and around us. The particular verses we're looking at as the unveiling of the

power of God, are Verses 31-33. I'm going to read John, we'll start reading at Verse 27.

John 12:27-33 ~ "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we pray that You might send forth Your lovingkindness, and Your light, Your truth. Through Your word, by Your Spirit, into our hearts, all for the glory of Your Son. We pray in His name, Amen.

In Verses 31 and 32, we have the power of God made known in the cross, and it does three dramatic things. Jesus says in Verse 31, the first thing, ***Now judgment is upon this world;***... The cross judges, it brings judgment. We noted last time, it divides. The word 'judge' means 'to divide', it separates. The cross is the ultimate Continental Divide. When someone comes to the cross they fall off from one side or the other. To the believer the cross is the most precious revelation of God's love, and His grace. To the unbeliever it is foolishness. It is a stumbling block. So the cross judges.

But then we see in the next clause, and this is the focus this morning, ***...now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*** The cross has infinite power not only to divide, or to judge, it has infinite power to destroy. It has infinite power to destroy the work of Satan. ***...now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*** I want us to think about these verses under the following outline. I want to spend some time looking at, kind of introducing it really with three W's and an H. You know, *Who? What? When?* and *How?* We're going to leave out *Where?* and *Why?* The three W's and an H this morning. *Who? What? When?* and *How?*

Now we unpack what this clause means, *...now the ruler of this world will be cast out*. Then in the application, we're going to really focus in on that *How?* more. We're going to spend a lot more time there. The *Who? What? When?* then the *How?* How is it that the cross destroys the work of Satan? How does it do that for the unbeliever? How does it do that in the life of the believer? Because it is the cross we see that we have to continue to go to for the power of God. Now let's look at this phrase, *...now the ruler of this world will be cast out*.

1) Who?

The first question is *Who?* Who is the ruler of this world? Now we know that He's talking about Satan. It is interesting, He describes him as the ruler of this world. In fact, Jesus uses that phrase to speak of Satan three times in this Gospel. Here in Verse 31, also in Chapter 14, Verse 30, where He says, "Now the ruler of this world is coming, but he has nothing in Me." And also in John 16:11, *...the ruler of this world...*

Now the word 'ruler' means 'to be first, to be first in rank, one who assumes leadership'. So He is saying that Satan is himself the ruler of the world. At the time Jesus is speaking, He's saying, "I'm about to cast out the ruler of this world." The Scripture gives ample evidence of that idea that Satan is the ruler of a great kingdom. The Bible clearly teaches that Satan is real, he is alive, he is active. Think of all the different ways that Scripture describes the devil. The word 'the ruler of this world', 'the devil'. I just mentioned, 'Satan', 'The Serpent of Old'. He is 'The Accuser of the Brethren', he is 'The Enemy of our Souls', he is a 'liar and the Father of Lies', 'a murderer from the beginning'. He is 'The God of this age who blinds the eyes of unbelievers'. He is 'The Prince of the Power of the Air'. He is 'a tempter, a deceiver, one who disguises himself as an angel of light'. He is 'the one who exercises the power of darkness and who is the one who rules over the domain of darkness'. Jesus is telling that in His cross, He is about to put him out. In fact, the force, *Who?* we are talking about Satan and his kingdom. Let's move to the second question.

2) What?

What is going to be done? *...now the ruler of this world will be cast out*. This is wonderful news. The arch enemy of our souls, the deceiver, the murderer who reigns over the affairs of this world at the time of Christ is about to be cast out. In fact, the wording is emphatic. It literally means, the Greek says, "He will be cast out," and then it adds the word 'outside'. The verb itself is strong, it speaks of, 'to

take someone by force and violence, literally *'to throw out'*. So the idea is to cast him out outside. He is to be violently dislodged. He is to be completely dethroned. The ruler of this world is about to be removed, forcefully. I mean, this is the kind of news that imagine if you lived under Nazi tyranny, imagine you lived in Holland or France during World Word II, or all the other nations that they subdued. Terrible rule of the Gestapo, see them murdering and just pillaging, and what horrors you would have witnessed. And then to have known that D-Day was about to happen. Can you imagine what joy filled the hearts of people on June 6, 1944, when people in France and Holland got the word that the allies had landed at Normandy? The long, dark night is nearly over, and multiply that by a trillion. Jesus is saying that the reign of tyranny is just about to end. This is the most wonderful news that the world could hear. The ruler of this world will be cast out!

3) When?

Who? What? Now the third question, the third W, *When?* Now, now the ruler of the world will be cast out. We noted it last time, it says *'now'* there in Verse 31 twice. *Now* judgment is upon this world. *Now* the ruler of this world will be cast out. The English reflects the Greek word order. The first word in each clause is *'now'*, emphasizing the *'nowness'* of it, the timing of it. This is the moment, this is the moment.

Now we know that the moment He is talking about is the cross. We see that in Verse 33 after He says, "And if I am lifted up, I will draw men to Myself." He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. The moment that He is going to cast the ruler of this world out is the cross, when He's lifted up. The defeat of Satan isn't in the resurrection. The resurrection is just the publication of the defeat that happened already. The defeat itself is in the cross, the way that He is going to be cast out is in the death of the Son of God. The irony of that, I mean think about it, the ruler of this world is cast out as Jesus hangs on the cross, but didn't it appear to be completely the opposite? I mean, if we'd been there, and we had been able to be, you and I wouldn't have been able to do this, to be an objective observer. The reality was if we were there, we would have been joining with the crowd saying, "Crucify Him!" because that is the nature of sin in us. But if you could have been an objective observer, and watched what happened, to see a crowd that on Sunday, Palm Sunday, was hailing Him as the 'King of the Jews', to now on Friday to be crying out for Him to be crucified, and choosing to let loose Barabbas over Jesus because Pilate is trying to escape responsibility for the death of Jesus. "I'm going to release to you one of the prisoners," and he puts Jesus up against the worst, most unlikely guy they would pick, Barabbas, knowing they'll

pick Jesus. Any reasonable Jew would pick Jesus to be released. Who would want to release this scoundrel? Without any hesitation they say release for us Barabbas. “What do I do with Jesus?” Pilate is even still trying to get out of it. “What will I do with Jesus?” “Crucify Him. Let His blood be upon us, and upon our children.” To see the hatred that animated the people, to see the hatred that animated the temple guards, to see the hatred that animated the priests as they beat him, dignified men in their robes spitting on Jesus and punching Him. Where does that come from? Evil! This is the hour of darkness, when evil reigns.

The Romans, why do they care so much about mocking Jesus, and forcing a crown of thorns down upon His head? Because they recognize, in the Christ they sense something that God is there, and they hate God. So you see this incredible reign of evil, and it looks like evil is winning the day. It looks like evil has gathered all of its resources together into this massive, mighty army of evil. The Jews and the Romans together, the crowds crying out, just a few disciples that aren’t involved, and they are all saying, “We don’t want you,” and they are casting Jesus out of the world. It’s as if the earth itself cannot bear His presence, and He must be lifted up.

And so evil, and the world, and man are repudiating Him, and in reality, in the amazing wisdom, the amazing plan of God, the entire, the exact opposite is happening. Evil thinks it has won its greatest victory in getting all of its dominion to reject Christ, but what has happened is, in Jesus becoming man, and taking upon Himself our nature, and then in His own body bearing our sin, and our guilt, and our shame, and being treated as if He lived our sinful lives. God pours out His wrath upon Him, all of that venting of evil, then basically it has ejected Satan, and cast him spiritually into outer space. Now there is a ‘now’ and a ‘not yet’ about this, but the reality is that is the force of what has happened, that when Jesus breathes His last, Satan is doomed to hell, and his reign over everyone who will ever believe is completely broken, definitively, at that moment. Let’s move to the *How?*

4) How?

Let’s talk about that a little more. How does the cross cast the ruler of this world out? There are some more passages we need to look at that help us to see this. Turn with me to Hebrews 2. How does the cross destroy his kingdom and cast him out?

Hebrews 2:14-15 ~ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself (speaking of Jesus) likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of

death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Jesus, by taking on flesh and blood, and becoming true man, in His death takes away, it says it renders him powerless, how does the cross cast him out? The cross first of all destroys Satan's power. It destroys his power. It renders him completely powerless. Now let's look at also, destroys his authority. Turn with me back to Colossians 2:13-15, the apostle Paul, writing about the wonder of our salvation, shows us that the victory was won not so much on Sunday. Certainly Resurrection Sunday we celebrate, and we will celebrate it next week because it is the stamp of approval, it is the guarantee of victory, and we wouldn't know that Friday had been so victorious without Sunday. That's what it is, it is the clarion call, it is the bugle sounding victory, but the victory is won on Friday, and Paul tells us the same thing in this passage.

Colossians 2:13-15 ~ 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

I think really it should be translated 'through it', the cross. He triumphed over them, through it, the cross. Jesus triumphed over the rulers and authorities, He disarmed them through the cross. He took away their authority. He took away the certificate that they had that said they had authority over fallen man. He took away that certificate, that right of authority. In fact the word 'disarmed' literally means 'to undress'. The idea I think is, a ruler often wears a crown, a royal robe, and what Jesus does is He disarms the rulers, He takes off their royal robe, He takes off their crown, and He makes a public spectacle of them in His cross. He does that by taking away their basis of authority, that is that certificate of decrees. The reason Satan has authority over the unbeliever is because of the sins they've committed, and God's holiness and righteousness, He rejects them. They are separated from God and Satan is able to rule over them.

But when Jesus takes away the certificate of, that is the idea that, basically the picture is there is a list of charges against every believer. Think about this, every single sin you've ever committed, every sin of word, every sin of thought, every deed, God has a record of it. God is so much different than we are. We tend to

think, “Well, it’s been a pretty good day. I didn’t sin as much as yesterday it doesn’t seem like.” We wish God graded on the curve, but the reality is, James 2:10 tells us that if you keep the whole law, and you’ve offended one point, you are guilty of the whole law. That is God’s accounting. That is if you lived your whole life, and you only sinned one time, you would still be worthy of hell forever. You say, “That doesn’t seem fair,” well it’s because you don’t understand sin the way God does. Sin is much worse than we think. You see our minds are so messed up we think that that seems unreasonable, but that is not unreasonable at all. So if you think it about it then, every sin you’ve ever committed there is a listing of punishment, and so it is punishment upon punishment. If one sin was enough to damn me to hell, how much is millions of sins that I’ve committed? I mean, you could never possibly recount them for one day. I mean you can’t confess every sin you’ve committed in one day, at the end of the day. Every time that your thoughts weren’t right, every sin of not only commission, those things that you do, but omission, the good things that you’ve left undone. Now all of that weight, all of that baggage against you, that was Satan’s right to rule you. You could never be back with God as long as you have that. God can’t abide the presence of sinners like you and me. We would never be able to be in His presence, and Satan had that title to our souls. Jesus, in coming in human flesh, and then allowing Satan to put Him on the cross, the sins of all the people then putting upon Him, He takes away that authority, and he destroys Satan’s right. Satan no longer has the title to anyone who repents and believes the Gospel.

So He destroys his power, He destroys his authority, and thirdly, He destroys his work. 1 John 3:8 says that the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, and what He is saying here is that though it appeared He was destroying the work of the devil throughout His ministry, and in some sense He was. I mean if you think about it, He was taking things from Satan all along. Every time He saved somebody, He was destroying the work of the devil. Every time He delivered someone from demon possession, He was destroying the work of the devil. Every time He healed someone, He was destroying the works of the devil. He was showing that the Kingdom of God was coming, but He’s saying with all this emphasis on now, that the moment that really destroys the work of the devil is the cross. It is the cross. The cross demolishes Satan’s reign and rule.

Now, what this means is this has tremendous implications. This means when you’re talking to that loved one or that friend that you’re burdened about—they’re caught up in such a mire of deceit, deception, and the more that you talk with them, the more that you see they have bought into the world system. They call evil good

and good evil. How can I possibly help this person? How can I get there from here? The answer is always to lift up Jesus, and as you're able to lift up Jesus on the cross, the message that will save is the message of Christ and Him crucified. Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2 that when he came to them, he said, "I resolved to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified." What he means is what I resolved to do when I came to preach to you, realizing that you guys were all caught up in all kinds—I mean, Corinth was a very wicked city. Immorality abounded. It was a spiritually dark place because of all the idolatry. People were bound up in false worship. They were captured by the philosophies of men. It was a Greek city and so they esteemed the philosophical arguments of Plato and Aristotle, and they gloried in human wisdom.

So Paul says, "How can I possibly get through to these people? They're so hopeless in their immorality. They're so hopeless in their idolatry. They're so hopeless in their human reason," and he resolved to know nothing among them but Christ and Him crucified. What he did is he preached Jesus and the cross. The Son of God hanging on the cross to save sinners, that was the message he preached. He went to that at every opportunity, and that's what we need to do. We need to learn how in conversations to look for openings to lift up Jesus, to talk about Jesus. "We're talking about so many different things, well let's talk about Jesus. Isn't it amazing that God would become a man and enter into this world? That's what we see in the Bible. God did that, and that He would die in our place, the place of every believer, He died for our sins. Can you imagine that God would die in the place of sinners?" Now, it's true that many times that is going to get the reaction that Paul got. To Greeks it's foolishness and to Jews a stumbling block. Often it will be that way. In fact, 1 Corinthians 1 tells us that. We read there:

1 Corinthians 1:18 ~ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Then he goes on to say in Verse 23:

1 Corinthians 1:23 ~ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

What he's saying is, "Look, I go out there and this is my whole message. It's Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I don't want to spend all of my time—now, I'm going to discuss things that I need to, I'll start where they are and I'll try to deal with some of their arguments, but what I want to do is make a beeline for Calvary, and I want

to talk to them about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and I want to lift Him up, and in doing that, I know I'm going to be repudiated by many, I'm going to be mocked by some, I'm going to be scorned by all, except the called ones." ...***but those who are the called...*** he says. ...***Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*** He said the message of the cross when it's preached gets that kind of stark reaction. It's got that kind of dramatically different response, but that is a message that is powerful. It drives some away but it draws others, and so we're to lift up the cross, and the cross as we lift it up, demolishes the work of Satan.

Now, think about this in the life of the unbeliever, and then we're going to talk about it in the life of the believer, how the cross delivers, how it destroys the work of Satan. Think about Satan's strategies. How has he exerted his rule, and why is the world in the mess that it is? Jesus tells us in John 8:44, remember He's speaking to the Jews? He told them a few verses before that, "You're of your father and you want to do the desire of your father. You're wanting to kill Me," and they're like, "Hey, we only have one father. We're not illegitimate children. We have one father: Abraham," and He says, "No, you are of your father the devil," in Verse 44 of Chapter 8. "Your father was a murderer from the beginning." And He goes on to explain how he murdered: ...***for he is a liar and the father of lies.*** It is in his DNA to lie, to deceive. How does Satan kill? Satan kills through deception. He lies. That is his strategy. In all of the work that he has done in this world, all the work that he's done to mess up things on a global perspective, it's through lies, and all that he has done to mess up the individual lives of lost people, he's done through lies. That is his strategy and he's the god of this age who blinds the eyes of unbelievers to the glory of God, and he lies to them about who God is.

Now, how do you counter a liar? How do you destroy the work of the master liar? With the truth. He's been lying since the beginning, since Adam and Eve. Do you remember what he said to Eve? "Has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" What he's actually asking her is, "Hasn't God told you not to eat of any of the trees of the garden?" Now, do you see what a liar he is? Do you see how he casts doubt on the character of God? He's saying, "God doesn't want you to eat from any of these trees, does He?" He starts there. He knows full well that God's only forbidden one tree, but he is trying to eclipse and obscure the glory and goodness of God, and so he's saying subtly, "Isn't it the nature of God just to forbid every good thing from you?" and I'm paraphrasing, but she says, "He said, 'Don't eat from the tree that's in the center of the garden, for the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.'" And then that liar says, "You surely shall not die," and it's the emphatic the way he says it in the Hebrew. "You surely shall not die."

Then he goes on to not only just directly challenge the truth of God, but then he challenges the character of God. “You surely shall not die, for God knows in the day that you eat of it, you won’t die. You’ll become like God. You will know good and evil. You see, God is holding you back. God is not good.” Do you see that? That’s what he’s saying and that strategy is his strategy ‘til this day. Every sin is basically us agreeing with the liar, that God’s not good, because when God forbids something, He does it out of a desire to bless us and protect us, doesn’t He? Isn’t that proven in the garden? I mean, think about it. There was only one command. Look at the character of God in reality. God didn’t say, “You can’t eat from all the orange trees.” I mean all the red trees. I was trying to use orange as a color, but I realized I used it as a fruit. “All the red trees, all the different red things—plums, peaches start out kind of red too—you can’t have that. You can’t have apples. You can’t have pomegranates.” I don’t know all the things that grow on trees that are red, but there are a lot of them. “I just don’t want you to eat the red stuff just because I don’t want you to.” No, the Lord didn’t do that. He made all kinds of stuff and He said, “Listen, all I want you to do is stay away from this one tree.”

The only fence in the world was around this one little thing. Think about that, the character of God. “Everything is open to you; one thing is not. Enjoy in My presence.” And then Satan comes and says, “Look at this fence right here. What kind of God would do that?” He tries to make it look like inside that fence is a whole new world of all kinds of possibilities, because he is a liar. And when Eve and Adam subsequently listened to him and ate of the fruit, they found out that God is true and every man a liar, and death came into the world. And so he continues to do that, though. That is what is binding up people in their lostness today is they believe that God is not good. They’re confused. They don’t understand the truth about God and they don’t understand the truth about themselves, and Satan is filling them with lies continually. The world system, their own flesh, our sin nature, the ‘unholy trinity’ as someone has coined that phrase, the ‘unholy trinity’ is the world, the flesh, and the devil, all of them opposed to God, all of them ultimately orchestrated by Satan in a reflection of his character because sin itself, the desire that Eve had when she said she wanted to be like God, she was just following Satan, his rebellion. In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, he is trying to ascend to the place of the Most High.

Now, if lies are the problem, if the reason someone is wrapped up in sin is because they believe lies, what do they need? They need the truth. They need the truth about God and they need the truth about themselves, and there is no better place to see the truth about God and the truth about yourself than when the cross is brought to bear. When you lift up the cross, and you expound the cross, and you explain the

cross, and you talk about the cross from the Scriptures, what happens is the reality of who God is, is set forth with such clarity. Isn't that what Jesus had said in this passage? Do you remember earlier, we didn't read it this morning, but remember when the Greeks come to Him and they're saying, "We want to see Jesus"? They come to Philip and Philip gets Andrew, and they come to Jesus and ask about it. "These guys are here and they want to see You." What does Jesus say? "Now is the Son of Man glorified," and then we find out what He's talking about right after that. He says, "A grain of wheat has to fall to the earth and die. I'm going to have to die." Isn't it ironic that now is the Son of Man glorified? The Son of Man is glorified in the death, that is, "The place that you see My character the most clearly, that's what it means to be glorified. The place that I'm most clearly glorified is on the cross."

Now, that's so counterintuitive. We would think, "Well, the place I think Jesus is most clearly glorified is when He touches the leper and heals him, or when He stops and He picks up the little child and holds him in His arms. Isn't that wonderful?" And those things are wonderful. Isn't it amazing that God cares about that little baby? Isn't it amazing that God would leave the glory of heaven to touch the leper's wound? Isn't it amazing that God would become a baby in Bethlehem? There is the glory of God, but Jesus when He says, "Now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified," what He's essentially saying is that of all the hours that I've been here, this is the hour where you truly see My character." And He came not just to show us His character but to show us the Father's character. John 1:18 says, "No man has seen God at any time, but the only begotten of God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has exegeted Him." If you want to see what God is like, look at the cross. That's the place you see who God is.

Now, think about this for a moment. You're talking to an unbeliever, and you're able to turn the conversation to talk about the cross. Maybe it's an email conversation. Maybe it's a conversation in person, and you start talking about what God has done in the cross, and if the Lord is working in them, and they're really listening, and they're thinking about what you're saying, they ought to have some things in mind that say, "Why would God die on a cross? I don't understand. Why would this have to happen?" because man thinks that sin is not that big a deal, and so why can't God just pardon it? "Why would God have to come die on the cross?" What that sets forth before us is first of all the holiness of God is so much greater than we ever imagined, and the cross testifies to that. The cross says that God is so righteous, He is so pure, that He cannot abide sin in any way. As I said earlier, one sin and you're doomed forever. That's how holy God is, and one sin is so much worse than we think.

Sin is not just where I missed the putt. No, that's not what sin is. Sin is rebellion. Sin is cosmic treason. Sin is being a Benedict Arnold to God, only a billion times over, and so how can a holy God not punish that kind of rebellion? He must. You see, my sin, my desire to live my life for myself the way I want to live it, is so much more offensive than I think. The unbeliever thinks God's okay with him. I mean, every time I read a statistic, and I see this happen as I talk to people, but you know, "Do you think you're going to heaven when you die?" "Yes," and they don't believe in Christ. "Why?" "Because usually I'm just not that bad a guy." They think they're going to heaven. "God's okay with me. Me and God have an understanding." They say stuff like this, and the idea is that God just exists to do what I want. If they really could see what they're saying, that's what they're saying. "Hey, I want this, and I know God wouldn't want me to be unhappy. It makes me happy."

They're just looking at things completely wrong, because they have a very small view of God, and when you lift up the cross, what you do is you expand their view of God. God is a God who is so holy that He cannot abide sin, and to show you how ugly it is, that's what you and I deserve. We deserve to be hung on a cross. We deserve to be abandoned, to have the sky go dark on us. We deserve to live eternally separated from God. When you see the glory of God like that, you see yourself in a whole new way. "My sin is so much worse than I ever imagined." So the cross not only lifts God up but it puts man down, and that's where all our hope begins is when we're down. The most loving thing that God can do for us is to put us down. We exalt ourselves. We need to humble ourselves. He resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble, so when you lift up the cross, what you're doing is you're giving that person the opportunity to be humbled just like you were, and like you continually are as you look at the cross, because when you lift up the cross in sharing it with someone else, you have to remember this is what I deserve.

You not only see the holiness of God, but you see the amazing goodness of God nowhere more clearly than on the cross. Where would you see the love of God? Where would you see the kindness of God more than Calvary? Would you want to go to Bethlehem or would you want to go to Nazareth? No, you go to Calvary to see the clearest display of the goodness of God. And so when you lift up the cross and you say, "This is a holy God who must punish sin," look how evil sin is, and yet look, it's Him interposing Himself and taking the blows and the punishment, and absorbing it in His own soul. He's taking the full weight and burden of your sin into Himself. There He is bearing it so that you can be free. "Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

You lift up the holiness of God. You lift up the goodness of God, and the lies of Satan begin to fall away. The lies of Satan that say I ought to live my life my own way, suddenly fall down. And so what happened when Isaiah saw the holiness of God, remember, is he saw God lifted up and he saw himself put way down. “Woe is me, for I have seen the Lord. I’m a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.” I think the reason he said that is it wasn’t that he had a particular problem with profanity. I don’t think Isaiah did probably at all. He was a priest. What Isaiah was saying is, “Listen, my life has been a horrible testimony to who God is. When I look at what my life has said about Him, when I look at how I’ve lived, every sin is blasphemy.”

Every time we sin we’re blaspheming. I mean, you’re a worrier. We think it’s not that big a deal. Don’t we really? Isn’t that kind of an okay sin? This person, they have a problem in that he was unfaithful to his wife. Well, that’s a terrible sin. That’s an ungodly sin. And that’s got tremendous implications. I’m not trying to minimize that, but we act like then, “Well no, she’s just a worrier.” What needs to happen if we’re going to be free is we need to bring our sin to the foot of the cross, because the cross not only saves the unbeliever, but it continues to save the believer. When you bring your worry to the foot of the cross, what happens? You realize that my worrying, my anxiety, required this of Jesus. My worrying is that evil that Jesus had to bear in His body, that awful mistreatment, that awful sense of aloneness, that awful sense of being engulfed by evil, all because of my sin of worry.

When you think about it, it makes perfect sense. What is worry saying? Worry is saying that God is not in control, or God is not good, or God is not wise. Either He’s not in control, so I need to worry because He’s not watching things, or I need to worry because He might be watching things, but He’s not good and He doesn’t know what’s best for me, and whatever He does isn’t good, so I need to worry, or He might be watching things and He might have a general idea, but He’s not that smart and He’s not wise. So when you worry, what you’re doing is you are blaspheming God. That deserves the cross. You’re joining in with Satan in lying about the goodness, and glory, and majesty of God. So the holiness of God is lifted up again. I see my sin in a new way. And then I see that isn’t it amazing that there Jesus is dying for me the worrier? There He is bearing the full measure of every anxious word. Every fretting moment of my life He’s born completely. He’s taken all of the punishment out of the way. He saw me when He hung at Calvary and He bore the weight of this sin, and therefore He gives me a perfect righteousness and I’m delivered.

The cross is the place where we see the glory of God, where we see the ugliness of ourselves, and where we find our freedom. The cross continues to say you have been delivered from the domain of sin. You have been delivered from the reign of darkness. You have been delivered from this world, the power of this world. It is the cross of Jesus Christ, and if you and I learn ourselves to live in the shadow of the cross, to keep ourselves near the cross daily, thinking about the glory of the cross, applying, bringing the cross continually to bear in our own lives, and walking in the way of the cross, dying to self, and then speaking about the cross, this is the most powerful thing that can be done. If you and I live the cross and you and I speak about the cross, the gates of hell cannot stand against that powerful display of Almighty God. Isn't that amazing that that is the power of God? Just speaking about Jesus Christ crucified, that's like a nuclear bomb going off in the kingdom of darkness. We need to pick up the weapons that He's given us and rejoice in His faithfulness and His goodness.

Let's pray together...

Father, we thank You for Your perfect wisdom, for Your glorious power which delivers us and continues to set us free. Lord, help us be people who are overwhelmed more and more by the glory of who You are and what You've done. We pray that we would be people, Lord, that You have worked in our hearts to such an extent that joy would just be flowing from us more and more as we continue to learn to live at the cross, that as we go throughout our day, that our faces, our countenances, would be filled with such joy that more and more as we talk with people, as we try to engage in conversations, there'd be more power in our words, because they sense the joy in us, they sense the transformation in us. Lord, that's what You're worthy of. Help us be worthy messengers. And Lord, we're thankful that today salvation is open to everyone who will believe, in this room, that Satan cannot keep anyone in this room in his grip if they will look to Christ and Him crucified. No matter what the bondage is, no matter how great the difficulty is, Jesus Christ is the answer. Lord, grant repentance. Grant complete surrender, and grant joyful trust in the beauty and glory of such a wonderful Savior. We pray in His Name, Amen.

This audio presentation, description, and transcription by Providence Church in Duluth, Georgia, USA, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

 Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Attribution:

Based on work at Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA and found online at <http://www.providenceduluth.org>. Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.