

Josiah Bell: 19 June am

(Sermon Summary)

Compelled by the love of Christ

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Successful sprinters need to live a life of dedication and discipline if they are to win the race. Like them, the apostle Paul lived a driven life, pursuing one thing (the Lord) with diligence, despite his many sufferings and hardships. We find it hard to keep trusting God every day, but the apostle Paul was compelled by the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). How can we, like him, find the ‘fuel’ we need to keep on pursuing God? The secret is revealed in 2 Cor. 5:21. This verse gives a clear interpretation of the Cross and what it means for your life.

The Cross is not, first of all, about men

In the account of the Crucifixion, we read about the actions of evil men: betrayal, cruelty, and spite. But they are secondary. What makes the seaside special is the sea - its immenseness and depth - not the strip of sand where we have fun. Just as the seaside is about the sea and not the ‘side’, so the Cross is about God, not men. The awesome reality is that the eternal Father made his Son Jesus, to be sin for us.

It is shocking because it is the Cross of CHRIST

Coal miners got used to their dark, dirty and dangerous life underground, but if we went down a mine we would be shocked at the working conditions. We are accustomed to being surrounded by sin, and cannot imagine what it was like for the pure, spotless Son of God to come down and live in our sinful world. He is repelled by sin and does not want to be near it, but out of love He even went to the Cross for sinners.

The Cross is a place of great darkness

Jesus 'became sin for us' but this does not mean that He committed any sin. Sin is not a vague abstract force - it comes from sinners! The sin that He was 'made' belonged to sinners; he was identified with them.

If we kill a fly, no-one will care, but we are outraged at murder because a human life is precious. Sin is so dreadful because it is a crime committed against God, who is of infinite value. Sin is like wanting God dead - we take His gifts but reject the Giver and choose to rule ourselves.

All the filthiness and ugliness of our sin was laid on Jesus, as if He was putting on our filthy clothes. And as He bore our sin, the wrath of God fell on Him. So the Cross is a place of horror and darkness.

The Cross is also a place of light

Jesus never ceased to be God's beloved Son, and on the Cross He was being obedient to God. "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). So God has exalted Him, and every knee will bow to Him (Phil. 2:9-10).

The Cross is the place which reveals the righteousness of God

If Jesus has been identified with your sin, it is so that you might be identified with His righteousness. We are united with Jesus by faith, like branches of a vine. You are clothed with His righteousness, so you receive God's blessing. Jesus has perfectly fulfilled God's law so there is no condemnation. Your sins are gone!

If you are not a Christian, Paul pleads with you to be reconciled to God. God sees with crystal clarity your whole life, clothed with filthiness, and you justly deserve His wrath, so you must receive Christ's righteousness.

If you are a Christian, this truth is a great incentive to run the race with diligence. The *starting* point is 'no condemnation'! The work of sanctification and service may be hard and heavy, but as you labour in the 'quarry' of your life, the sun is always shining on you - even when you sin. God knows you will keep failing and sinning, but he has declared you righteous. This is the strength in which we work. "Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength" (Isaiah 45: 24).