

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Metaphors for the Cross*

**A**s already stated, the cross is our calibrator, center, and crux. These metaphors help us visualize and cherish its depth of meaning. In this chapter, I want to explore even more metaphors that help us appreciate the wonders of the cross.

What is a metaphor? *A figure of speech in which a word is applied to an object to which it is not literally applicable.* May the following metaphors make the wisdom of the cross even more glorious and understandable for you.

#### **The Cross Is a Lens**

Glasses have a pair of lenses that help the user see objects more clearly. In a similar way, the cross is a lens that helps bring all of life into better focus. God wanted the cross to be our lens from the very beginning, but we struggled to perceive it. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, the Father was finally able to point and say, *This is what I've been saying to you all along. Now can you see what I mean?* At the cross, the Father's heart became clear, and now we're able to see the way of salvation and the way of sacrificial servanthood.

The Scriptures come into better focus when viewed through the lens of the cross. Some verses explode with fresh meaning when interpreted in light of Calvary. Name the biblical issue, and the cross will help us see it better.

Someone once said that all truth is God's truth. View all truth everywhere, therefore, through the lens of the cross. This applies to every educational course you take, no matter the school. Truth is found in many scholastic disciplines, but so is falsehood. How can we distinguish between them, keep the true, and discard the false? By subjecting every propositional statement to the scrutiny of the cross. View every

lecture and textbook through the lens of the cross, and you'll become skillful in preserving truth and detecting error.

When you hang with your friends, you probably chat sometimes about the values of your culture—such as justice, equality, liberty, compassion, identity, etc. Opinions on these topics abound, and discerning what is true can be challenging. If you evaluate every opinion through the lens of the cross, however, you'll be equipped to recognize truth and resist the twisted thinking of the world. The cross will help you understand how to respond to injustices perpetrated by people against you or others. For example, when talking about the hot-button topic of racial tensions, the way forward gets clearer when we bring the discussion to the foot of the cross. The cross calls us to lose our lives and lay them down for people of all skin colors and languages. We find the world's narrative on issues such as racism inadequate because they don't surrender their perspectives to the wisdom of the cross.

When people try to help you find your life and save your life, you'll have the discernment to see your circumstances through a lens they can't see. The cross will keep you from "walking in the counsel of the ungodly" (Ps 1:1).

As you process current events through the lens of the cross, the Lord will open your eyes to His perspective on world events.

Interpret every voice you hear and every line you read through the lens of the cross, and you'll be able to make judgments and decisions that accord with light, truth, wisdom, and understanding.

*Make the cross your lens.*

## **The Cross Is Our Balance Beam**

The cross is the balance beam of Christianity. What is a balance beam? It's a horizontal beam of wood upon which

Impossible to make the cross too large.

gymnasts perform impressive feats of strength and agility, all the while maintaining their equilibrium on the narrow bar. Like that beam, the cross is our point of reference that enables us to maintain a balanced stance in all areas of truth and practice. It keeps our theology calibrated and aligned.

Every excessive and weird doctrine has strayed from the centrality of the cross. The cross safeguards us from imbalanced ideas and helps us weed out false teachings before they spread in the church. If you come across a novel teaching that you're not sure about, measure it against the plumb line of the cross. Does it line up? Does it honor and support everything the cross represents? If you use the cross to maintain your theological balance, you'll be preserved in truth.

Many of my friends have told me they see the *resurrection* as the central pillar of our faith, and the cross as the necessary lead-in or prelude to that great, central event. I love their passion for the resurrection because I share it, and their preference here is not bad or wrong. But for me, the *cross* is the central pillar, and the resurrection the natural outcome or consequence of that great event.

When the churches of Galatia got imbalanced and strayed into doctrinal error, Paul wrote the book of Galatians—something like a balance beam—to get them centered again on the true gospel. Not once in that book did he mention the resurrection, but he mentioned the cross seven times (Gal 2:20; 3:1, 13; 5:11, 24; 6:12, 14), and nine times if you include two secondary references (2:21; 6:17). When calling them to get centered again in the gospel, he didn't use the resurrection as his basis of appeal. He used the cross! It's our balance beam.

When various groups stray into imbalanced doctrine, examine their emphasis closely and you'll likely find that, while they still trumpet the resurrection of Christ, they grow quietly distant in their emphasis of the cross. When we get quiet about the cross, we lose our balance.

Use the cross to challenge imbalanced ideas. When you're

in a room where ideas are being discussed or debated, the cross defogs the room. Like a noise cancellation feature on a set of headphones, it silences the noise and muffles the chatter. Bring the cross into the discussion and you may be stunned at the way it silences the cacophony and brings clarity to the issues at hand.

I never feel safer than when clinging to the cross. It maintains my equilibrium. If I can't get something through the cross, I'm not taking it with me.

### **The Cross Is an Anchor**

The cross is the anchor of our faith. The writer of Hebrews portrayed our hope in Christ as an anchor that's tethered to the mercy seat in heaven where Christ has sprinkled His blood (Heb 6:19-20). When we're anchored to this heavenly rock, nothing on earth can shipwreck us.

The cross anchors our faith in the midst of life's storms. Storms come equally to the wise and foolish (Matt 7:24-27), but here's what distinguishes the wise: They survive the storm. Why? Because they're anchored. Just as an anchor helps a boat survive a tempest, the cross will anchor your faith and enable you to weather life's storms. When you're anchored by the cross, you can come through a storm even better for it.

Storms come in many shapes and sizes, and they often shake our faith. When it feels like everything in your life is being shaken, take some advice from this pilgrim and return to the cross. It can't be shaken, and clinging to it will save you.

I wish I could say to every young person going through a faith crisis: *Go back to the cross.* Are you disoriented by a swirl of questions? Go back to the cross. Does it seem like God is distant and silent to your prayers? Go back to the cross. Gaze again at His bloodied hands and feet. When nothing

The wisdom of the cross arrests arguments and clears foggy thinking.

else can hold your heart, the cross will. It's strong enough to anchor your heart in any storm.

I have both arms and legs wrapped around the cross of Christ. I've decided that, if it goes down, I'm going down with it.

### **The Cross Is Our GPS**

A GPS (Global Positioning System) device uses satellite signals to help us navigate toward a destination. In a similar way, the cross uses Holy Spirit signals to direct our steps in the way of righteousness. When we wonder, "How do I get from here to there?" the cross shows the way: *Walk the Via Dolorosa*.

How do I make a lasting difference in my world?" *By losing your life*.

The greatest race ever run was won by a Man whose feet were nailed to a tree. From that tree, He's showing you how to run your race, too.

The wisdom of the cross will show you how to live life skillfully. Follow the bloody trail of His feet and you'll eventually make it to your eternal destination.

### **The Cross Is a Dipstick**

God used the cross like a dipstick to show us His love for the world. Someone might ask, "What's a dipstick?" It's a narrow strip of metal that mechanics thrust into the engine block of a car to measure its oil level. In a similar way, the Father took the cross, thrust it into the blood of Calvary, showed its measurements to the world, and said, "This is how much I love you."

Furthermore, the cross also measures *us*. Using the cross like a dipstick, the Father evaluates the hearts and souls of men and women. He plunges it below every façade and reveals what's really happening on the inside.

The cross locates us and confronts us with the true condition of our hardened hearts. You really can't look at the naked Christ without being denuded yourself. At first glance, when looking upon the crucified Savior—hung before the gaping gaze of a crowd of spectators—you're struck with how exposed He is. But then you realize, He wasn't the only one on Golgotha laid bare that day; *everyone* at the cross was being exposed and measured.

Simeon had prophesied about it years earlier when he said, "The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke 2:35). And sure enough, at the cross *everyone's* thoughts were revealed—priests, soldiers, Pilate, dying thieves, and the entire gallery of witnesses. You couldn't watch without it measuring and revealing you.

This dipstick is still measuring all of us today.

Actually, the cross is a metric against which almost *anything* can be assessed. You can use it, like a dipstick, to evaluate circumstances, situations, and current cultural issues. I recommend examining *everything* according to its height and length.

## The Cross Is Our Emblem

The cross is the emblem of our faith.

Someone once suggested to me, "I don't think the cross should be the emblem of our faith but rather the empty tomb. If we're going to put something around our neck, it shouldn't be a cross but an empty tomb."

I appreciate that person's sincerity and zeal for the resurrection of Christ, but I actually disagree with that opinion. I'm persuaded the cross *is* the emblem of Christianity, and here's why. The compelling distinctive of our faith is not that God is alive—*many* religions and faiths believe that. The compelling distinctive of our faith is that God died.

That God should resurrect from the

The way to the Father is as narrow as the wood on which Jesus was crucified.

chains of hell with everlasting life coursing through His being doesn't astonish us; what stuns us is that Eternal Life died. The death of God is the part of the story that's utterly astounding!

Where did this idea come from? Who came up with the idea of God suffering a hideously grotesque death? This notion is so preposterous and scandalous that no human mind conceived it. This didn't originate on earth but descended from heaven.

What other religion brags on the death of its leader?

### **The Cross Is Our Coat of Arms**

A coat of arms is a *crest, badge of heraldry, or shield of family, corporation, or country*. The cross, therefore, is our banner, shield, and ensign. It's our coat of arms—the insignia of our loyalty to the Lamb.

The cross is all about loyalty. First of all, it reveals the loyalty of Jesus to His Father. He didn't want to do the cross, but He did it anyway out of fierce loyalty to His Father's will. Even when Abba forsook Him (Matt 27:46), He remained loyal—unto death. Therefore, it's the ultimate act of loyalty.

Secondly, the cross inspires our loyalty to Jesus. Anyone that loyal to the Father deserves all my fealty. Clutching it to my breast, once again I swear my head to the cross of Jesus Christ. He died for me and I'll willingly die for Him. I proudly parade this coat of arms every day as I walk out into the world. As goes the old hymn, "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war."<sup>1</sup>

When "the evil day" of Ephesians 6:13 or "the hour of trial" of Revelation 3:10 comes your way, your loyalty will be tested. Only one thing is strong enough to hold your heart in that hour. I advise you, therefore, to fasten your heart around the cross *now* so that its holding power will carry you *then*. When they come to torture and kill you, it'll seal your resolve

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1 Sabine Baring-Gould, 1864.

and set your face as flint. Hold it close to your heart and let it always be your coat of arms.

## Judge the Cross

You can't dismiss the cross; you must judge the cross. When confronted with it, no one can remain neutral. What is it—*really*? What verdict will you render?

In reality, there are only two options. Either it's the greatest hoax of history that deserves to be trampled, reviled, and spat upon, or it's the greatest hope of human history—something worth dying for.

Hoax or heroic—which is it? You be the judge.

Our answer has a direct bearing on our judgment regarding hell. Before you make a determination about whether you think hell is real or not, you must first make a determination regarding the cross. Here's why.

If there is no hell, the cross is absurd. The cross makes sense only if it's saving us from something utterly hellish.

If you decide the cross is a hoax, then I suppose you can dismiss the existence of hell and be on your way. But if you judge the cross to be the heroic intervention of God, its extremity points to the extremity of the hell from which we're saved.

The Carpenter crafted His greatest work with the wood of a cross.



**For Group Study and Discussion**

1. Read Mark 14-16 this week, and share with the group what moved you most in this reading of the crucifixion account.
2. The cross is a lens, balance beam, anchor, GPS, dipstick, emblem, and coat of arms. Which metaphor did you enjoy the most, and why?
3. Read the book of Galatians this week, ponder all the places where Paul referred to the cross, and bring your observations to the group discussion.
4. In what ways does the cross anchor our faith?
5. How can we invite our unbelieving friends to behold and judge the cross? (as hoax or heroic)
6. *If there is no hell, the cross is absurd:* Talk about that statement. How does the cross inform our understanding of hell?
7. As you close your group time, center your prayers around Galatians 2:20.