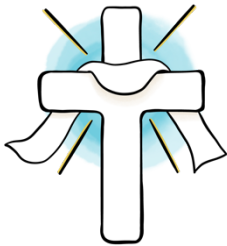


What is the Cross?

At first glance, the cross may appear as a mere emblem of suffering and death, a symbol of a dying Christ, or a complex icon of self-denial. Yet, within the heart of the Christian faith, the cross is far more transformative. It is not just a symbol of an ending but of a new beginning, a beacon of hope, and a declaration of victory.

The following article delves into the true essence of the cross, unraveling its significance beyond common perceptions. Join us in uncovering the layers of meaning behind the cross: the climactic act of redemption at Calvary, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the dawn of a new covenant. As we answer key questions about its purpose and impact, we will see the cross not as a symbol of confusion but as the ultimate expression of God's love and grace.

What does the cross mean?



Although some view the cross as an offensive symbol, it holds a profound significance within the Christian faith. It represents one of the most beautiful expressions of God's heart for humanity, revealing the intersection of his wrath, justice, mercy, and love.

On the cross of Calvary, Jesus willingly sacrificed his life and bore the weight of our sins, offering complete payment for our transgressions. His death on the cross was a moment of glory (John 12:23–33). In speaking, “It is finished” (John 19:30), Jesus declared that the debt of sin had been

fully paid. Significantly, at that very moment, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), symbolizing our direct access and atonement to God.

While a crucifix, displaying Jesus' body on the cross, emphasizes his suffering and death, an empty cross reminds us that death could not hold him captive. Jesus triumphantly rose from the dead, signifying the victory over sin and death. The cross proclaims the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice and the completeness of his redemptive work.

Sadly, not everyone comprehends the profound meaning of the cross. As the apostle Paul states, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). For some, the cross is repulsive and offensive, but for those who trust in Christ's work, the cross symbolizes victory and hope, representing the power of God's love and the triumph over sin and death. Therefore, it is prominently displayed as a reminder of our redemption.

What is the narrative of the cross in the Bible?

The narrative of the cross begins in the Old Testament, where various symbols, prophecies, and sacrifices foreshadow the coming of Christ and his sacrificial death. The sacrificial system instituted in the Law of Moses, especially the offerings made on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), prefigures the ultimate sacrifice that Christ would make. The prophets also spoke of a

suffering servant who would bear the sins of many. For example, Isaiah 53 vividly describes the sacrificial death of the Messiah for the sins of the people.

The Gospels provide a detailed account of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. They narrate how Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world, lived a sinless life, and taught about the Kingdom of God. The climax of the Gospels is the passion or Holy Week narrative – the arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The cross is central in this narrative, as it is the means by which Jesus offers himself as the atoning sacrifice for sin. Crucial moments leading up to the cross include Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46) and his trials before religious and Roman authorities. His crucifixion at Golgotha (Matthew 27:33-56) and his declaration of the completion of his redemptive work, "It is finished" (John 19:30), are what give Good Friday its name.

The Epistles, particularly the writings of Paul, expound on the theological significance of the cross. They explain how the death of Jesus on the cross was God's plan for reconciling humanity to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The cross is portrayed as the ultimate demonstration of God's love (Romans 5:8) and as the means by which believers are justified by faith (Romans 3:23-26). The Epistles also describe how the power of sin and death is broken through the cross (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

The Book of Revelation, while symbolic, presents the triumph of the cross in the ultimate victory of Christ over evil, sin, and death. It depicts Christ as the Lamb who was slain, worthy to open the scroll of God's redemptive plan (Revelation 5:6-14). The cross is shown as the means by which Christ achieves victory and establishes his eternal Kingdom.

Why was Jesus put to death on the cross?

Jesus was put to death on the cross to complete God's plan of salvation for humanity. His death was the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:5-6) and affirmed in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus, being sinless, was the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. His death on the cross was necessary because it satisfied the justice of God. Sin required a penalty, which is death (Romans 6:23), and Jesus paid that penalty on our behalf. By his crucifixion, Jesus bore the wrath of God against sin, offering himself as the atoning sacrifice for our transgressions (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What happened when Jesus died on the cross?

When Jesus died on the cross, several significant events occurred. Firstly, He accomplished the atonement for our sins (John 19:30). His death marked the fulfillment of the law and the prophecies concerning the Messiah (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44). Secondly, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), symbolizing the end of the Old Covenant and the opening of direct access to God for all believers. This act signified that the barrier between God and humanity had been removed through Christ's sacrifice. Lastly, Jesus' death on the cross displayed God's profound love for humanity (Romans 5:8) and his victory over sin and death, which would be fully realized in his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Did Jesus' death on the cross pay for the whole world's sins?

Jesus' death on the cross paid for the sins of the whole world. This concept is known as the doctrine of universal atonement or objective justification. The Bible affirms that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) and that God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Christ's sacrificial death was sufficient to cover the sins of every person (Hebrews 10:10), providing the means for reconciliation between God and all of humanity.

Why are some people still going to hell if Jesus died to pay for the world's sins?

While Jesus' death on the cross paid for the sins of the whole world, the benefits of his atonement are received through faith. Faith is receiving and resting in Jesus' finished work for us. Salvation, including all of the blessings God offers, is a gift of the Holy Spirit, that must be received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Those who reject Christ and do not believe in him do not receive the benefits of his atoning sacrifice. At death, they will be eternally separated from God and all of his blessings. John 3:18 states, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." Therefore, it is not the lack of atonement or its sufficiency that leads to condemnation but the rejection of the gospel—the rejection of the gift—and unbelief.

Why do some Christians wear crosses?

Many Christians wear crosses to symbolize and share their faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. The cross represents the central event of Christian salvation history—the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a reminder of the love, grace, and forgiveness that come through Christ's atoning work. For believers, the cross is a symbol of hope, redemption, and the transformative power of God's love. Wearing a cross serves as a visual testimony of one's worship and adoration of Christ and a reminder of the price paid for their salvation (Galatians 6:14).

A Closer Look: The Cross

As Jesus hung on the cross, two criminals were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left (Luke 23:32). Both criminals initially joined the crowd in mocking Jesus. However, as the crucifixion unfolded, something miraculous happened to one of them.

As the hours passed, one of the criminals experienced a profound transformation. He recognized his guilt and the innocence of Jesus. At that moment, his heart softened, and he spoke to Jesus, requesting, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

In response, Jesus spoke words of assurance and comfort that resonate with believers today. Jesus told the repentant thief, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

In this poignant exchange, we find a powerful connection to the concepts of "remembering" and "paradise" in the Bible. Just as God "remembered" Noah and Joseph in their times of need,

Jesus “remembered” the repentant thief in his final moments. This act of “remembering” isn’t about recalling something forgotten, but about active intervention, care, and fulfillment of a promise.

To understand the significance of Jesus’ “paradise” promise to the thief, we must turn to the Book of Revelation, where the term “paradise” is referenced several times. Revelation 2:7 states, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

This verse connects “paradise” with the Tree of Life, which is in the presence of God. The Tree of Life has always been associated with God’s dwelling place, symbolizing eternal life and communion with him. In Revelation 22:2, we find further evidence of this connection, as it describes the Tree of Life bearing fruit for the healing of the nations in the New Jerusalem, which is the dwelling place of God.

By comparing these verses, it becomes evident that “paradise” is a term for heaven, the place of God’s eternal presence, itself. When Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with him in “paradise,” he assured him of an immediate and eternal presence with God in heaven.

Through his faith and recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, the thief was granted the gift he requested; that very day, Jesus remembered and welcomed him into the paradise of heaven with God forevermore.

In those few words, Jesus declared the sufficiency of his sacrifice and the completeness of his redemptive work. The dying thief did not have the opportunity to perform good deeds, keep religious laws, perform ordinances, or undergo baptism. He simply placed his trust in Jesus, recognizing him as the sinless Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sins and Jesus *remembered* him.

What does the cross mean for you?

Just as the repentant thief found hope and assurance in Jesus’ promise of paradise, you, too, can find peace and assurance in the power of the cross. Through faith in Christ’s finished work, you are invited to receive the gift of salvation and eternal life in God’s presence.

The cross of Christ, a bloody tree of death, is, for us, a beautiful tree of life that welcomes us into the presence of God. When we gaze upon the cross, we remember the permanent sign of God’s providence, care, and faithfulness. It’s a reminder that, like the repentant thief, we are also assured of immediate and eternal communion with God in heaven.

Through the cross, Christ spanned the great divide separating humanity and God, offering us a restored and intimate relationship with Heavenly Father. Just as God “remembered” Noah and Joseph, and Jesus “remembered” the thief, the cross reminds us that God actively intervenes in our lives, offering forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life to all who trust in him.

In the face of human brokenness and the consequences of sin, the cross stands as a beacon of certain hope and a testament to God’s redemptive plan. It reminds us that we are not left to bear

the weight of our transgressions. Jesus has paid the price in full, offering forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life to all who believe in him.

As you trust Jesus, find solace and strength in the shadow of the cross, letting its message of certain hope and redemption transform you from within. Jesus, who conquered the grave, walks with you every step of the way, providing all you need. Rejoice in the cross, for it opens the gates of paradise, leading to a joyful eternity in God's presence. The cross boldly proclaims to those near and far: "Jesus is enough."

Study the Cross in the Bible

- John 12:23-33
- John 19:30
- Matthew 27:51
- 1 Corinthians 1:18

Songs about the Cross

- ***How Deep the Father's Love for Us*** by Stuart Townend beautifully portrays the depth of God's love in sending His Son to the cross for our sake.
- ***Jesus Paid It All*** by Elvina M. Hall speaks of the completeness of Jesus' work on the cross, paying the debt of sin and providing salvation.
- ***The Power of the Cross*** by Keith & Kristyn Getty highlights the power and victory of the cross over sin and death.
- ***It Was Finished Upon That Cross*** by CityAlight summarizes the significance of what Christ did on the cross for you and me.