

## THE POWER OF THE CROSS

KARATINA UNIVERSITY CU SUNDAY SERVICE 28-1-18

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Readings: MATT 27:1-54 1Cor 1:17-25

### WHAT WAS CRUCIFIXION

- ❖ The word cross comes from a Greek word *crux* which means a wooden instrument of torture, when used in Christianity it is a symbolic representation of redemption through the death of Christ on the cross by crucifixion.
- ❖ Crucifixion was the most cruel, shameful (Heb 12:2 *Christ endured the cross, scorning its shame*) and barbarous forms of death known to man-
  - It was so dreaded that even in pre-Christian era, the cares and troubles of life were often compared to a cross.
- ❖ Whoever hang on the cross was cursed and an object of scorn. (Gal 3:13, Deut 21:22-23 *cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree*)
- ❖ Crucifixion was a public process of humiliation intended to deter would be criminals. Before being crucified, the criminal would be stripped naked, bent over and tied to a post, with the Roman soldiers applying blow after blow on the bared back with a lash intertwined with pieces of bone or steel. This was sufficient to cause death.
- ❖ The criminal would then be fixed on a tree/ cross. There were two methods of affixing a living victim to a cross: tying or nailing (which Christ underwent). This left the victim to support the body weight with his arms.
- ❖ Scientific studies have shown that, when a person is suspended by his two hands, the blood sinks rapidly into lower extremities of the body and within 6-12 minutes the blood pressure drops to half and the pulse doubles. The heart is deprived of blood and fainting follows; and death occurs due to heart failure. However, some crucifixion victims would survive 2-5 days.
- ❖ Death was therefore hastened by breaking of the legs (crucifraginum) **READ John 19:28-37** when they came to Jesus, they found he was already dead.
- ❖ The upward body hanging position made the chest cavity pulled upward and outward making it difficult to exhale in order to draw a fresh breath. The victim would try to heave himself up to breath, thus causing more pain on the nailed legs and the scorched back.
- ❖ The abnormal position of the body also caused great suffering, with the slightest movement causing additional torture
- ❖ One would also be given a stupefying potion/ drink (Mark 15:23) – to dull the senses or capacity to think therefore reducing responsiveness.
- ❖ Hanging for long time also induced traumatic fever.
- ❖ Sometimes, a fire was built beneath the cross to suffocate the victim from the fumes.

### MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CROSS

1. Paul in (1 Cor 1:17-25) says that the message of the cross is **foolishness** to those perishing.
  - It becomes a stumbling block to the natural man who sought for glory and credit in salvation
  - A religion that worshipped a man who died on the cross was foolish to many and therefore, it seemed wiser, safer and easier to worship the Roman emperor
  - Jews were seeking for a sign (ritualism) something outwardly beautiful, appealing to senses/emotions
  - Greeks sought for wisdom (rationalism) some explanation or reason before accepting the truth and acting on simple faith.
  - Gnostics held the belief that matter was evil and therefore a holy God would not associate with evil, thus denied the absolute deity of Christ. Col 2:6-12

## 2. Other world views that oppose the cross

- Death of Christ was an **accident**- this was something unforeseen by Christ and not in the plan of God. The scripture clearly refutes this assertion (Matt 16:21, Mark 9:31)
- Jesus died like a **martyr**- just like anybody else who dies for their faith.
  - However, martyrs die for their faith in someone else not themselves.
  - Besides they face death with confidence and happiness, but this was not the case of Christ Luke 22:39-46.
  - Furthermore, martyrs die for themselves while Christ died for others.
- The death of Christ was a **moral example**. However, his death did not call on us to keep being crucified.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEATH ON THE CROSS**

The death on the cross was necessary for propitiation for the sins of the people. It was **the only way** through which the sins of mankind would be removed. (Hebrews 2:17, 9:23-26, 10:4)

The power of the cross is not manifested in death (since other people were crucified and died) but at the **resurrection**. The fact that Christ rose from the dead on the third day as divinely predicted, declared him as the son of God. This is a demonstration of God's satisfaction with the sacrifice made for our sins. It was on the cross that Jesus' suffering for us reached its climax, for it was there that he bore the penalty for our sins and died in our place.

Through the cross, **Christ put away our sins** and made it possible for everyone, however sinful to come to God. The death on the cross made it possible for God to reach out to the guiltiest and vilest sinner and to offer freely a full salvation from all sin. At the cross, all sin was answered fully and forever. The cross was the full and final answer to all that sin is and judgement it deserves. (Heb 9:26-29).

Christ's death on the cross was a **ransom**, a price paid for buying back a person or a thing. Man had sold himself to sin and Satan and the cross paid the price that redeemed man from such bondage.

The cross made it **possible for us to be received into the most blessed fellowship**. The old testament high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed animal on the mercy seat (the lid/covering of the ark of covenant) to atone for the sins of men against God- this was the place where God met the interceding high priest and granted pardon to the sinful man. **In the death of Christ, the holy God grants pardon to the sinful mankind**- it is at the cross that God meets the sinner who receives pardon and gains favour with him. Heb 9:22

The cross **broke down the enmity wall between the wicked man and holy God**, bringing the believer to a place of friendship with God (**READ Col 1:19-22.**) Sin erected a barrier between God & man and made their fellowship impossible until some means be devised to remove sin. Nothing but the death of Christ in the estimation of God could remove that barrier. The cross therefore becomes a practical demonstration or exhibition as to the seriousness with which God views sin. The cross is the one place where sin can be understood and explained since we judge the awfulness/ seriousness of a crime by the punishment meted out to the one who commits it. (Romans 5:10 Ephesians 2:11-22)

Christ **cancelled the written code and nailed it on the cross**- there was a custom where accusations or charges or a debt against a person were written on a stone tablet and once cleared; they would be erased, cancelled, rubbed or blotted out of the wax tablets. The erased tablet was nailed on the doorpost of the person as a witness that it was cancelled. **Col 2:9-15**

The cry of Christ on the cross 'it is finished' signified the **completeness of our salvation**. The Greek work renders the meaning '*to make an end, accomplish, fulfil, perform, fill up, pay or go over*'. This was a triumphant cry that announced a work completely accomplished. Therefore, the cross brings a complete salvation to everyone who will accept it by faith.

The death on the cross being the means of our redemption **signifies our value before God**; since the price paid for anything determines its value to the purchaser- the greater the cost, the more an owner values the article. This is what then qualifies us to be called **the children** of God.

## APPLICATION OF THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

The cross presents the greatest crisis for humanity- because it means **either life or death** to everyone based on one's response of faith or unbelief respectively.

1. The death of Christ was voluntary (he gave himself as an offering to God.) It now remains for **sinner to voluntarily accept him** as their substitute for the legal penalty of sinfulness- death.

The death on the cross did not bring universal salvation but made salvation available for all who would accept it by faith. Redemption is therefore provided for all on condition that one exercises an act of faith in Christ.

Hell is real for those who ignore the message of the cross, its experience is awful; if not, God would not have therefore subjected his son to such a dreadful and shameful death on the cross.

2. **1 Peter 2:21-25** he bore our sins **so that we can live in righteousness**, we are no longer lost sheep going astray but have been restored back to the shepherd. – **this is a call to holy living.**

Deliverance from sin and evil commits the redeemed to holiness. **(Go and sin no more)**

### HYMN

#### AT THE CROSS

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,  
Or to defend His cause;  
Maintain the honor of His Word,  
The glory of His cross.

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away,  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day!

Jesus, my God! I know His name,  
His name is all my trust;  
Nor will He put my soul to shame,  
Nor let my hope be lost.

Firm as His throne His promise stands,  
And He can well secure  
What I've committed to His hands  
Till the decisive hour.

Then will He own my worthless name  
Before His Father's face,  
And in the new Jerusalem  
Appoint my soul a place.