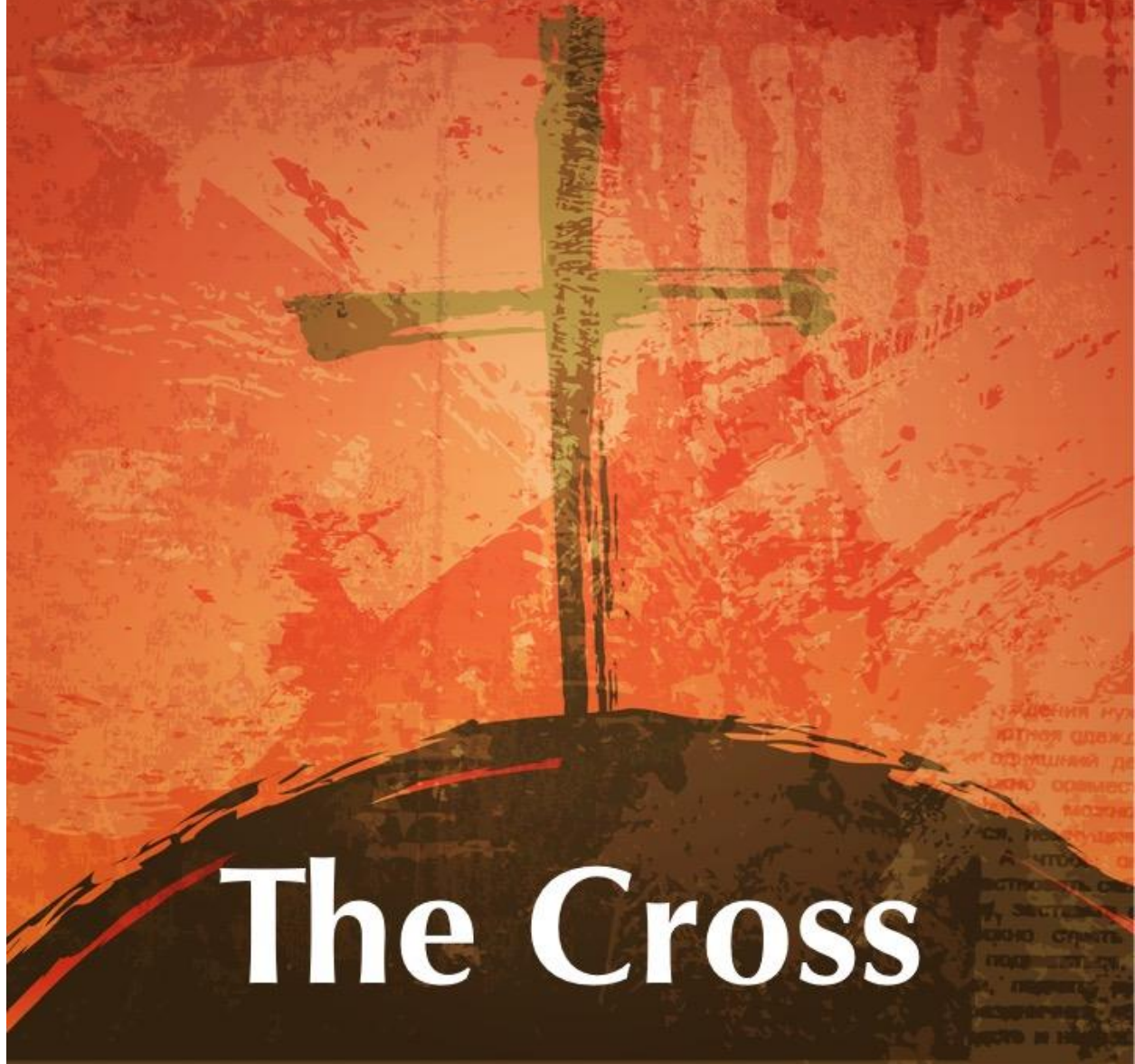


Because of



The Cross

Life Group Studies

Introduction

In the period of Lent, it is common for Christians to spend time reflecting on our need for repentance and transformation, looking forward to the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

This year we are doing a short series on the meaning and significance of the Cross, to help us reflect on the depth and wonder of what Jesus achieved through his death. The Cross is the most prominent and common symbol of the Christian faith, but the meaning of it is not always well understood. What we find when we study the Cross in the Bible is that there is not just one thing that it achieved. The Cross of Christ is like a diamond with many facets that show different aspects of the love of God.

We hope that doing this series will increase our knowledge and appreciation of the doctrine of the 'Atonement', which is a way of describing how Jesus reconciles us to God, to ourselves and to each other through his death and resurrection.

Our four studies look at four different facets of the Cross. We see that on the Cross:

- 1) Jesus takes our judgement
- 2) Jesus sets us free
- 3) Jesus puts us right
- 4) Jesus restores our relationships

It is best if these studies be done after hearing the sermons on each topic, so that the group will have more basis for discussion on what can be quite complex theological issues. There are depths and mysteries to the Cross which can take a long time and spiritual experience to appreciate, so there is no need to feel inadequate if the group is unable to answer particular questions.

Jesus Takes our Judgement

Matthew 26:36-46

1. There is an old song that goes - 'tell me why, tell me why, did Jesus die on Calvary?'. How would you answer that question?
2. Can you think of examples of how the crucifixion of Jesus is depicted in popular culture?
3. Why was Jesus 'overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (v38) in the garden of Gethsemane?
4. What do you think the 'cup' was that Jesus prayed for his Father to take away from him? (v39, 42, 44).
5. Have members of your group read out Psalm 75:8-10, Isaiah 51:17-20, and Jeremiah 25:15-17 & 27-28. What is the 'cup' in these passages? What does this mean for how we understand what Jesus was facing as he prayed to his Father?
6. Do you find the idea of the judgement and wrath of God easy to accept? Why/why not?
7. Is the idea of 'righteous anger' appropriate for describing God's response to sin and evil in the world? How is it related to his love?

8. Though they had previously protested that they would share the cup with Jesus (Matt 20:22), his disciples fell asleep and failed to watch with him as he prayed. Why might they have struggled to stay awake?
9. 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak' (v41). How have you experienced this truth in your own spiritual life?
10. Jesus struggled to accept his coming death, yet he accepted the will of his Father (v39 & 42). How does this help us to understand the significance of the Cross? (see Hebrews 4:14-16 & 5:7-9)
11. What does it mean for us to be able to live without judgement?

Jesus Sets Us Free

1 Peter 1:17-21

1. Can you think of examples of how we use the terms 'redeem' or 'redemption' in everyday life?
2. What does it mean to be a slave? What different kinds of slavery are there?
3. The metaphor of 'redemption' that Peter uses is drawn from the practice of slavery. A payment of a redemption price would set the slave free from their master. How does Peter use this metaphor in vv18-19 (i.e. Who are the slaves, who is the slave master, what is the payment that is made)?
4. Read Leviticus 4:27-31. Why is it important for our redemption that Christ be a 'lamb without blemish or defect' (v20)?
5. Apart from an 'empty way of life', what else have Christians been set free from by the death of Jesus? Read Hebrews 2:14-15.
6. **How** have we been set free from sin and death by the Cross of Jesus?
7. If we have been set free from sin and death, why do Christians still sin and die?

8. Read the passage from 1 Peter again, in its wider context (1 Peter 1:13-25). What implications does our redemption have for how we should live?

9. Are there any remnants of our 'slavery' to another way of living that you would like to be set free from?

Jesus Makes Us Right

Romans 5:1-11

1. What types of situations make you feel like 'justifying' yourself to others?
2. How confident do you feel that you are 'right with God' at the moment?
3. Divide the group into three sub-groups. Have each sub-group take a section of the passage (verses 1-5, 6-8, and 9-11) and rewrite that part of Paul's argument in your own words.
4. In Romans 3:21-31 Paul argues against the idea that it is possible to be justified by keeping the Law of God. Why is it not possible to be justified by good works or by keeping the commandments of God?
5. Read Romans 4:13-25. Why was Abraham justified by his faith?
6. What are the results of being justified by faith and the blood of Jesus (v1-5 & 9-11)?
7. Who did Christ die for, and why? (vv6-8) How does the cross demonstrate God's love for us? And how does this affect our desire to justify ourselves to God and to other people?

8. What does life look like when we live 'in the hope of the glory of God' (vv3-5). What is the source of this hope (v5)? How can this enable us to deal with the reality of suffering?

9. What obstacles are in our lives that prevent us from experiencing the reality of the love of God that has been 'poured into our hearts'?

Jesus Restores our Relationships

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1. What are the characteristics that you would usually judge someone by on a first impression? How many of those things are based on outward appearance?
2. Why would it be possible for someone like Paul to have regarded Jesus 'from a worldly point of view'? What would it mean for us to do that?
3. Paul says that when anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come and the old is gone (v17). What sort of things would you expect to see in someone who has been renewed by God? What 'old' things would be gone?
4. What does the word 'reconciliation' mean to you? When have you seen reconciliation between people (or groups of people) taking place?
5. How has God reconciled the world to himself (v19)? What type of behaviour and activity should flow from our reconciliation with God (v19-20)?
6. How could it be true that 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us' (v21)? What has this got to do with the Cross? (v21)

7. How should we 'regard' ourselves and others now because of what Jesus has done on the cross? What does that mean for how we treat ourselves and other people?
8. What have you learnt in this series, or what has grabbed you again, about the meaning of the Cross?
9. Go back to the first question in the first study in this series. Why did Jesus die on the Cross? Has your answer changed?