

Maximum Impact – Part IV
Pastor Ty Blackburn
John 12:32-33
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Turn in your Bibles now to John 12. It is right to say that the events of that first Easter weekend are the hinge and turning point of all of history. What happened in that event, the cross, the crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, literally split history in two. Without that there would be no B.C. and A.D., even though B.C. means *'Before Christ'*, A.D. means not *'After Death'*, as I thought for the first 10 or 12 years of my life. It means *'Anno Domini – In the Year of Our Lord'*, so it starts at His birth, but it would not have been that way had it not been for the momentous impact of God becoming flesh, and God going to the cross. Then the wonder of it all being vindicated. "Is it true? Is He really the Son of God? Is all that He said, and all that He claimed to accomplish, even in Calvary, is that true?" It almost seems too good to be true, it certainly seems too good to be true that God could love us like that. Was it just a myth? Of course not, the resurrection proves it with an exclamation point. "This is the reality of who I am," God says, in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The veil was torn in two, the way is open to Heaven.

We've been looking at this passage of Scripture for a number of weeks, in John 12, which has focused our attention on this particular point—the power of the Cross, the supreme power of the cross. We've titled the series *'Maximum Impact'*, borrowing Wayne Mack's title of his book. We've used that because of the reality of what Jesus is sharing here in this passage just a few days before the cross. He is telling us that this is the lynch pin, this is the power source, this is that which needs to be a focus of all of our living, and all of our sharing with others. That it is the cross of Jesus Christ that has the supreme power, as it was the one moment in history that split history in two. It is the one event, when someone comes into contact with the cross, everything becomes B.C. and A.D. When you truly come to the cross, everything is before that and after that because it changes everything. That is what happens in salvation certainly, but isn't it a wonder that though that momentous event, when someone comes to understand that the cross of Jesus Christ is for them, that, "He died in *my* place." That, "It was *my* crown that He wore." When we come to understand that, it changes everything, and we become a new creature.

And yet, as the Christian walks with God, and walks through the difficult days of life in a fallen world, and encounters all the challenges that we face, and doubts arise, there are moments where we continue to need to come to the cross again. We



need to go back to the cross because it is the cross that continues to change everything, and it is the word of the cross that can make the biggest difference in every area of our life. Not just personally, but culturally, in our families. That's why we've titled this message 'Maximum Impact', we borrowed also from Psalm 11:3, the question, *When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?* These words that David, the psalmist, apparently people were saying to him in the midst of great turmoil, when there was political upheaval, social strife, things looked hopeless, there were people saying to him, "Flee as a bird to your mountain," and Psalm 11 recounts this. For when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? Well what David does in that passage is remember who God is. And what we've said is, we can feel that same way when we look at the social decline that we see today, the moral decay, the spiritual darkness, immorality on the rise, crime. It is all around us, foolishness and destruction that is not just out there, but it comes into our families, and into our own hearts. Sometimes we feel hopeless. When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

What we see in this passage is the most powerful thing you can do at any moment is to lift up the cross of Jesus Christ. That in lifting up the cross of Jesus Christ, you are lifting up the truth about God in kind of a laser focus. There is a sense in which God has been revealing Himself clearly throughout creation, from the moment He created He has been revealing Himself. Psalm 19 says that the heavens declare the glory of God. The firmament speaks forth His praise. And though they are not literal words, and they are not heard with the ears, their line has gone out into all the earth. There is no place where the message of who God is in creation is not being proclaimed every moment of every day.

Then you have God speaking through the prophets. He gives a special revelation and He sent His prophets all over Israel, and even up to the dark places of the world. Egypt, Moses goes there. Nineveh, Jonah goes there. Babylon, Daniel is there. God is sending His prophets to proclaim His word, and the message is: This is who God is. So there are all these different ways God has been speaking, but the pinnacle, the most clear and precise moment where God reveals Himself, and His glory, with laser focus, is the cross of Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate moment of self-disclosure where God says, "This is who I am. The cross."

So the cross ought to be for us our continued source of strength, our continued source of confidence. As Christians we ought to continually go to it ourselves because we need, more than anything else, to know who God is at every moment. When we seek to minister to people who are experiencing the effects of life in a



fallen world, they are still bound up in their sins, they are calling good evil, and evil good, and we feel like there is no way to get there from here, when the foundations of their lives, and the foundations of their thinking are destroyed, what can the righteous do? You build relationship and lift up the cross. You show the love and compassion of God in caring about that person, and then look for an opportunity as soon as you are able, to talk about the cross.

I was reading a story this week, a very interesting lady, Rosario Champagne Butterfield, some of you may have seen her testimony, or read about her. I'm going to just quickly summarize essentially the story of her testimony. She was a lesbian professor at Syracuse University, in Syracuse, New York. She was a tenured professor as a young lady, one of the earliest tenured professors, female tenured professors in university history. She was on the cutting edge. I mean, she was a go-to person in the homosexual community. She was a go-to person at the university, academic intelligencia.

Promise Keepers came to Syracuse at some point in the late '90's, and she wrote a scathing article about that ministry in the newspaper about patriarchy, just the offensiveness of the patriarchal mindset that comes from biblical thinking, this kind of thing. She was just lambasted basically the Christian world view. She received a lot of encouraging mail, and she received a lot of hate mail, but she received one letter from a pastor who wrote her, and just kind of challenged her thinking enough that when she read his letter, he even invited her to call him on his phone. She was keeping up two boxes, one of hate mail, and one of good stuff, you know? She would read it and then she was putting them in one place, and she couldn't decide where to put his letter. She is like, "I'm kind of a compulsive, OCD person, "And I've got to file it somewhere, but I can't file it. Where do I put this?"

So it stayed on her desk for a whole week and she kind of kept seeing it, kept looking at it, and she finally called him, and she had a conversation with him in which he was engaging, and encouraging, but coming at life from a very different world view. He said, "Look, I would love to have this discussion further, could you come over and have one of my wife's wonderful meals, and we can talk in my home? The three of us would have a great time together, getting to know one another, and talking." So she went, and over a period of months she would go back every now and then, and they would check on her, and call her, and talk with her. This is, think about how far they are, this guy was actually a pastor of a little Reformed Presbyterian Church in Syracuse, New York, very small. He wasn't

doing kind of a Joel Osteen ministry. It wasn't everybody going, you know, it was a small church, he is just preaching the Gospel.

Well, anyway, over time he had an opportunity to share with her. They've spent a lot of time listening to her, and then she talked about the one day where he said, "I'd like to come and share with your students," you know he's been listening to her talking about literature, all kinds of things, and he said, "I'd like to come share with your students about the Bible. You teach the importance of literature and stuff, certainly your kids need to understand something about the Bible, right?" "Well they do, yes," but she said, "There is no way I'm letting you teach them about the Bible." He said, "I've already written out my lecture." "Well, why don't you try it out on me," so he did. He happily launched into it, and basically took her through the Old Testament, and showed her how the Old Testament was all one book, and it all pointed to Christ, and the cross. She said she was intrigued, and she was offended all at the same time.

She didn't know what to do with that, but it kept weighing upon her, and finally, over time, and this winsome heart presenting, without apology, the truth of the Gospel, this woman got saved, and now she is married, has four children, she is not a professor at Syracuse, she is a leading evangelist against the misery that comes with the homosexual lifestyle, liberating people from sin. Because the reality is, no matter what our lustful tendencies of our heart are, we all are sinners, and if we follow our own hearts, we follow our own hearts to destruction. It is just different flavors of the same thing, it is just wickedness and death, and the only way you find life is to surrender to Jesus Christ, to come to the foot of the cross, and it is the cross that transforms. I would say that that is an example of the greatest miracle that the world has ever seen, when as the Bible says, when a person is saved they go from being dead to being alive. We were dead in trespasses and sins, and then God made you alive together with Christ.

He also likens it to creation. He says that when we are saved what happens is, in the same way that God looked out on the darkness that was before there was anything else, there was darkness, God looked in the darkness and He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. I mean, think about the power in that moment. Those words, "Let there be light." He said when God looks at an unbeliever in the darkness of their soul, and He brings them to faith, it is as if He looks into that darkness and says, "Let there be light," and suddenly there is light. That is the greatest miracle the world ever sees, and it doesn't have to mean going from the extreme of where Rosario Champagne Butterfield came from to Christ. When you or I got saved, it was just as amazing a work of God. Raised in a Christian home,

trusting in your own self-righteousness, thinking that you are better than other people because you believe the Bible even, and God shows you, in a moment of profound grace, that you are as vile and wicked as the worst of sinners, and apart from the grace of God you have utterly no hope, then you run to Christ. That is the power of the cross, that is what we celebrate today, and that is what Jesus says ought to be our focus every moment of every day. We're going to be looking today, particularly at Verse 32 of John 12. Now we've been looking at Verses 27-33. I'm going to read Verses 27-33, and we're going to focus on John 12:32.

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.

Father, we ask that You might grant us, by Your Spirit, to empower Your word so that in Your light we might see light. That You might manifest to us the one who is truly the light of the world. We pray in His name, Amen.

We're looking at the way to have maximum impact is to lift up the cross of Jesus Christ because in the cross there is tremendous power. In previous weeks we've seen that the cross, in those Verses 31-32, there are three things about the cross, and we've already looked at the first two. The cross, the reason that the cross is the focus that brings the power is the cross judges. Verse 31, ***Now judgment is upon this world;***... He is speaking about in His cross, judgment is coming upon the world. We noted that the cross itself judges. We tend to have a high view of ourselves. We tend to think that we are okay, that we don't really, you know, "Yeah, I need some religion." Many people are okay with a little bit of religion, and they will say that. "Yeah, okay, I go to church," but they don't understand that, "No, what I need is not just some modification to my life, I need the cross of Jesus Christ." When you look at the cross and you understand, "This is what was

required for my salvation,” there is nothing that humbles the heart like that. I mean, when you begin to measure out all that Christ went through.

I remember hearing about, some years ago, when *The Passion of the Christ* was filmed, and I think there were certainly some weaknesses to that movie, significant weaknesses, but when it was screened, it was screened early screening in Hollywood, and they invited a lot of the actors, and actresses, and producers, and other well-known folks to attend this private screening of the movie. I remember one well-known actress, as the scene of Christ suffering is going on, and being depicted with such graphic clarity in that movie, that one of the women gets up and just basically is overcome, and says, “Why? Why are they doing this to Him?” She could not understand what in the world, and if you think about it, there is a sense in which we should say, “Why? Why are they doing this to Him? He went about doing good, healing, and teaching, and loving people. Why are they doing this to Him?” The right answer is: Because of your sin and my sin. The truth is that my sin and your sin, if we were the only person alive, that is great enough that Jesus would have to suffer like that. So the cross judges, the cross changes our view of ourselves. We don’t need a boost up to Heaven, we need a radical transformation. So the cross judges.

It also delivers. He says in Verse 31, “Now the ruler of this world is cast out,” that is Satan himself, who the Bible calls the God of this age. And Jesus mentions, earlier in John’s Gospel, John 8, that the unbeliever, He is talking to Jews, and He says, “You are of your father, the devil.” He’s talking to the people who were closest to God. He says, “In reality, you are of your father, the devil. That is until you are redeemed, until My cross, until I save you, you are not only not neutral, you are a soldier of darkness. You are begotten by him.” Most people acknowledge, “Yeah, I’m a sinner. I don’t do all that I ought to do,” but when you come face to face with the fact, “This is who I am,” that is humbling. But the good news is, the cross breaks the power of Satan. It delivers us from darkness. It delivers us from the domain of darkness.

But then lastly, it doesn’t just stop there. Today we come to, not to the cross’s power to judge, or the cross’s power to deliver, but today we are focusing on the cross’s supreme power to draw, the attractiveness of the cross, the beauty of the cross, because of what we see in this last sentence here. Jesus says, ***And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.*** He’s saying, “It is not enough for me in the cross. In the cross I did this: I judged you, I showed you how ugly your sin is, and how much you need a Savior. In the cross I delivered you from a domain of darkness. I broke Satan’s hold over everyone who would ever

believe. I broke the old in the cross. But that's not enough. In the cross, I draw you to myself." It is as if we finally see ourselves, we see our need, the cross shows us that, and we say, "Oh wretched man that I am..." Satan's blinders are removed and our eyes are able to see for the first time, and it is almost like this mental picture I was trying to work through, this progression. These three things, in a sense, are happening when someone goes from darkness to light. They come to see themselves in a new way, the cross judges them, and then the power of Satan is broken, so the blinders are removed, and so they see themselves, they have a sense of now the ability to see, but it is as if they are afraid to look up at God. "If I am this miserable, and I now can see God, I am scared to look at Him." But when you look up and you see the cross, you see the wonder of God, and it doesn't drive you away, it draws you.

There is an incredible beauty to the cross, and the beauty of the cross is the beauty of God Himself. When Christ is made known by looking and lifting up the cross, there is an irresistible power, an attractive pull, a magnetic force. This is again why the cross should always be central in our evangelism, central in our sharing with other people. It is a measure of our ministries as we share with people, and certainly a measure of a church's ministry. "Why does he never talk about the cross?" "I really like that guy's message. It was very helpful," but did he talk about the cross? If you don't talk about the cross, you're not going to see the power of God unto the salvation. You may see modification, you may see some adjustments of life, but it is the cross that brings new life. In the cross we see the reality of who Jesus is, and who God is. Remember that Jesus' whole purpose in coming is to disclose God to us. That is why God is in flesh, so He can make the reality of who God is visible to us. John 1:18 said, "No man has seen God at any time, but the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him, He has exegeted Him." Remember what Jesus said to Philip? Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us," John 14, and Jesus said, "Have I been so long with you, Philip, and you don't understand that He who has seen Me has seen the Father?" You want to know what God is like? Look at Christ. Look at Him every moment of His life. Look at everything that He did, everything that He said, but if you really want to see in the clearest focus what Jesus is like, and what God is like, look at the cross. That is the moment.

We've noted already in this passage that Jesus, when He earlier says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," and then He talks about His cross, He is saying that, "The moment of the cross is the moment when I will be glorified. Glorified means to have the true measure of My character made known, to have the essence of who I am disclosed." He's saying essentially, "I've been showing you who I am, but the



moment of the cross is so great, so much supersedes everything else, it is as if now is the only moment.” And if it is the moment you see the Son of Man glorified, it is the moment you see God glorified. This is the moment you see who God is, and this is what makes the cross attractive.

I want to look at two things that the cross discloses that make it have a magnetic pull to those who come to faith. How does it draw all men? There are two things I think we see in the cross. First, the lowliness of God, and second the loveliness of God. You see these two realities supremely unveiled in the cross, and this makes it possible for a sinner to run to the Savior.

1) The Lowliness of God:

Now to help us unpack this, we’re going to look at a couple of other passages that show us something of this reality. Turn with me to Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says:

Matthew 11:28 ~ “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

The invitation is to come to Him, that is the word, “Come to Me.” Now He says, and the enticement is, “I’ll give you rest,” but He goes on to explain why you can come, why you should come, and look what He says. What is it that draws you to Jesus Christ? Look what He says in Verse 29:

Matthew 11:29 ~ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

“The reason that you should come to me is because I am gentle,” and the word ‘humble’ means ‘lowly’. “I am gentle and lowly of heart.” You see that no more clearly than on the cross of Jesus Christ. You see the lowliness, and the humility, and the meekness of Jesus. He mentions two words here which I really think are the lowliness of God seen in two ways. First of all in the meekness of Christ, and secondly in the humility of Christ.

A) The Meekness of Christ:

The meekness of Christ, He uses the word, “I am gentle.” ‘Gentle’ is the word ‘meek’. It could be translated, some translations say ‘meek’. It is one of these words that is a little bit hard to turn into an English word because there is not really

a perfect fit. '*Gentleness*' in English focuses on the external manifestation of this word's meaning. This word means something internal and external, okay? But gentle focuses on the external manifestation, not the internal reality. If you are meek, if you are as Jesus says, '*praótēs*', you are '*meek*', what it means is, when people come up against you, you don't bite them. You know when you are struck you don't strike back? You are gentle. You are not a person who is always reacting. You know if somebody says, "What do *you* want?" That is not meek. But the meek person is someone who's able to be offended and they're slow to even take offense, gentle, and the gentleness comes from an inward disposition of heart in which the meek person is willing to relinquish their rights and their prerogatives. There's a disposition of the heart in which they're not insisting on their rights and their prerogatives. Now, this is so essential. If God was not meek, there is no way we could approach Him. His rights and His prerogatives mean that we have so trampled on His rights and His prerogatives that the very sight of us should be odious, and His right is to destroy us, to cast us away forever.

Even if you think about this idea of gentleness, too, you think about someone who's really strong, a body builder or a warrior, or some boxer, or whatever, and yet a good man like that can still then hold a baby and not crush the baby. I mean, he's used to crushing things, you know? But you know when you're touching a baby, you don't do what you do to a barbell. I guess you don't crush a barbell, but you know what I'm saying. There's a sense in which you recognize the need of the situation, and you soften because of the need of the person here.

God is like that. God is like that way beyond our wildest dreams or our fondest hopes. When God sees the weak, He responds in gentleness, and the cross tells us that, because here He is laying aside all of His rights. In the cross, He's laying aside His glory to come down to the earth. He's laying aside His position as King of kings and Lord of lords. He lives as a slave of all. He has people that He created—I mean, think about when the Jews and the Romans are beating Him and mocking Him, hitting Him in the face, saying, "Who hit You?" I guess He's gotten swollen, He's bleeding, and they're hitting Him, saying, "Tell us who hit You, if You're a Prophet." The moments that they're striking Him, the reality is that Jesus Christ is the One who is upholding all things by the word of His power. He's holding them in existence. If He were to stop, if He were to will it, the molecules in their bodies would blow apart. He's holding all things together. He's holding them. There He is restraining His rights as they strike Him, not striking back. He was reviled. He reviled not again. As a lamb led to slaughter, He was silent before its shearers. That's the meekness of Christ.



On the cross, we see how slow God is to anger as He says, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing. So the lowliness of God is seen in the meekness of Christ, and secondly:

B) The Humility of Christ:

Humility is the other word that’s used in this passage. “I’m gentle and humble in heart.” Humility is a willingness, or really I think C. S. Lewis defined it well. *It’s not that you think too little of yourself...* Some people think very highly of themselves. That’s what we do. We think highly of ourselves. But then some people will say, “You know, I’m just terrible. I’m just awful. I can’t believe how bad I am,” and in reality when people are doing that, they’re thinking very highly of themselves. “I want to call up and just tell you how bad I am today.” Why do I call up to tell you that? It’s because I want you to tell me that I’m not so bad, and I want to impose on your time to bother you with the fact that I have a need right now. I need you to affirm me. Do you see how selfish that is, how self-exalting that is? So C. S. Lewis said this: *Humility is not thinking too little of yourself. Humility is learning not to think of yourself at all.* It’s seeing yourself in proper proportion. *I’m not all that.* And this is the amazing thing. God is humble. He is able to not think of Himself and His interests completely so that He can think of the interests of the other, and you see that in the cross of Jesus Christ.

This says that He is approachable. It’s not His disposition or His heart to want to pour out His wrath. It is His heart to say, “Come to Me.” Now, He will pour out His wrath, and if you’re not in Jesus Christ, you will experience the fury of His wrath forever, because the worst thing in the world is to spurn this kind of love and this kind of lowliness. And if you esteem yourself too greatly to come to the foot of the cross, you will regret it for all eternity, for He is holy, and He is righteous, and He will punish sin, and He’s good because He does, but the wonder of it is the cross, He’s saying, “There is no reason for you sinner no matter how black your sins are, I will make them as white as snow. Come to Me.”

I mean, think about how approachable He was on the cross itself. There He is in agony. He’s experiencing all this physical agony, and more than that, He is experiencing the spiritual agony of being separated from the Father, and as He’s there, people are hurling insults at Him, saying, “If you’re the Son of God, come down from the cross.” And there are two thieves being crucified beside Him, remember? And as you look and put together all the Gospel accounts, what we see is that at the beginning, they were both hurling insults at Him. They were probably saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, why don’t You save us and Yourself?”

What are You doing? You're the King of the Jews and You're on a cross?" They're insulting Him, but as one of those thieves keeps looking at Christ and seeing Him in His meekness and His humility, something happens in that man's heart. He tells the other one who is continuing to hurl insults at Him, "Stop insulting Him. This man has done nothing wrong. We are here because we deserve it," and he says, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

Here is God who has been offended even in this moment, the moment of greatest weakness, this man has been hurling insults at Him just moments before, and Jesus lays down His right to retaliate, lays down His pride, and He says, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." That is the God of the Bible. The lowliness of God. It's the overwhelming attractiveness of the lowliness of God. How can it be that He who is holy and dwells in high and lofty places can also come down to dwell with him who is lowly and contrite of heart? (Isaiah 57:15). So we're drawn by the lowliness of God, but secondly we're drawn by:

2) The Loveliness of God:

God is lovely because He loves us. John says that in his epistle. We love Him because He first loved us. And a passage where you see the power, the drawing power, of the love of God is 2 Corinthians 5:14, the same chapter Ted mentioned earlier when he said and quoted, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21)." Seven verses before that, verse 14 says, "For the love of Christ constrains us, that if one died then all die." He goes on to say, "We no longer live for ourselves. It's the love of Christ that has this constraining power that draws me to no longer live for myself but to live for Him." There is a magnetic force to the love of Christ. When I look at His love, I am drawn to it. This is the mark of the believer. The true believer is one who glories in the cross, glories in what God has done for him. And when we glory in the cross, we're glorying in the love of God. We see the loveliness of God in the love of God. We love Him because He first loved us.

We see it in two ways. There are two sub-points on this second point as well. We see the loveliness of God first of all in the love of Christ for sinners, and secondly in the love of the Father for sinners. In the cross we see both the love of the Son for sinners and the love of the Father for sinners.

A) You See the Love of Christ for sinners:

1 John 3:16 says this. This is how we know what love is, that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. If you want to know what love is, look at Jesus Christ. He was loving us when He laid down His life for us. In John 10, Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” One aspect of the glory of the cross is that Jesus freely lays down His life. The Father gives Him—we’re going to talk about that in a moment, but the first thing we’ll look at is Jesus lays down His life. He offers Himself. How can it be? He didn’t just go through the physical agony that the movie *The Passion of the Christ* focused on. And this was one of its weaknesses. It totally missed the bigger issue. As horrible as the physical agony was, and the emotional pain of being insulted and humiliated the way He was in His humanity, the greatest agony of the cross was the spiritual agony that the Son of God felt. Galatians 3:13 says that He redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

What he’s saying is that the way He saved us was that on the cross He was cursed by the Father. To be cursed means to have wrath poured upon, to become the ultimate enemy. There’s a sense in which Jesus as He is on the cross, God lays upon Him the sins of the world. All of the guilt, all of the pollution, all of the vileness, for every sin that everyone who would ever believe has ever committed, it was laid upon Jesus. He knew it was going to be laid upon Him, and think about this, the wonder of one who is absolute holiness and purity, wearing our filthy garments of sin. I mean, haven’t you felt at times just the dirtiness of sin and how ugly it makes you feel, how awful it makes you feel? You’ve done something and you’ve done damage to someone you love, and you wish you could take those words back. You wish you could take that action back, and there it is, the guilt, and the pain, and the anguish of that sin, and you and I who are conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, we feel that overwhelming sense of guilt.

How infinitely greater must it have been the anguish for Jesus, the Pure of pure, the Holy of holies, to bear in His body our sins? The filthiness, the vileness, the shame, and not only just the experience of that guilt and shame and condemnation, but the greatest horror of all spiritually was that the Father turns His back on the Son. This is why Jesus halted before going to the cross. This is why in this passage, He said earlier in John Chapter 12, “Should I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But it’s for this hour that I came. Father, glorify Your Name.” Save Me from this hour, why? Not because of the physical agony. Not just because of the pain of wearing the robe of sin, but the pain of being separated from the Father. For on the cross as

He bears the weight of sin, the Father's face of pleasure turns away from Him. For the first time in all eternity, it's as if—it's beyond our ability to understand, but the Trinity, there's a disjuncture in the Trinity. The Father and Son who love each other with such incredible love, the Spirit, this communion of love is in a sense suspended in those agonizing hours on the cross, and the sky is dark at twelve noon, because the Son is bearing the guilt and weight of sin, and God is Light. In Him is no darkness at all, and so the Father removes His presence from the Son and there He hangs in agony, and Jesus becoming that and experiencing that all because He loved sinners like you and me. This was the only way to save us, and He was willing to do that. Do you see the loveliness of God? When you understand that about Jesus, doesn't that make you love Him more? *Amazing love, how can it be that You my God should die for me?* That is the love of Christ. But it's not just the love of Christ for sinners, but also the love of the Father for sinners.

B) The Love of the Father for Sinners:

I mentioned 1 John 3:16. Much more familiar is John 3:16.

John 3:16 ~ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

The cross is also the Father giving up the Son, turning Him over to become the sin-bearer, the wrath-bearer. The intimate communion of the Father and the Son, broken as the Son willingly gives Himself up for the purpose of saving sinners, and they together agree upon this great act of love, and the Father in His agony watches as His Son is led farther and farther away bearing our sins, His only begotten Son, John 3:16. It harkens back to John 1:18 that I mentioned a little bit earlier.

John 1:18 ~ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained (declared) Him.

That harkens back to the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. Do you remember the story where Abraham offers Isaac to the Lord? When you read that in the text, I remember reading it some years ago and being struck by how it seemed God was being so hard on Abraham. This is what He says. And remember how he waited for his son Isaac for 25 years? "I'm going to give you a son and I'm going to make you a great nation," and 25 years later He finally gives him the son.

He says in Genesis 22, “Abraham, wake up.” I’m adding a little bit there. “Abraham, take your son, your only son, whom you love, and take him to the mountain I’ll show you, and offer him there as a sacrifice.” Two other times in the passage, He says, “Take your son, your only son.” Now, why do You have to add *your only son*? I mean, He could have just said, “Take Isaac and offer him.” He said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love.” Why did God do that? I think He had a purpose in Abraham’s heart but He had a bigger purpose than that, because what happened we know is the Lord didn’t really intend for Abraham to offer Isaac. He supplied a sacrifice.

Abraham went to Mount Moriah and there he was ready to offer Isaac, and the Lord stopped him, and the Lord then provided a sacrifice in place. A ram was caught in a thicket, and He said, “Now I know that you have not withheld your son, your only son, whom you love, from Me.” There at Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount, that would later become the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and at that same place, Jesus is offered, and what God is showing us is, “What I did not require of you, I will do myself. I’m going to give My Son, My only Son, whom I love, and I will give Him freely for all men, and it will be the source of salvation to all, and I will not withhold that which is most precious and most dear to Me.”

God gave what is most precious and dear to Him for you. If you have repented and you are trusting in Christ, you can rejoice in this every day, and if you’ve not yet repented and believed, how can you say no to such love? This is who God is. He is holy, and He is just, and He will punish sin, but if you will believe on Christ, you will find that your sins have been punished in Him and you are then brought into the fellowship of love of a God who loves like this, a God who is lowly and who will put up with you, who understands your weakness, who fills His word with things like, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.” He remembers our frame. He’s mindful that we’re but dust. He knows how weak we are and He’s always saying, “Come,” and His cross says, “Come.” He’s willing to bear the shame so that you can be His.

There’s a sense in which the lowliness of God and the love of God are brought together in one of the parables that Jesus taught. Remember the story of the Prodigal Son, the son who wants to treat his father as if he’s dead. He wants to get his inheritance now. “I know you’re going to live a while longer, but I don’t want to wait. Divide up the inheritance. Give me my inheritance.” He goes off and he lives in a foreign land, and he squanders all of those resources in riotous living, ungodliness.

Remember how he comes to himself. He's eating, he has no food to eat, he's so hungry, and he longs to eat the slop with which he's been feeding the pigs. I mean, can you imagine that? That's worse than smelling dog food and when he'd eat the slop and he sees how miserable it is that he is below now the pigs. "I don't have what they have," and he says, "Surely I'll go back to my father's house, and he will let me at least live as a servant, and so he figures out what he's going to say. "I'm going to go back to my father, and I'm going to say, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Let me live as one of your hired hands'" He's worked out a speech, and he begins to make his way back.

Then the father sees him a long way off and the father is not proud and self-important. The father sees the need of the son. In his lowliness, in his meekness, the father is not sitting there with his arms crossed, saying, "Well, it's about time." Jesus said, "No, this is not what we are like." The father runs to the son, and remember he starts into his story. "Father..." He runs to his son and he kisses him. The son starts into his prepared speech. "Father, I've sinned against you and against heaven," and he never gets to finish the rest. The father says, "Send for a robe." Here he is in tatters. He's in clothing that somebody that had been feeding pigs would be in. He says, "Send for the robe. Kill the fatted calf, for this son who was lost is now found. He's back." He put a ring on his finger. He gives honor to this son who had so dishonored him.

One of the things that's interesting in Middle Eastern society is it was something that was undignified for an older man to run. The idea is once you get to a certain age, other people run to bring you things. You don't run for anything. And a landowner like this, a man who was established, would never run. And what happens is he runs to the son, and the sense is what he's doing is he's shaming himself to distract all the other—can you imagine the servants that see, what they're thinking? "Can you believe he's come home?" They know what he did. They love this man, this wonderful landowner who cares for all of his family and all of his servants, and they're probably taking up offenses for him. "Can you believe he has the nerve to come home?" They're ready to fold their arms against him, but the father runs, and then in a sense they're stumped by the fact, "What's he doing running? No man runs..." and then they see him fall upon him and kiss him, and what happens is the father takes shame on himself rather than allow shame on the child.

This is the nature of God. This is what Jesus says: “This is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. I will bear your guilt. I will bear your shame. You come to Me, but you must surrender yourself. You must repent. You must acknowledge your guilt. You must acknowledge that apart from Me, you have nothing and you will spend eternity in hell. But if you will acknowledge that and look upon Christ and look upon the cross of Christ, Him bleeding there in your place, bearing your sins, the full weight of wrath for your sins, and you will place your faith in Him, I will receive you to Myself. I will kiss you. I will put a ring on your finger, a robe around you, and I will kill the fatted calf, and I will celebrate, for the one, this son, this daughter who is lost, is now found.”

That is the glory of the cross, and how can we not regularly go to the cross? And how can we with people around us not share this wonderful message? And when we do, when we have opportunity, sometimes people will run from it. We know that, but He says in this verse, “If I be lifted up, He will draw all men,” that is He will draw men from every tribe and kindred. When you lift up the cross, you never know who’s going to come. You may see Rosario Champagne Butterfield come, a leading lesbian activist. The cross was lifted up and she came running. There’s no limit to the power of our glorious Savior.

Let’s go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we marvel in wonder and amazement at what You’ve done. The wonder of who You are, it does seem too good to be true. We look at Jesus and we see the things that He said and the amazing things that He did, and finally the great work that He did at Calvary, and we’re overwhelmed. God, we praise You and we thank You for the glory of the cross and for the sealing trumpet of the resurrection, that it said, “Yes, all that Jesus said about God is true, for death could not hold Him.” You raised Him from the dead.

Lord, we pray for everyone in this room. You know our hearts. You know everything about us. We don’t even know ourselves, Lord, but You know everything about us, every sinful deed, every sinful thought, every evil motive. We can fool others but we cannot fool You, and Lord, You are the one with whom we have to do. You are the one that we’re going to have to stand before, and You know it all. We are so guilty. We are so vile. There is no health in us. There is no hope for us in ourselves, and yet, Lord, we have a mighty Savior, and You have lifted Him up before our eyes. You have lifted up the Son of Man.

You have lifted up the Lord Jesus Christ, and You beckon men from every tribe and nation, from every kindred, to come and to drink from the water of life, to come unto You, we who are weary and heavy laden. It's so hard living for ourselves, living under the dominion of sin and Satan, but You say, "Come unto Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart," and You'll give us rest. I pray that You would help those who have never come to you today in this room to come right now, Lord, to run to You, to see that You have done everything necessary. There remains nothing more to be done except to surrender and to place their trust in You. And for those who have already come to You, Lord, that we would just live near the cross and that God forbid that we should glory in anything but the cross of Jesus Christ. We pray in His marvelous Name, Amen.

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