

## The Greatest Theological Fallacy Of All Time

On Sunday, we concluded our sermon series called “Reflections On The Cross.”

1. Warm up question. If you had to pick a symbol for the Christian faith and you had to pick something other than the cross, what would you choose and why?
2. Despite all the “logo” options available to the Christian faith, the cross emerged as the primary option. As Jeff pointed out on Sunday, the cross was the first century equivalent of an electric chair or lethal injection syringe. To the state the obvious, the cross was an odd choice. Hebrews 12:2 refers to the “shame of the cross.” Galatians 5:11 speaks of “the offense of the cross.” I Corinthians 1:18 indicates that to non-Christians in the first century, the cross was “foolishness” and “a stumbling block.” The reason the cross was (and still is) so offensive is captured in our key verse, when the scribes and elders shouted these words at Jesus:

Matthew 27:43 (NASB). “He trusts in God, so let God rescue him now, if God delights in him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

- a. What theological assumptions are embedded in the words the scribes and elders shouted at Jesus? In other words, what do their words reveal about how they assumed God acts toward people God likes and does not like?
  - b. Jeff said he constantly counsels people who seem to approach life with the same embedded theological assumptions as “the enemies of the cross,” i.e., the scribes and elders. How about you? Do you believe God routinely delivers people God favors from the hardships of life? Why or why not?
  - c. Take a poll within your group by show of hands. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view:
    - ✓ God often delivers believers out of hardship.
    - ✓ God occasionally delivers believers out of hardship, but usually chooses instead to help us power through hardships.
    - ✓ God never delivers believers out of hardship, but always chooses to help us power through hardships.
    - ✓ If none of the foregoing statements fit you, how would you put it?
  - d. When in your life did you hope or expect God would help you escape from a time of hardship, but God didn’t? Did that cause you to question your faith? What, if anything, did you learn from going through the hardship? Did you come out the other side stronger?
3. In her book “Breathing Space,” Heidi Neumark tells the story of an old woman named Miss Ellie. Heide and some of her friends built a bridge across a creek near Miss Ellie’s home to provide a shortcut to the home of Ellie’s best friend. The

shortcut saved Miss Ellie the struggle of walking miles through tall grass infested with snakes on hot Carolina days. But when Heidi unveiled the surprise of the bridge, Miss Ellie was not happy. She said, “Child, I don’t need a shortcut,” then went on to tell Heidi about all the other people she routinely stopped and visited as she took the long and difficult way to her friend’s house. Miss Ellie preferred the long and difficult path for the blessings it brought.

- a. Shortcuts are always tempting. Can you think of a simple example from your own life where you prefer to do something the “hard way” instead of a faster, more convenient way?
  - b. Suppose God said, “Ok, I’m going to let you pick one situation in your life right now where I’ll give you a shortcut, i.e., a quick escape from a difficult situation.” What difficult situation would you be tempted to choose – and why?
  - c. Why do you think God seldom offers us shortcuts out of the hardships of life?
  - d. II Corinthians 4:17 says, “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.” What do you hear that verse saying?
  - e. In John 16:31, Jesus said, “In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” What do you hear that verse saying?
4. Think back to the story Jeff told about the guy who tried to help a butterfly who was struggling to get out of its cocoon. The man used his keys to carefully cut a large opening in the cocoon to allow the butterfly to escape. But when the butterfly crawled out, its muscles of its wings were so underdeveloped (due to lack of struggle), it could not function and died. Sciencing.com puts it this way: WARNING: In most instances, helping the butterfly out of the chrysalis will prevent it from ever flying. The butterfly needs the struggle to strengthen its wings.” Jeff said, “You are that butterfly.” As you reflect on this analogy, what thoughts or feelings does it evoke within you?
5. In Philippians 3:10, the Apostle Paul says, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”
- a. What does it mean to enter into “fellowship with Christ’s sufferings,” and why is that so important?
  - b. What does it mean to “become like him in his death”?
  - c. Is it possible to attain the resurrection of Christ without entering into the fellowship of his sufferings? Why or why not?
6. Given all we’ve discussed, why do you think the cross became the ultimate symbol of the Christian faith? Do you think it was a good choice? Why or why not?