

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing the subject of "The Cross."

I would encourage you to go to <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info> as I continue to update the site. I have links to several specific features below. Let me know what you think, whether you have any suggestions, or any requests.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

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Or you can access other educational/informational/inspirational resources at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources>

You can find the current preaching schedule for the Springfield, Missouri Restoration Branch at https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources/Service_Schedule.php

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1 Corinthians 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.

The Cross.

These two words placed together in this order evokes to most Christian minds a veritable plentitude of thoughts. Torture, suffering, anguish, but also redemption, atonement, and salvation. It is appropriate when we approach the traditional celebration of Passover that

we should bring to memory all of these things. But if those six different words aren't brought to mind, two other words are or should be: Jesus Christ.

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ are fantastic in their own right, but it would be an incomplete message if not for these two words: The Cross.

“Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world.” – Archimedes, Greek philosopher, circa 287 BC to 212 BC. (see https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/archimedes_101761)

It might perhaps be appropriate to use this quote from Archimedes to refer to the life of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice some 245 years later would become the fulcrum on which he (Jesus) moved the world using the fulcrum of the cross. Salvation rests upon it and the atonement cannot exist without it, and the life of Jesus cannot move the world without the entirety of his ministry being leveraged by that singular sacrifice. Jesus Christ is both lever, fulcrum, and movement for the world. He is the savior of the world.

Historians agree that crucifixion by means of the cross was a common Roman method for dealing with true criminals, those perceived to be criminals, or political malcontents. Rome had no particular argument with Jesus himself – it was not in their purview to wantonly kill people – it was bad business and would tend to lead to uprisings, excepting where they had to assert their authority.

Crucifixion was not new to Rome though. The book of Esther describes Haman as being put up on gallows that scholars tend to agree refers to a cross or something very similar to it. Even that reference might be considered to be a late reference to something that existed long before. The term “gallows” is often used as a pejorative for “tree,” which brings to mind that the law of Moses had something to say about those who are hung from trees for punishment.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

22 And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree,

23 His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day (for he that is hanged is accursed of God), that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord, thy God, giveth thee for an inheritance.

If we go this far back, is there any older reference? Perhaps –

Genesis 40:19 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

This earliest reference to this type of punishment was in the days of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was at the time in prison in Egypt and gave interpretations of two dreams that were had by Pharaoh's butler and baker. The butler's dream foretold his (the butler's) release from prison, while the baker's dream foretold his death by hanging from a tree. That being the case, this might be the first reference to a crucifixion, many years before Rome came into being.

The fact that the law of Moses has reference to it is not mere coincidence. Paul wrote in his epistle to the Galatians that this same reference from Deuteronomy 21:22-23 was in due time the same manner of death that Jesus was to suffer, and it is also the reason why it was so important for Jesus to die on that day and not be left overnight on the cross. He had to fulfill the law – every part of it -- including the manner of his death.

Galatians 3:12-15

12 And the law is not of faith; but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, **Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree,**

14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that they might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto.

John shows plainly that the Jews insisted that Jesus and the other two crucified next to him should not remain overnight into the Sabbath, being the Sabbath of the Passover.

John 19

31 The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation--**that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day** (for that Sabbath day was a high day)--besought Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.

32 Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him.

33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs;

34 But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

35 And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.

I remember once when preaching or teaching (I forget which) that at the mention that Jesus was made a curse for us, I got some kind of funny looks. How could this most pure specimen of divine integrity become a curse? Yet that is exactly what the crucifixion was required for. He took upon himself our curses because we could not bear them ourselves without suffering the spiritual death. Our curses transferred to him, so he became a curse

for us. Anything that is cursed by God must die, so Jesus had to die even though he himself was perfect.

It may be that the terminology is somewhat confusing, as we read the following from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 12:3 Wherefore, I give you to understand that no man, speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can know that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

What Jesus did was to kill off that which was a curse – the sins of the world, though he himself was not “accursed.” Meaning, that something that accursed is rejected by God on account of its nature – an intrinsic part of its character. Jesus was not this – he bore our sins, meaning that he carried them, but he himself was not intrinsically accursed on account of some evil that he himself had done. Anyone claiming Jesus to have some intrinsic flaw or sin because of who he is would be doing so at the behest of the devil.

One could argue, perhaps even passionately, that Jesus didn't need to do this sacrifice – he could have just let us die that spiritual death and, when we were all done, start over with a new humanity that didn't sin. There is a problem with that idea though. When God created man, he made some statements that were irreversible.

Genesis 1:27-33 (Inspired Version)

27 And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so.

28 And I, God, said, Let them have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

29 And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them.

30 And I, God, blessed them and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

31 **And I, God, said unto man, Behold, I have given you every herb**, bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the which shall be the fruit of a tree, yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

32 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein I grant life, there shall be given every clean herb for meat; and it was so, even as I spake.

33 And I, God, saw everything that I had made; and behold, all things which I had made were very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

These are irreversible statements because one of the characteristics of God is that his word shall not return to him void. Or in other words, if God says it, there is no going back on it. It **must** be fulfilled.

Genesis 3:30 (Inspired Version) For as I, the Lord God, liveth, even so my words cannot return void, for as they go forth out of my mouth, they must be fulfilled.

Isaiah 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Man could not have dominion over the earth very well if he were dead, so knowing that man would sin, God created a plan of redemption that would return him (man) to a perfected state of life. Thus, there was the need for a savior to perform the task of redemption. A crucifixion had to take place.

Jesus had to be crucified to satisfy the word of God and the demands of justice. Satisfying the demands of justice was the means whereby we could be restored to spiritual life, which in turn was the means for fulfilling the word of God.

Indeed, because of the rebellion of Adam and Eve, we would have been consigned to a state of spiritual death permanently from the beginning.

2 Nephi 6:10-14

10 For it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

11 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection.

12 And the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall;

13 And the fall came by reason of transgression;

14 And because man became fallen, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord;

As Jacob says, “For as death hath passed upon all men,” meaning that ***it had already happened***, and in verse 14 he says, “because man became fallen, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord” which is what ***spiritual death*** is:

Helaman 5:66-72

69 Yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord;

70 Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection and redeemeth all mankind from **the first death--that spiritual death for all mankind, by the fall of Adam, being cut off from the presence of the Lord, or considered as dead**, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

71 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord;
72 Yea, and it bringeth to pass the conditions of repentance, that whosoever repenteth, the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire.

The death of Jesus on the cross was never intended to bring about a redemption from the physical/temporal death, but from the spiritual death. By means of the resurrection the grave has no victory and the sting of death is swallowed up in hopes of glory, or in other words, the restoration to a physical/temporal body:

Alma 13:47 And that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory. And Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.

The reference to the “bands of death,” is notably a plural word, because there are two deaths of which he is speaking. The death of Christ on the cross – the atonement sacrifice - brought about a redemption from **spiritual** death, which is a spiritual victory, while the resurrection of Christ brought about the means for the **physical/temporal** victory over death.

It would seem strange, then, to think of all those poor souls who died before Christ’s crucifixion who should be suffered to endure the spiritual death all those thousands of years until that day when Jesus proclaimed a victory over the spiritual death of men. ***It really should seem strange because that is not how the scriptures describe it.***

Rather, we find this particular passage that describes the situation succinctly:

Alma 16:210, 215

210 For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice--yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but **it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.**

215 And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law--every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and **that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal;** and thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name;

Here is the answer: the sacrifice Jesus made is very much similar in character to Jesus himself: infinite and eternal. We note particularly the word “eternal” which means that it is “from all eternity to all eternity.” Or in other words, the sacrifice of Jesus brought about redemption from the spiritual death for all men in all of eternity, with the caveat that it is for those “who shall believe on his name.” Thus, whether we look to the life of Adam or the life of the last human that shall ever be born, redemption from this spiritual death is available to them.

We also find consolation in the words of Alma to his son Corianton concerning these things:

Alma 19:25-27

25 Behold, I say unto you, **Is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?**

26 Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people, as well as unto their children?

27 Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us, as unto our children, **or as after the time of his coming?**

God is not a respecter of persons, so he loves us whether we had lived before the time of Jesus' ministry or after, and thus the plan of redemption is equally valid for all the times of men.

The crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus are both necessary components for the redemption of mankind because they represent the two components that make up a human soul: the spirit and the body.

Doctrine and Covenants (RLDS) 85:4a

4a Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you, is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. **And the spirit and the body is the soul of man.**

As we also read in Alma's explanation to his son Corianton,

Alma 19:52 Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but it meaneth the reuniting of the soul with the body of those from the days of Adam down to the resurrection of Christ.

(Here Alma pejoratively refers to the soul in the same sense later used to describe the spirit of man.)

There must have been a very real transference of guilt from the men from all the ages of mankind to Jesus, or this could not have been completed. This is why, as many surmise, that Jesus began to physically fail before he was nailed to the cross. This was a choice he made, but it carried severe physical and spiritual trauma with it. We see this in the effects it had upon him in the garden of Gethsemane:

Luke 22:43-44

43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

44 And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Mosiah 1:100-101

100 And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, **even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death;**

101 For behold, blood cometh from every pore, **so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.**

Doctrine and Covenants (RLDS) 18:2h – 2j

2h For, behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer, if they will repent; but if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I;

2i **which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit,** and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink;

2j nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men;

How Jesus was able to do this transfer of the punishment for the sins of mankind to himself is perhaps the greatest mystery in the gospel and in all the scriptures that we have. But we are assured in the Book of Mormon that only an infinite and eternal being would even be capable of it, whatever mechanism that it required. Indeed, we have already seen this passage, but here we emphasize the nature of the sacrifice itself.

Alma 16

210 For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice--**yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice;** but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

Here we find the key distinguishing difference between Jesus and everyone else: Jesus took upon himself the appearance of man, which was created in the image of God, but he was not merely human. His dual identity as a man and as God made this sacrifice different than all that preceded it or that have been done since. A merely human sacrifice would have accomplished nothing more than all those other crucifixions that had been done, or the sacrifices of animals under law of Moses.

Hebrews 10:1 For **the law**, having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things, **can never with those sacrifices, which they offered continually, year by year, make the comers thereunto perfect.**

Those sacrifices carried symbolic value in that they referred to the true sacrifice of Jesus, just as Jacob described to his people in the Book of Mormon, more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus:

Jacob 3:3-6

3 Now in this thing we do rejoice; and we labor diligently to engrave these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful

hearts and look upon them, that they may learn with joy, and not with sorrow, neither with contempt concerning their first parents;

4 For, for this intent have we written these things, **that they may know that we knew of Christ**, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we, ourselves, had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

5 Behold, **they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name; and also, we worship the Father in his name.**

6 **And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him**; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, **which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.**

The means by which Jesus suffered the crucifixion – upon a cross – is also interesting from the perspective of the shape of the cross itself. While it is a simple shape, and some dispute what that shape truly was, we can assert that the word describes it as well as the definition. A cross. Two pieces of wood that cross each other. I feel that there is something deep in the meaning of that as well.

Jesus himself used the term cross to describe how we should deal with sin and temptation, and how to change ourselves for the better.

Matthew 5:31 Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart; for it is better that ye should **deny yourselves of these things**, wherein **ye will take up your cross**, than that ye should be cast into hell.

Matthew 10:33 And **he who taketh not his cross** and followeth after me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 16:25 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**

Matthew 16:26 And now **for a man to take up his cross is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.**

Mark 8:36 And when he had called the people, with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**

Mark 10:20 Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and **come, take up the cross, and follow me.**

Luke 9:23 And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.**

Luke 14:27 And **whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

The shape itself is intriguing to consider as it is used in a sense for other things like street signs or directions in buildings. A circle with an icon and a line through it at an angle, in which a given behavior or choice is forbidden or declared unlawful. (Do not enter) (No left turn) (No parking), etc., these are borrowed terms for the same idea.

The cross itself serves as a reminder of brutality and torture, but also of courage, power, integrity, and a way of life. Some might view it as a symbol of death and killing and murder, but Jesus gave his life – it was not taken from him.

When the soldiers came to break his legs, thereby to hasten and ensure his death, they found he had already died. In fact, Jesus “gave up the ghost” – meaning that his spirit departed his body and his body died. It was not uncommon for crucified victims to live for several days after being placed on the cross, but Jesus was dead before the end of the day, and this is what surprised the Roman soldiers tasked with finishing their grisly duty. They had expected, like the other two “thieves” crucified alongside Jesus, for him to still be alive.

As the great high priest, his duty was to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. Unlike other high priests he did not have to firstly offer a sacrifice for himself – he had no sin that had to be purged. Instead, he made a sacrifice – giving himself a living sacrifice – that would be eternal.

The role of Christ’s priesthood in performing this sacrifice cannot be overstated. If Jesus had not been ordained to this role his sacrifice would not have satisfied the demands of the law, because high priests were responsible for this task. Yet his priesthood was not given by the law, but by an oath. He performed the sacrifice as a high priest because the law was incomplete without himself as the object of it (i.e., the sacrifice), while simultaneously being the only one authorized to perform it.

Thus, only he had the authority to perform this sacrifice, and only he could be the object of the sacrifice on account of his nature as an infinite and eternal being. He presided over his own death, while also satisfying the law of Moses in its entirety.

At the time of Jesus’ death on the cross, two major events took place at the same time. A great earthquake in Jerusalem, and the veil in the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. This veil served as the curtain between the holy of holies and the outer sanctuary, as described in the law of Moses, and it was a thick curtain, which we find described the book of Exodus:

Exodus 26:31-34

31 And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work; with cherubim shall it be made.

32 And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold; their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver.

33 And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony; and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.

34 And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.

In other words, this curtain (“veil”) was a visual barrier between the place where the shewbread and other items were kept, and the inner sanctuary where the mercy seat was, which sat on the ark of the covenant.

Daily sacrifices were performed outside this curtain, while a once-a-year sacrifice was performed inside it by the high priest. It was a barrier between God and man, and it ripped in two at the time of Jesus’ death on the cross, signifying that the way to God was opened up through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

On a cross there is basically one point at which two different lines meet. It is the intersection of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the point at which we must choose to continue in sin or move on to serve the Lord. It is the intersection between spiritual life and spiritual death.

The way we view the cross is important, and it is remarkable that such a simple symbol today can have so much meaning and so many different ways to consider it. Ultimately how we view the cross is a choice, both figuratively and literally. We can see it as a symbol of the terrible things of this world, its cruelty and horror, or we can see it as a symbol of the only hope we can possibly have for salvation by virtue of the one who used it for us.