1 CORINTHIANS 2:2

THE GLORY OF CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED

Why the Cross Remains the Center of the Gospel and the Hope of the Nations



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I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

, 1 Corinthians 2:2

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Christ and Him Crucified

Why the Cross Remains the Center of the Gospel and the Hope of the Nations

Paul's settled determination was simple and uncompromising: "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." That resolve is not a relic of the first century. It is the primary anchor the church must recover in this hour.

The cross addresses at least four interlocking realities. It is the means of salvation. It is the decisive revelation of God's love. It discloses the ways and character of God. And it is the key to understanding how God is leading human history toward its appointed end. Along with the knowledge of Jesus Christ Himself, the understanding of Christ and Him crucified is the primary reality to which believers must give themselves. It is not merely the doorway into the kingdom; it is the ongoing diet of the church and the lens through which everything else is interpreted.

Paul's language in Galatians is severe for a reason. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" (Galatians 3:1) The ultimate aim of spiritual deception is not always the invention of elaborate heresies. It is often the quiet release of a fog that distorts the way the church sees the cross. The cross is still affirmed. It is simply no longer central. It becomes sentimental, private, or reduced to a past transaction rather than remaining the living center of how believers understand God's love, God's ways, and God's leadership of the nations. The writer of Hebrews issues a parallel warning: do not neglect so great a salvation, lest you drift. Drifting is rarely dramatic. Like a swimmer who looks up and discovers the shoreline has shifted, the church can move a long distance from the cross without ever deciding to leave it.

Paul's intensity reaches its peak in Galatians 6:14: "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Coming from a man who had seen the risen Lord, the phrase carries sobriety. It is almost a prayer: if I boast in anything else, stop me. Forbid it. That kind of resolve forces a question. If the apostle felt that strongly, perhaps there is more at stake than most of us have assumed.

Isaiah's Three Mountain Peaks

The book of Isaiah contains three surprising revelations of the same Man. In Isaiah 6 the prophet sees the Lord high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple, the seraphim crying "Holy, holy, holy." John 12:41 tells us that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory. That vision is majestic and, in one sense, expected. Of course the Lord is high and lifted up.

Some time later the same prophet receives a second vision that undoes him. The One who sat on the throne is the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, growing up before the Father as a tender plant, a root out of dry ground, with no form or comeliness that we should desire Him. Isaiah 53 is the pinnacle of the glory of Jesus as revealed in the book of Isaiah. The third peak comes in Isaiah 63, where the same Man appears again in a way that startles the prophet and ends with the revelation of the steadfast love of God (Isaiah 63:7). He sees the Man as a fierce and righteous judge longing for the day of vengeance (Isaiah 63:4). The pathway from the throne of Isaiah 6 to the exaltation of Philippians 2 runs directly through the suffering of Isaiah 53. God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name because He humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The context of Isaiah's first vision still speaks. In the year King Uzziah died, the nation stood in transition, moral and spiritual decline, economic uncertainty, and the looming threat of foreign power. It was precisely then that the prophet saw the Lord high and lifted up. The same four pressures press upon the church in our own day. The Spirit's invitation remains unchanged: lift up your eyes. See the Lord high and lifted up, and see that the One high and lifted up is the Lamb who was slain.

Isaiah 42 and 49–55 form the Servant Songs. In them the prophet explores the servanthood of God with unusual depth. The songs show how the humility of God confronts the darkness and idolatry of the nations in order to lead them into glory. John the Baptist's first public cry summarizes the entire movement: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That cry will also be the cry of the end-time church. The Lamb takes away the sin of the world first through the cross and then through the judgments that flow from it, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The Servant is presented in successive facets. He is the Judge who will bring justice to the nations (Isaiah 42). He is the faithful Messenger and King (Isaiah 49–50). He is the Redeemer of Israel (Isaiah 51–52). In Isaiah 53 He is revealed as the Lamb of God. In Isaiah 54–55 the same Servant is the Bridegroom. The arc is deliberate. God's strategy for redeeming Israel and

bringing the nations out of darkness is the meekness and self-giving of the crucified Servant.

The Poverty of the Servant

Isaiah 53:1–3 opens with a question that still hangs in the air: “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” The report is almost unbelievable. The arm of the Lord, the power of God, is revealed precisely to those who believe a message that sounds like weakness. He grew up before the Father as a tender plant, a root out of dry ground. There was nothing in His outward appearance, background, education, or social position that would have drawn the eye. He was born in Nazareth, the backwoods of Israel, laid in a feeding trough, uneducated by the standards of the schools, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was despised and rejected by men, by His family, by the crowds, by the leadership, and at times even by His own disciples. We hid, as it were, our faces from Him.

The miracle is that anyone recognized Him at all. When Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus replied that flesh and blood had not revealed it. The recognition of the Messiah in the weakness of His humanity required revelation. The same dynamic continues. Everything in the natural resists the face of Christ crucified. We hide our faces for several reasons. The cross confronts us with the pinnacle of God’s glory and the depth of our own depravity at the same time. It shows how serious God is about sin and the lengths to which He will go to deliver us. And it shows what He requires of those who follow Him.

Isaiah 53:4–6 moves from the poverty of the Servant to the atonement He accomplished. “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows… He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” Jesus did not die only for the wrong we have done. He also died for the wrong done against us. He bore the griefs and sorrows that have broken human hearts as well as the transgressions and iniquities that required judgment. There is no lasting inner healing outside the discovery of Christ and Him crucified. Justification is more than right standing before God; it includes the acknowledgment that we have been wronged, which in turn empowers the heart to forgive.

In the Old Testament the priests laid both hands on the head of the sacrifice, placing their full weight upon it. The gesture was prophetic. There is coming a Lamb on whom the entire weight of our faith must rest. Salvation is not a wage we earn; it is a gift received by placing the whole weight of our trust on the

finished work of Christ. The Father prepared His Son for this. Hebrews 2:10 says it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. The word “perfect” carries the sense of the unblemished sacrifice made ready. Revelation 13:8 declares that the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. The cross was not Plan B. It was consistent with the nature of God from the beginning. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him. There was no conflict in the heart of the Father, because the self-giving of the Son is the revelation of who God is.

Years ago I had a dream. I was in a sanctuary during worship. Off to the side was a communion table and a picture of Jesus on the cross. I was there, taking the bread and the cup, aware of the Lord’s presence. Suddenly the atmosphere changed. The worship team began singing, with surprising passion, an old Whitney Houston song: “How will I know if he really loves me?” They repeated the chorus again and again. I woke with a clear phrase in my spirit: “Sincere, but looking for love in all the wrong places.” The primary place we know the love of God is the cross. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We are convinced not first because we felt something, though the Lord is kind to let us feel His love, but because He gave His Son.

> *I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)*

The Cross as Victory, Not Defeat

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. Kings do not conquer by dying. Yet the God-Man prevailed precisely through death. The enemy offered Him the kingdoms of the world without the suffering. The crowds tried to make Him king by force after the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus refused every shortcut. The pathway to His inheritance as the Son of David ran through the cross.

Revelation 5:2-3 makes the point unforgettable. A strong angel proclaims, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth is found worthy. John weeps. Then one of the elders says, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed.” When John looks, he sees a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. What qualified Him to take the title deed of the land of promise, thus the earth, was not merely resurrection power but the scars of the cross. The emphasis falls on the suffering. Daniel 7 shows the same pattern for the saints: they receive the

kingdom through a process that mirrors the path of the Son of Man.

Jesus did not die in weakness. He cried out with a loud voice and gave up His spirit when all things were finished. Colossians 2:15 declares that at the cross He disarmed principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. That was a catastrophic day for the kingdom of darkness. The final temptation, to come down from the cross and prove He was the Son of God, was refused. He had the power. Twelve legions of angels stood ready. He chose obedience unto death.

Even Pilate felt the authority of the suffering Messiah. “Do You not know that I have power to crucify You and power to release You?” Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:10-11) From that moment Pilate sought to release Him. The beaten, unrecognizable Prisoner unsettled the governor. When the religious leaders objected to the inscription “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” Pilate answered with sudden stubbornness: “What I have written, I have written.” He had looked into the eyes of a King. Jesus died victorious and rose victorious.

The revelation of Christ and Him crucified does at least five things. It saves us, the journey begins with the clear portrayal of Christ crucified. It captures us with wonder, we were created with a capacity for wonderment, and the beauty of God revealed in the Lamb answers that capacity. It transforms us, we become like what we behold; Paul speaks of being conformed to His death. It gives us a prophetic worldview, the Servant Songs show that human history is being led by the meekness of the Lamb, which changes how we interpret the events of our time. And it reveals our calling. First Peter 2:21 states it without ambiguity: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” The example is specific: when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. That atmosphere of soul is what the church is called to carry in an increasingly hostile generation.

The same reality shapes the most practical relationships. Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. That is not generic kindness; it is cruciform love. The unity of the church is produced by the same source. Revelation 12:11 describes the overcomers: they overcame the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by not loving their lives to the death. It is a triple reference to the cross. The spirit that sows division is overcome by the reality that overcame the powers of darkness.

Perilous Times and the Renewing of the Mind

In his final letter Paul warns that perilous times will come. The description that follows is not aimed primarily at the surrounding culture, though the culture is involved. It describes conditions that take root inside the community that names the name of Christ: lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. The antidote is not first a new cultural strategy. It is a return to the Scriptures with focused seriousness. The Holy Spirit who inspired the Word lives in every believer and is ready to open it. The Bible is an on-ramp into the presence and heart of God.

I learned something about urgency years ago on a trip to Suriname, the country of my parents' origin. I had not been there in nearly thirty years. As the plane touched the runway, an involuntary sigh rose from the deepest part of my stomach. Later I discovered that the Hebrew word for comfort carries the sense of a sigh. There was a tremendous peace in being in the land that was so integral to my formative years as a child. That night, while sitting with the Lord and pondering end-time passages, I noticed an emotion I usually carried was missing. Instead of the familiar stirring of urgency, I felt peace. I wondered if I was losing my edge. The Holy Spirit spoke clearly: many confuse the urgency of the hour with the immediacy of the hour. Urgency calls for reprioritization. It does not demand that everything be finished on an artificial timetable. We run our own race at the pace of the grace given to us, provided we run it with priority and focus.

Romans 12:1–2 stands at the hinge of Paul's greatest letter. In light of the mercies of God, he urges believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, then adds: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The conforming he warns against is the internal narrative by which we interpret our lives, our families, our cities, and the world. Transformation is a metamorphosis. It takes time. True repentance involves both a change of action and a change of thinking. Paul likens entrenched thought patterns to strongholds, fortresses that offer a sense of safety even when they are false. The gospel calls us to tear them down and rebuild according to the truth of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3–5).

The renewed mind learns to interpret events through the lens of God's leadership rather than the competing narratives of the culture. Self-preservation is one of the clearest markers of worldly thinking. During the blood-moon predictions that circulated some years ago, people asked whether they should stockpile food and ammunition. I am not against prudence. But if I fill my

garage with supplies, they will be gone in a day once my neighbors have none. The early church, receiving a prophetic warning of famine through Agabus, responded by taking up a collection for the poorer congregations. Their first thought was not self-protection but the welfare of the body. That is gospel thinking.

The same distinction applies to the great movements of peoples across national borders. Scripture teaches that God determines the times and boundaries of the nations so that people might seek Him and find Him. When large groups of human beings are in motion, the gospel-oriented heart asks how the Spirit might be drawing men and women to Christ. Political categories alone miss the deeper story.

Empathy is good and necessary. It is like anesthetic before surgery, I want the anesthetic. But when empathy is divorced from truth it becomes a substitute for the gospel rather than its servant. Everyone wants the anesthetic; fewer want the surgery. The result is a form of godliness that lacks power. Jesus is reduced to a cosmic counselor rather than the Man who died a gruesome death for the sin and darkness that reign in the human heart. I never knew that cold love could look so passionate. The last days, Jesus said, will be like the days of Noah: ordinary life continuing until the sudden moment. The day before is always just the day before. Meanwhile an acclimation can take place inside the church if we are not anchored in the Word.

The Marriage of the Lamb

Revelation 19 announces the marriage of the Lamb. It is not called the marriage of the Lion or the Warrior, though He is both. It is the marriage of the Lamb. The value systems, the meekness, the self-giving love of the crucified Christ are the realities into which the church is being invited so that she may be equally yoked with Him. The bride makes herself ready. One of the primary ways she does so is by the beholding-and-becoming principle. The forerunner cry of John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God”, becomes the cry of the end-time church. In beholding Him we are transformed into His likeness.

The mystery of God will be finished in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The completion of that mystery is the cross proclaimed with clarity and power, the cross embraced for salvation and as the pattern of life, and the cross demonstrated before the nations through a people who have been conformed to the image of the Son. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. The pathway remains the same.

The church in every generation faces the temptation to drift from the cross. The pressure is subtle: to treat the cross as a past event rather than a present power,

to emphasize resurrection life without the death that precedes it, to adopt the world's definitions of power, success, and love. Paul's response remains the only adequate one. God forbid that we should boast in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. To boast in the cross is to make much of it, to speak of it, defend it, live from it, and measure every other claim by it. It is to recognize that the manifold wisdom of God is displayed not primarily through human strength or cultural influence, but through a people who have embraced the crucified Christ and are being conformed to His image.

The hour is urgent, but urgency is not the same as immediacy. There is time to return to the Scriptures, to ask the Spirit for fresh light on the cross, and to allow the Word to do its slow, thorough work of transformation. The promise still stands. The pathway remains the same: Christ and Him crucified. That is the glory of the cross.

Discussion Questions

1. List the four interlocking realities the cross addresses according to the opening section.
2. Identify Isaiah's three "mountain peaks" that reveal the same Man.
3. Describe the successive facets of the Servant presented in the Servant Songs.
4. Summarize what Isaiah 53:1–3 reveals about the poverty and rejection of the Servant.
5. Explain the difference between viewing the cross as a temporary defeat versus viewing it as victory.
6. Clarify the five things the revelation of Christ and Him crucified does in the believer.
7. Apply the distinction between the urgency of the hour and the immediacy of the hour to your own sense of calling or pace.
8. Demonstrate how gospel thinking differs from self-preservation when interpreting current events or pressures.
9. Show how the marriage of the Lamb is connected to the value systems of the crucified Christ.
10. Apply Paul's resolve in Galatians 6:14 ("God forbid that I should boast except in the cross") to one specific area of your life or ministry this week.

Father, we thank You for the glory of Christ and Him crucified. Recover in us a settled determination to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Tear down every stronghold that resists the face of the Lamb. Conform us to His death so that we may live in His life, and make the cross once again the living center of our understanding of Your love, Your ways, and Your leadership of the nations. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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The cross is still affirmed. It is simply no longer central. This short study returns the church to Paul’s settled determination: to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Drawn from Isaiah’s three mountain peaks, the Servant Songs, the Gospels, and Revelation 5, these pages recover the cross as salvation, as the revelation of God’s love, as the disclosure of His ways, and as the key to how He is leading the nations.

Includes discussion questions for personal study or a small group.

A study in the glory of Christ and Him crucified.