

Theme: “Names of Wondrous Love” – CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Text: John 19:16-18 (EHV)

¹⁶ So then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus away. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to what is called the Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him with two others, one on each side, and Jesus in the middle.

What does the cross mean? I suppose that depends on who’s looking at it. To some, it might just be a piece of jewelry hung around their neck. To others it might be a superstitious symbol used to ward off evil spirits. To the skeptic or the atheist it is a symbol for the weak minded and those who need the “crutch” of religion in their lives. To the Romans it was an instrument of torture meant to inflict a horribly slow and painful death. To one thief next to Jesus it was the doorway to death—both physical and eternal. To the other thief it was the gate to heaven and life eternal! It all depends on who’s looking at the cross.

The more important question is, “What does the cross mean to you?” “What does the cross mean to me?” Hopefully to all of us the answer would be that it is the blessed symbol of what our Savior came to do for us: The place—the “altar,” so to speak— where Jesus, the God-man, shed His blood to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the whole world. It is the place where God’s Law and His wrath over sin, and His Gospel and the “Good News” of His saving grace in His Son Jesus meet. It is a reminder of our sin, and the blessed symbol of our salvation. It is the symbol of Jesus’ unquestionable, unconditional love for us. Like the Apostle Paul says, there is no greater message than that of the cross, the message of **“Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).**

Today as we continue our sermon series, “Names of Wondrous Love,” we look at that word *crucified*. Perhaps, it’s more of a term than a name, yet we so often link it with His name, Christ. It’s His **“Name of Wondrous Love” – CHRIST CRUCIFIED.**

I. Crucified because of our sins

“They crucified him,” (v. 18) our text says. Just three short, simple words in English. Only two words in the original Greek. It’s almost shocking how simply and starkly the Gospels describe Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion. But there was nothing short or simple about it. We shudder to think about the torture, torment, and pain Jesus endured as He was scourged and beaten, and in His bloodied and beaten state, made to carry His cross on which the crucifixion would be carried out by driving nails into His flesh to hold Him there while He was raised in the air and dropped into the supporting hole in the ground with a jarring and dull thud.

The crucifixion part—the actual nailing to the cross—is done rather quickly, but the dying is excruciatingly slow! Normally hours would go by, even days, as the victim would hang dying on that cross, wracked with constant throbbing torturous pain, and burning thirst. No Roman citizen or respected person was ever to be subjected to this shameful, slow death by crucifixion. That was a torture reserved for the worst of criminals...and for God’s Son!

And yet all of this physical pain that Jesus endured *paled* in comparison to the hell that God’s Son endured that day. The crushing weight of all the world’s sins through all of history, all the punishment of death and hell that are the just punishment for those sins came crashing down with staggering force on Jesus as He hung there on that cursed cross. We can’t even begin to imagine the depths of hell’s suffering He endured on that cross while He cried out in anguish, **“My God, my God, why**

have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). “**They crucified him,**” our text says so simply. But how can we imagine the depth of suffering this involved on the cross that day?

While we can only guess at the suffering involved in that word *crucified*, we do not have to guess at the “they” who crucified Him. Certainly the soldiers were involved, the ones who physically put Jesus on the cross and hammered those nails into Him there. The cowardly and selfish Pontius Pilate, trying vainly to wash innocent blood off his hands with water, was clearly also involved authorizing His crucifixion. The chief priests and the Jews gathered at the cross in their blind hatred choosing Barabbas and crucifying their only Savior were also most certainly involved.

There are even more involved in the “they” who crucified Him. Think of Judas the disciple who betrayed Jesus, who himself is now dead as Jesus is being crucified. Think of Peter, weeping in the darkness, repentant and forgiven, but in his fear had denied Jesus His friend and Savior three times.

If we look even closer we see more of the “they”—do you see them? Men and women of all classes and nations throughout history, but having one thing in common: They all bear the stain of sin. If we look closely enough we’ll even see us! We all of us, because of our sins are all included in the “they” who crucified Jesus. Today each of us looking into our own heart and life must confess, “I crucified Him.”

II. Crucified for our salvation

We don’t want to stop there. When we look at the cross we don’t just think of the guilt of our sins. We don’t just see God’s Law and His wrath over sin. After all, what comfort can “Jesus crucified by me” bring to us? No, we want to look again at His cross, this time not to see who put Him there but to see why He stayed there. It wasn’t the nails. It wasn’t the soldiers or the hateful crowd that kept Him on that cross. It was His wondrous love held Him there! Christ’s cross brings the blessed, saving, comforting truth that we need so desperately, “Christ crucified for me.”

The cross loudly and clearly proclaims God’s Gospel—the “Good News” of His forgiveness and saving love for us in Jesus. Christ’s cross shouts the declaration that all our sins have been fully paid for—freely and forever. That’s what Jesus meant when He cried out, “**It is finished!**” (John 19:30).

The Bible spells out this glorious truth again and again, in passage after passage, clearly and plainly:

- † Yes, the prophet Isaiah tells, “**He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him**” but in that same verse he also reminds us, “**By his wounds we are healed**” (Isaiah 53:5).
- † The Apostle Paul tells us, “**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- † “**The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin,**” John assures us (1 John 1:7).

These are just a few of the passages. There are many others like them in the Bible.

Down through the ages Jesus cross has stood as a blessed promise and invitation to all sinners to receive the love, forgiveness, and eternal life that Jesus won for us there. God has given us that glorious invitation and blessed promise so many times in our lives, in both His Word and the Sacraments that perhaps it doesn’t seem so grand and glorious anymore. We have heard about our wondrous Savior and His wondrous cross so many times that we might be tempted to respond, “Another Lenten sermon about Jesus and His cross? What else is new? I’ve heard this all before.”

When I find myself thinking those kinds of thoughts I'm reminded of a story that a rancher's wife told me a number of years ago. She and her husband had a new ranch hand and his wife living and working on their ranch. As time went on she began to have conversations with this ranch hand's wife about her faith and about the Bible. She found out that this woman had zero knowledge of Jesus or the Bible whatsoever. And I mean zero. So in the evenings she would go through a Bible story book with this woman to give her a good overview of what the Bible is all about. Eventually they get to the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, of course, and this woman is just really loving it and eating up the Word of God that she's been hearing and reading. And then they read the account of Jesus suffering and death on the cross and this woman looks in wide-eyed shock at the rancher's wife as she is reading this and she says, "You mean He died!?"

This Lenten season it's back-to-the-cross time. It's time to look at and hear about that familiar cross once again. It's time once again to kneel beneath that cross, confessing our sins and then rejoicing in Jesus' forgiveness. It's time to marvel again at the wondrous love behind those words, "Christ crucified for me."

May the Holy Spirit renew our hearts with wide-eyed shock and wonder each time we hear and read about what Jesus did for us on the cross. "You mean He died!? The Son of God died!? And He died for me!?" Hallelujah! Amen.