April 11

Good morning brothers and sisters.

Since this is the start of “Holy Week,” that is, the week leading up to Resurrection Sunday, I thought we would take a break from our year-long walk through the books of the Bible and change our focus a bit. This week, our daily devotions will be titled “Reflections on the Cross.”

One of the things that people often ask is, “Why did Jesus have to die?” Or “Couldn’t there have been another way?” Or “Why did he have to die on the cross?”

To understand the cross is to understand something of the nature of God. To start with, we need to understand that God is perfectly holy and perfectly just. He describes Himself this way: “Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

In addition to holiness, another characteristic of God is that He is righteous and just: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you” (Psalm 89:14).

Plainly stated, if God was not holy, if He was not just, then He wouldn’t be who He is. Stated another way, God wouldn’t be God.

Secondly, because God is perfectly holy and just, as we have discussed before, He cannot abide sin. He cannot look the other way. Sin is so grievous to Him that in His sovereignty, He has decided that the only remedy, the only thing that makes us “right” or “justified” to Him, is sacrifice. Not just any sacrifice, but a blood sacrifice. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Leviticus 17:11).

So we see that God, in His perfect holiness and justice, requires a blood sacrifice for sins against Him. However, the lesson of the Old Testament is that despite thousands and thousands of animals being sacrificed on the temple altar, it was never enough. The sin was great and the sacrifice insufficient. “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:1-4).

However, be encouraged. God always has the final say, and that final say is His abiding love for us.

Tomorrow: “Why the cross?”

IHS, Pastor Lou
April 12

Dear DGCC Family. Grace and peace to you this day.

Yesterday we looked at the holy and just nature of God and why He required blood sacrifice as the atonement for sins. We also saw that animal sacrifice repeated over and over was insufficient to justify us before the living God.

So, God offers the perfect and final solution: The Son of God Himself, Jesus the Messiah. The ultimate and final sacrifice. “Sacrifices and offerings burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:8-10).

Only a perfectly holy and just God could have conceived of this sacrifice, and only a perfectly holy and just God could have offered it. Why? Because His love for us is so deep that He desires eternal communion with us, and that love caused Him to sacrifice His own Son. But still, the question remains: Why did it have to be the cross? Why couldn’t Jesus just get sick and die? Or live to old age? Or fall off a cliff? The answer lies in prophecy:

“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed…He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, sheep before its shearsers is silent, so did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away” (Isaiah 53:4-7).

From this we learn that Jesus was to be “pierced.” Sickness, old age, and other forms of death were insufficient to fulfill prophecy and provide complete atonement once and for all.

We also learn that Jesus had to bear “punishment” as He would bear the sins of humankind. That punishment could not be a slap on the wrist. That punishment could not be a few days in the local jail. That punishment could only be one thing.

Lastly, we learn that Jesus was to be “oppressed” and would die from “oppression.” In other words, Jesus’ punishment was to be completely unjust and completely undeserved by Him.

The punishment had to be severe. It had to be unjust. It had to be public so there could be no doubt. Jesus had to be pierced, first by Roman nails, and then by a Roman sword. And that meant one thing, and one thing only: The Cross.

Tomorrow, death on the cross brings the power and love of the cross.

IHS, Pastor Lou
Greetings to you this day in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

As we contemplate “Reflections on the Cross,” for the last two days we’ve explored the “Why” questions.

Today let’s look at what the cross means for our lives 2,000 years later. Let’s look at its power and its love and its transforming nature.

Peter, one of Jesus’ closest friends, along with John, says this, in part quoting Isaiah:

“‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the **Shepherd and Overseer of your souls**” (1 Peter 2:24-25).

Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, through our belief in Him, we have returned to Him, which is what God intended in the first place. We have been restored into fellowship with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And, not just that, but this King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who knows every hair on our head and every star by name, in all His majesty and glory so desires relationship with us that at the same time, He is the "Shepherd and Overseer of our Souls.” Think of it, the King of the cosmos takes personal care of our souls. That relationship is made possible because of the cross.

So, the cross means that our souls are in the hands of the One who went to the cross. The cross means that our souls were ransomed by the One who went to the cross. And the cross means that our souls will rest in eternity, with complete joy and exaltation, with the One who went perfectly, finally, and completely, to the cross.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
April 14

Grace and peace to you this day.

As we conclude our “Reflections on the Cross” during this Holy Week, it amazes me that only God can turn an instrument of death into an instrument of life. For the Roman world, the cross was the absolute symbol of agony, pain, and death. But for the Christian world, God takes the cross and turns it into the ultimate symbol of love, hope, and life eternal.

Where once people dreaded the cross and ran from it, now believers are drawn to the cross because of the power and love it symbolizes. I am reminded of a line from the old hymn *Rock of Ages*: “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.”

The author of the book of Hebrews says it like this:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross**, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:1-3).

What amazing Scripture. As we “fix our eyes on Jesus,” we are encouraged to look away from the things of the world and instead set our gaze upon the Lord. Further, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is the “author” of our faith, that is, He is its creator and purpose. Additionally, Jesus is the “perfecter” of our faith, meaning that Jesus, and only Jesus, completes our faith and makes it perfect.

Lastly, the pain and agony of the cross was a precursor to the eternal joy that Jesus knew was set before Him in Heaven with His Father. And, because Jesus experienced the cross for us, and because of His unmerited grace and mercy and love, we too will one day experience that joy, for it is a gift set before us as well.

That is the power, and the grace, and the love of the cross. Thank you for the cross, Lord. Thank you.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
Dear DGCC Family,

Blessings and peace to you on this Good Friday.

May this musical devotion lift your souls and cause you to cast your eyes upon Him.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Gae-n0Pb7Q

IHS,

Pastor Lou