

The Meaning of the Cross

ILLUS – If Jesus were here today he would be wanted by: The Liquor Licensing Board for turning water into wine without a licence; the Australian Medical Association for practising medicine without a licence; the Health Department for feeding 5,000 people in the open; the Education Department for teaching without a certificate; the Water Police for walking on water without a life jacket; the RSPCA for driving a herd of pigs into the sea; the Australian Board of Psychiatrists for giving free advice on living a guilt free life; the Women's Liberation Movement for not choosing a woman disciple; the Inter-Faith Movement for condemning all other religions.

Jesus has always been controversial – even when He was walking this planet.

Everybody has an opinion.

So what is it all about? The death and resurrection of Jesus?

I want to give you four truths that will help you understand what Christ's death is all about.

1. You and I have a sin problem.

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

ILLUS – When I was a little boy, my brother and I would go into our back yard at night with our torches. And the conversation would go something like this: “Wow, look how far my torch goes.” “Well mine goes further than that.” “Oh, yeah, well I just got this other one the other day. It goes all the way up to that tree.” “Yeah, well check this one out. This is the mother of all torches.” Then there'd be this blinding flash of sheet lightning. And do you think you could see either one of our torch beams?

People are a bit like that with God – we feel okay about ourselves as long as we can outshine someone else. “Well, I know I don't always do the right thing – but I'm not as bad as Jack The Ripper.”

But God doesn't compare us with Jack The Ripper, He compares us with His own perfection.

2. The penalty for sin is death.

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I know that lots of people think that God has a set of scales, and that He weighs our bad deeds on one side, and our good deeds on the other side.

ILLUS – When my daughter was in grade 1 or 2, the teacher asked the kids what their dads did for a living. “My Daddy is a carpenter ... My Daddy is a plumber ... my Daddy is an accountant.” “And what does your Dad do?” “He finds things.” “What do you mean?” “He goes into people's houses at night and finds things.” He was a professional burglar. Imagine this guy has broken into a house, and on his way out of the window, two policemen appear from nowhere, jam a gun into his ribs: “Get down on the ground! ...” They slap the cuffs on him and shine the torch into his face. “Well, if it isn't Light-fingered Lennie. Take a good look around you Lennie, because you're going away for a loooong time.” Suddenly he cries out, “Hold on officer! I think you ought to know that I gave \$50 to charity this morning. And not only that, I helped a little old lady change her flat tyre. Then I visited my old Aunt Bertha in hospital.” “Well, I didn't know that. Why didn't you say so in the first place? That's three good deeds, and only one bad deed. You're free to go.”

Does any country in the world work like that?

I don't think so.

The policeman doesn't care which laws you've kept – he's still going to arrest you for the one you broke, and you're going to pay the price.

So why in the world would we expect God to weight up our good deeds and our bad deeds?

The Bible says: "The wages of sin is death ..." That's **all** sin – **all** sin is under God's judgment.

God sees all sin – everything you do, say and think.

How many of you would like your thoughts for a day to be thrown up on a video screen in the main city square?

3. Jesus paid the price.

1 Cor 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

ILLUS – The camp director ran the most amazing camps – they were well organised, games, sports and everybody had a great time. Then there was a Saturday night rally. Nicky was from a severely dysfunctional home. He disrupted everything, bullied smaller kids and swore at others. The camp director had an idea. When he shared it with his leaders, they were shocked. He called Nicky in and got him to answer honestly how many stripes of the cane he thought each of his items of bad behaviour was worth. It totalled 25. "You can't cane me that much. It wouldn't be human." "You're right. I'm not going to cane you 25 or 5 or anything." The director took off his shirt and sat on a chair hugging its back. He took all 25, by which time Nicky understood the meaning of grace.

In this day and age, we're a long way removed from cultures where making sacrifices were the norm.

So it's not so easy to understand that the Bible says that Jesus became a sacrifice for us, and paid the price of our sins.

Someone illustrated it this way.

ILLUS – The only reason you are alive today is because something has died. Every day we endorse the principle that life comes out of death. Trevor Chandler

Something has died so that you can live.

Spiritually, that is also true – Jesus died so you could have eternal life.

4. You need to make a response.

ILLUS – Imagine someone has bought you a lottery ticket. A few weeks later, you get a call, and this voice says, "Hello, and congratulations! I'm so-and-so from the lottery. Are you sitting down? You have won \$30 million!" And you say, "Yeah, right. Who is this really?" A year later that money is still sitting there waiting for you to claim it. Two years later, 5 years, 10, 20, many years later, and you have fallen on hard times. You die totally penniless. But all this time you had \$30 million sitting there waiting for you to claim it.

You never received the benefit.

Why? Because you didn't believe the messenger, and because you didn't believe the messenger, you didn't respond to the message.

Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

All you have to do is respond in faith to God's message of forgiveness.

It's not enough to accept this intellectually – you have to make a response, a commitment.