

Tonight we take a closer look at the most familiar of all the mementos, that is the cross, and remember why it is so precious to us. We turn to John 19:16-18.

“16 Then [Pilate] delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away. 17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, 18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Of all the mementos, the cross is the most common. We have crosses hanging on our walls in our homes. We wear them on necklaces and other jewelry. They stand out prominently in our churches. The cross has become the symbol of Christianity. However, like so many things, when a memento becomes too common, it can lose its meaning. That has happened to a large extent with the cross. Tonight we want to remember what the Cross means for us and why it is a treasured symbol.

There are so many things the cross should remind us of. It’s a reminder of our Salvation. It’s the heart and core of our faith. It can also help us in our battle against temptation. As Hymn 153 says, “Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.” When sin seems tempting, look at the cross. See the real cost of sin. See how much God’s own Son suffered for those sins. That will make you think differently about sin.

But tonight we will consider how the cross is a symbol of pure love. That might seem rather strange? The cross is a symbol of the most cruel torture. It was a means of execution reserved for the worst of criminals. How can something so brutal be a symbol of love? If you wore a cross on a necklace or had one on the wall of your house in the Roman world, people would have wondered what’s wrong with you. What kind of a sadist are you? But for us the cross has become precious because the Cross is proof of God’s Love. As another hymn writer says, *“Inscribed upon that cross we see in shining letters ‘God is Love.’”* Hymn 178

That’s why the Apostle Paul proclaimed, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Gal. 6:14. He found the greatest glory in that symbol of shame and death. And so do we, as we just sang in our hymn:

In the Cross of Christ I Glory!

We glory in the cross because that is where Jesus proved His Love for us when

-I- He Chose the Cross.

Why would anyone choose the cross. It was greatly feared, people would do everything they could to avoid it. Yet Jesus chose the cross. We can know that because Jesus often told people that He was going to be crucified. He told Nicodemus “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” John 3:14 Some time later Jesus said to a crowd of people, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” Then John makes sure we understand what He meant, “This He said, signifying by what death He would die.” Jn 12:32-33 Not to mention all the times He told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem and would be crucified.

Yes, Jesus showed His love for you by choosing to go to the cross for you. He also proved His love by not letting anything dissuade Him from it. There were a number of attempts to try to get Him not to go to the cross. Satan tried to talk Jesus out of going to the cross. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world with all their glory and said, “All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.” He was suggesting that Jesus take the easy way out. Go ahead and think about

yourself. You can have all this without the suffering. On another occasion Jesus' own disciple Peter, tried to convince Jesus that He shouldn't go to the cross. He said, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall not happen to you!" Matt. 16:22 Peter had his mind focused on glory, and he just couldn't imagine Jesus suffering and dying. Even when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, dreading what lay ahead of Him, He remained completely committed to doing His Father's will to suffer death in place of all the people of the world.

Thank the Lord that He did not succumb to any of these temptations or back away from the cross. Thank God that He didn't think about Himself. He didn't think about what would be easier or more enjoyable. He only thought about how He could carry out His Father's will to save you from sin and death. That is the very definition of love, to do what will be good for the person you love, no matter what the cost or sacrifice.

Jesus had a choice. He could rule all things from His throne in heaven, enjoying all the comfort and glory that was rightfully His as God and creator of all. Or He could go to the cross and suffer the most horrible death and endure the full wrath and punishment of God His own Father against the sins of the world in order to save you and me from sin, death and an eternity of suffering in hell.

He chose the cross! The Jews taunted Him on the cross. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." It was true, He could not save Himself, not because He didn't have the power to come down from the cross, but because He loved you and was determined to save you and me. That is Love — the deepest love of all. The cross has become the glorious symbol of the greatest love and the greatest salvation because Jesus chose the cross for us.

The cross is also an opportunity for us to prove our love for Jesus as

-II- We Choose the Cross for Him.

The cross is more than something to wear, it is a cross for us to bear. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Luke 9:23 We do not choose the cross to try to atone for our sins or in any way to help in our salvation. Jesus chose the cross for us because He was the only one who could save us. We choose the cross because we love Jesus and want to follow Him, but the world hates Jesus. The world today is getting more and more vocal about their hatred and rejection of Christ and His true Church. They hate the constant reminder of sin and the cost of sin.

So we also have a choice to make. We can deny Christ and enjoy an easy life where we are not hated and rejected by the world and receive the judgment of the world; or we can follow Jesus and bear the hatred of the world but receive Jesus' love and salvation won for us on the cross. Having Jesus' love and salvation is more than worth any amount of hatred and persecution from the world. Therefore we choose the cross also.

However, bearing our cross is more than suffering shame and persecution for Christ's sake, note that Jesus associates taking up our cross with denying ourselves. Denying oneself is essentially showing our love for Jesus by showing that we are not going to put our own desires or pleasures ahead of Him, or even our own needs before Him.

We have gotten so used to our easy, comfortable way of life that we find it rather easy to choose the things we like ahead of Jesus. If something else comes along that we feel is more important or more fun, we may choose to do that instead of worshiping or serving our Savior. Thank the Lord that Jesus was not so easily sidetracked from serving us. He went to the cross for us. Jesus denied Himself. He did not think about what he wanted or what would be easier or more enjoyable for Him. He was devoted to you. He chose the cross to save you. He would not be dissuaded or sidetracked by anything. May the cross always remind you of what an amazing, loving Savior you have. And may it always move you to put Him above everything else in your life. Amen.