

The Crux of Christianity



By Ben Godwin

Christianity stands alone as the only religion whose founder came back from the dead. Millions of Christians of all denominational backgrounds are preparing to celebrate the greatest event in history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ! When you consider what distinguishes Christianity from all other world religions, the answer is really quite simple—Jesus! He alone can claim a virgin birth, a virtuous life, a vicarious death and a victorious resurrection.

Religion, you see, is man's effort to reach God; Christianity is God's effort to reach man. It's been said that religion is when man reaches up; Christianity is when God reaches down. And the crux of Christianity (the most crucial and essential element) is the cross. There's an old saying that applies here, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." The Apostle Paul wrote, "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:18). To believers around the world, the cross is still the main thing.

The cross is more than merely a historical event, more than an in vogue fashion accessory for jewelry. It is the centerpiece of the Gospel, the focal point of human history and God's masterpiece. The cross is a bridge that connects a loving God to a lost humanity. The Romans used crosses to torture, humiliate and eliminate their political enemies. God used the cross to crush and conquer our spiritual enemies—sin, Satan and death. God took a sadistic instrument of torture and turned it into a universal icon of hope and salvation.

D. L. Moody explained the necessity of the cross, "I must die or get someone else to die for me. If the Bible doesn't teach that, it doesn't teach anything. And that is where the atonement of Christ comes in." This principle is at work even in the natural food chain—something must die in order for something else to live.

I'll never forget getting stuck behind a truck headed to a local chicken processing plant. My son, Nathan, who was maybe five or six at the time, asked me where they were taking the cages full of chickens. I tried to delicately describe to him how those live chickens were going to be transformed into chicken fingers and nuggets. His response was priceless. He said, "Dad, let's join hands and pray together that all those chickens escape."

Jesus could have escaped but instead He became our scapegoat on the cross. In Old Testament times, the sins of Israel were confessed over a scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The Hebrew word for scapegoat is *Azazel*, meaning “the goat of departure.” Once the sins of Israel were transferred to the goat, it was released out in the wilderness to wander and never be seen again. In effect, their sins were removed from them. Notice that a double transfer transpired—the sins of the people were transferred to the scapegoat, the innocence of the animal was transferred to the people.

Something similar took place on the cross. Jesus became our substitute and paid our penalty of sin—death. Isaiah 53:5 explains, “*He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*” A woman was caught speeding in California and ordered to appear in court. The judge enforced the law and fined her one hundred dollars. Then he stepped down from behind the bench, removed his judicial robe and opened his own wallet. He took out a \$100 bill and paid the woman’s fine. It turned out the woman was his daughter. Likewise our heavenly Father sentenced us for our sin, but then He paid our penalty by sending His Son to die on the cross as our substitute.

The lyrics of a song say it well, “I should have been crucified, I should have suffered and died. I should have hung on the cross in disgrace, but Jesus, God’s son, took my place.” Charles Spurgeon, the great British preacher of the 1800’s, summarized his entire theology with four simple words, “He died for me.” Paul penned his agreement in Romans 5:8, “*But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

Ironically, the place of death became the place of life. Jesus was crucified at a place called by the Hebrew term *Golgotha* and the Latin term *Calvary*. They both mean “the place of the skull.” It was called this either because the hill resembled a human skull or due to the fact that skulls could be found at that place of execution. Only God could take such a cursed place and turn it into the greatest blessing for all mankind.

The geographical center of the city of London is a place known as Charing Cross. There is a train station there and you can find your way anywhere in London from that location. Once a little boy got separated from his parents and was lost. A policeman found him crying and tried to comfort him. When he got the boy settled, he asked, “Can I take you home, son?” The boy replied, “Oh, no, sir, take me to the cross, and I’ll find my way home.” (1001 Great Stories, R. Kent Hughes)

This Easter season take time to revisit the cross. If you get to the cross, you’ll find your way home. Minus the cross, there is no Easter, no Christianity, no salvation, no reason to have church and we are hopelessly lost in our sins. I enjoy egg hunts and chocolate bunnies as much as anybody, but nothing can replace the cross—it’s the crux of Christianity.

Ben Godwin pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church.
He has authored two books available at Amazon.com or bengodwin.org.
His weekly telecast live streams at TV16HD.com on Mondays at 9 p.m. and Tuesdays at Noon.
This article was recently featured in the *Daily Mountain Eagle*, a newspaper based in Jasper, Alabama.

