

### IS IT STILL THERE?

<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

<sup>11</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him,

we will also live with him;

<sup>12</sup> if we endure,

we will also reign with him.

If we disown him,

he will also disown us;

<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless,

he remains faithful,

for he cannot disown himself.

A four year old girl was watching a baby get baptized in church. She watched the pastor make the sign of the cross over the baby's forehead and heart. She sat in the pew for a moment, remembering how her mother told her that she was baptized in the same way. She lifted up her bangs off her forehead and asked her mother, "Is it still there?" "What," her mother asked? "The cross. Is it still there?"

Is it still there? You know, the cross. Is it still there, the cross Jesus carried and the cross you carry?

I. *Is it still there, the cross Jesus carried?*

The cross of Jesus was put on you. <sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. Ours is a religion of remembering. When Jesus instituted Holy Communion, he said to do this in remembrance of him. The Children's Christmas service is the same story every year. You will not hear anything earthshattering different each Sunday. We keep going back to Eden and Sinai and Bethlehem and Calvary. We spend our time remembering Jesus.

We need to remember because we live among people who no longer remember Jesus. This is a time when people do what is right in their own eyes and not according to the Bible. Even people in the church have begun to compromise God's Word. Each person has become his or her own authority. People don't ask, "What does God want?" but instead, "What do I want?"

And don't we find ourselves forgetting, too? It is easy to forget. The narthex, the room you entered when you stepped into church, goes back hundreds and hundreds of years in church architecture. It is intended to be this transition, a place where you not only hang up your coats but where you also forget about the outside world so you may concentrate on God. But we easily do the opposite. We use it as a place to leave behind God as we enter the real world. We too easily take his gifts for granted. We too easily assume that we deserve the possessions we have because we worked hard for them and then are reluctant to give them up. Pride and our abilities start to take the place of faith. Do we remember the cross at work, at school, in the hospital?

And we forget why Jesus came. Jesus came to save us from our sins. The psalmist asked the Lord to forgive even his hidden faults. Imagine that. We sin so often, we can't even remember them all! And if I am not bothered by my sins, I am not going to call to Jesus for help. Does the cross mean anything?

That is why Paul tells us to remember Jesus Christ. That is why we are a remembering church. That is why we talk about the same things. And what are we to remember? The fact that Jesus rose from the dead. The Bible has over three hundred passages that talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We are told that this event is a sign to unbelievers as well as the answer to believers' doubts; it serves as the guarantee that Jesus' teaching's are true. It assures us God accepted Jesus' sacrifice for our sins; we are truly forgiven. It serves as the motivation to live new lives in Christ; it also drives the fear of death from us as it is proof that we will rise from the dead. The cross is our ticket to eternal life.

And note how Paul calls it "my gospel." No, it is not the gospel he made up. The gospel message was meant for him. This is your gospel. Yes, Jesus just died for the sins of the world, but he also died for your sins. Jesus didn't just rise from the dead. He rose in order to open your grave.

Did the pastor do the sign of the cross over my head at my baptism? I don't know; I was too young to remember. But I do know that God has put the cross of Christ on me in my Baptism as he did for you. Don't forget you have that cross on you. The best way is to remember. Remember why Jesus came, to save sinners of whom we are the worse. Remember that those sins are forgiven at the cross. Remember, because he lives, we too, shall live. When you leave today, don't leave that cross in the narthex. Wear it. See it. Realize what it means to you.

## II. *Is it still there, the cross we carry?*

By faith we have the cross Jesus carried. But we also have another cross, one that we carry. Is it still there? Let me put it to you this way. Watch a football game. You will always see fans there from the visiting team. I give them credit for rooting for their favorite football team as they wear their team's colors. Most of the time they are not harassed too much. Sometimes they are. I remember being at a Denver game when the fans tried to pour beer on some Kansas City fans. Sometimes it is easier to hide your allegiance in the opposing team's home field.

It is easy to dress up and root for Jesus in our home stadium, here at church. It is easy to pray out loud here. It is easy to talk about Jesus in Bible class. But do we feel uncomfortable rooting for Jesus outside the friendly confines here? The truth is, if we believe that Jesus is our Savior and if we call him Lord and if we do what he says and say what he says, someone will tease us for it. Jesus said, **"All men will hate you because of me."** (Mark 13:13) The cross we carry is anything we suffer because of Jesus Christ. I believe we all understand this concept of carrying the cross. We all have felt the fear, timidity, the pressure, we have all heard the snickers, maybe even some were discriminated against because of what we believe about Jesus.

Every Christian has a cross to carry. The Apostle Paul had his. **This is my gospel,<sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.** The Apostle suffered much for the sake of Jesus Christ: Right now he was sitting in a Roman prison chained up like some common criminal.

Is it still there, the cross you carry for Jesus? Or do we behave more like the timid fan in the opposing team's stadium and refrain from letting it be known for whom we are rooting? I believe that all of us here would like to carry our crosses or do a better job at it. Well, Paul gives us reasons not to be afraid to carry our crosses.

**<sup>11</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him.** No matter what people do to us, we will win and live forever. They can't take away your salvation.

That is why this trustworthy saying continues, **If we disown him, he will also disown us; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us.** Just think of all the saints who have gone on to heaven before us, especially those heroes of the Bible who faced all sorts of persecution. Do you think they will look back and say it wasn't worth it? Would we look back from heaven and say that all the persecution and ridicule wasn't worth it? Never. How can the crosses we carry compare to the crowns we will wear with Christ? Disowning Christ means God will disown us, but enduring means crowns in heaven.

The trustworthy saying continues, **<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.** If you fail to pay your gas bill, they will eventually turn off your gas. Not the Lord. If one doesn't believe God now, God doesn't just walk away and say, "You had your chance." The truth is, we will not always carry our crosses well. There will be times, like Peter, when we will deny knowing Jesus. But God will remain faithful to us as he was to Peter. He is faithful to his promise to forgive sins whether you confessed them all your life or with the last breath on your deathbed.

With our crosses come opportunities. **This is my gospel,<sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.** They may have imprisoned Paul with chains, but not God's Word. Paul was willing to endure anything if it meant getting the gospel out to others. Think of the jailer at Philippi where Paul was imprisoned. If his death would mean the salvation of one more soul, Paul would gladly give it.

Parents, what would you be willing to endure if it meant your children would spend eternal life in heaven? What would you give up? What about your husband or wife, or your parents or that uncle you haven't seen in ten years? What would you endure to see them in heaven? Is there any burden too heavy, any sacrifice too great, or price too high?

Is it still there? The sign of the cross the pastor makes over our foreheads was there for only a moment, but we still have the cross Jesus carried through faith and Baptism. And with that cross come our own crosses to carry. Remember the Lord and his resurrection. This will help you endure anything and everything for the salvation of souls and for the day the Lord will crown our heads. INJ Amen.