

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever played with **binoculars**? Or watched children play with them? First you look through them the *right* way and see everything magnified. Then you decide to look through them the *wrong* way--through the little end and you find everything is smaller. Binoculars offer a great object lesson in *perspective*. What you see depends on your angle of vision--or what kind of spectacles you have on--or what end of the binoculars you hold up to your eyes.

I love to hear or read children's comments about Bible stories and church. Their fresh *perspectives* often are amusing as well as insightful.

-A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say," he asked. "Why, God tells me." "Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?"

-A six-year old was overheard reciting the Lord's Prayer during a worship service. "And forgive us our trash passes as we forgive those who passed trash against us."

-Nine-year old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday School.

"Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge, and all the people walked across safely. He used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters and call in an air strike. They sent in bombers to blow up the bridge and the Israelites were saved. "Now Joey is that REALLY what your teacher told you," his mother asked. "Well, no, Mom, but if I told it the way the teacher did, you would never believe it!"

You have to admire children for that quality of wide-eyed wonder and unblemished naiveté. There is a refreshing quality about seeing and hearing something for the first time. There is a delightful sense in not being jaded and not being imprisoned in the "been there, done that" dimension of smug *one-upsmanship*. Is there anything new under the sun? **Yes--for him who has eyes to see. Yes--for her who has ears to hear.**

Today we find ourselves at the beginning of LENT, that season of preparation for Holy Week... The term "**Lent**" comes from an old English word similar to the words *long* or *lengthen--referring* to the lengthening of days (more sunlight) that occurs in the Spring.

In Lent we envision Jesus on his way to Jerusalem for his final visit. Lent pictures Jesus on his journey to the Cross. We come through Lent every year on the way to Holy Week--it is familiar territory but let's seek to see its culmination with a new and a fresh vision.

Today (at the start of the journey) I want to prompt you to reflect on the **Cross of Christ**.

Have you thought much about the evolving *changes* in **attitude** among the disciples as they took that journey to Jerusalem. They knew Jesus was special; he was a rabbi like no one they had seen or heard. He taught as one with authority.

He drew crowds and he did remarkable acts of power and kindness. But the disciples had trouble putting two and two together. Jesus is the Christ?—well, maybe. And then near the journey's end everything turned bleak. One of the remarkable things that happened between the first Palm Sunday and Good Friday was the *change* in **mood** of the crowd in Jerusalem. One day Jesus was a hero--the long awaited Messiah. A few days later Jesus was arrested and treated like a criminal--quite a change in mood and perspective.

He was betrayed and arrested, tried and executed as a criminal. Who could even dare to hope for anything good to come after Good Friday? Who could imagine a triumph like Easter? As their Lord hung on a cross and his life ebbed away, they hung their heads and lost all hope. But when they saw the stone rolled away and later spoke to Jesus face to face--their perspective changed again—180 degrees.

I'm speaking of the original disciples and the first century crowd in Jerusalem to point out changes in mood and perspective. **How did his contemporaries see this Jesus?** Was he the Messiah or a rabble-rouser? Was he truly a king or simply the latest version of a zealot, a Galilean revolutionary?

How you answer that question depends on your perspective and your faith stance? Paul envisioned two radically different ways of responding to Jesus in the aftermath of the first Holy Week--two opposing ways of measuring the impact of **Jesus crucified**, the result of **Jesus sacrificed**, the benefits derived from Jesus *laying down his life* for his sheep.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." The two camps or two groups are called what? Those *perishing* and those being *saved*!

And so the message of the cross is perceived as foolishness in one camp and as divine power in the other camp. *For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate (Isaiah 29:14).* According to Paul, God is showing the world a different kind of wisdom and intelligence. God acts and speaks from His own perspective!

**Example:** the God's eye view (*sub specie aeternitas*)

Paul's rhetorical questions in v. 20 posed a direct challenge to the 1st century world's great talkers: *the wise man* (philosopher), *the scholar* (the expert in Jewish Law) and *the philosopher of this age* (the debater/popular speaker). All belong to the **old age** whereas the Messiah has ushered in the kingdom and the **age to come**.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, rhetorical eloquence was greatly prized. Powerful orators received the same kind of attention and acclaim now lavished on movie stars, sports heroes and other public entertainers. But where are they today? God's mighty act in history has relativised all other "*talkers*." The talk or word of the cross--God's amazing act of grace--this kind of wisdom and power has set the true and lasting standard.

**Example:** today's great talkers are **talk-show hosts** (*Oprah, Regis, Dave, Jay—Johnny Carson*)

**Example:** The New Atheists (scholars and **elites**); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* and now Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great*.

In light of the world's power-brokers (the rich & the famous) how can the death of one man be important? How can the crucifixion of Jesus be a salvation event for the whole world? One would have to be a fool to believe that! Except for two things—**if** it really happened (HISTORY) and **if** that is how God reconciles people to Himself (GOD'S PLAN).

And that is Paul's declaration.

If the cross is the *centerpiece* of God's salvation activity, if it is the *turning point* in human history, all human standards of evaluation are overturned by what God has done.

**Example:** Gordon Fee (cross or electric chair)—it is a fact of history, an instrument of death

But most Greeks & Jews in the first century said, "*No way!*" This does not make sense. They sought evidence of a more credible sort. Maybe you too have looked for something more reasonable. What exactly were the ancient

doubters seeking? See verse 22. “*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom...*” They looked for empirical demonstrations of power (*signs*) or rationally persuasive arguments (*wisdom*).

The first century Jews, who had suffered long under the burden of foreign oppression, quite understandably, looked for demonstrations of God’s **power**. Like the signs done by *Moses* at the time of the Exodus... The Messiah should be a man of power, a wonder-worker. When Jesus performed miracles, the crowds grew. Remember the feeding of the 5000? They wanted to grab hold of Jesus and make him king, then and there.

The **Greeks**, famous for their love of learning, looked for **wisdom**. They wanted to hear an orderly account of things persuasively presented. The Greeks who gave the world *Plato*, *Socrates* and *Aristotle*—looked for a wise man and a Great Teacher. When Jesus confounded the scribes and wowed the crowds with parables—he fit the bill—for a while.

But then God threw it all away. He allowed this Messiah to be delivered to the Romans as a criminal—and then he was nailed to a cross. He is **no** wise man who cannot outsmart the priests and Pilate. He is **no** wonder-worker who cannot overcome a jeering crowd and a band of soldiers. “*He saved others; why can’t He save himself?*”

**Why? Because he was giving himself up to save the world!**

God saves by giving himself as a sacrifice.  
Jesus is the crucified God.  
He overcomes evil by loving others unto death.

You have to admit that this not what anyone would expect. It is mind blowing and category defying. This is why Jews and Muslims who believe so strongly in an all-powerful God—have trouble even entertaining the claims of Christ who appeared weak in going to the cross.

**Example:** God’s Story and the **Unexpected** (*Rahab, Ruth, Noah’s Ark, Gideon*)

On the cross Jesus uttered several last words. Collected from the four gospels they describe key aspects of the message of the cross...Today I want you to especially notice the **Cry of Dereliction**: “*My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?*”

This cry sums up the Jewish stumbling block. *Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*--we read in Deuteronomy. Jesus was hanged on a tree (a cross) so he must be under God's curse. Thus, God must have forsaken him. But if God has cursed him and abandoned him he cannot be God's *anointed* one. Instead he is God's *rejected* one! But that is to read Jesus' **Cry of dereliction** from the wrong perspective. Jesus was quoting Psalm 22 as he agonized on the cross. He saw himself in the psalm as the one “*poured out like water,*” and as one “*scorned by men and despised by the people.*”

Jesus experienced being *abandoned* or forsaken by even his close friends as He went to the cross. Luke shows us three who abandoned Jesus:

- Judas* (who deserts when following Jesus does not pay off)
- Peter* (the overconfident one)
- who* is the third person to abandon Jesus?

See Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember what he says in prayer about the cup. “*Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but yours be done.*” Jesus even experiences a sense of abandonment from His heavenly Father.

But Jesus knew his genuine experience of *forsaken-ness* completed his atonement—his identification with sinners and his bearing our sins on the cross. In the Garden he looked into the cup of suffering and wrath and atonement—and He drank it anyway. Abandoned yet even then he did not give in to despair. Jesus turned to Psalm 22 to express his agony and faith. Only Jesus' failing strength prevented him from uttering the rest of David's lyrics:

*But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. {20} Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs... (24) For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.*

Do you hear this **Cry of Trust** that follows the **Cry of Dereliction**?

Jesus did not swerve from his mission to save us. Even when he saw into the cup and realized the price he must pay. Even when his friends Judas and Peter are about to abandon him...

Why? Why did Jesus go to the cross? Why does He do this amazing thing? Because He loves us so much. If He did not turn away even as he was abandoned—do you think anything *you* say or do will make Him love *you* less? And if you see this forgiving love and embrace Him—what will that enable you to do? Forgive others, love others, serve others?

Reading the signs and seeing the true picture of Jesus—this is our aim on our Lenten journey.

All over the world millions of people have seen the *Jesus Film*-- 3.4 billion people have seen the Jesus Film in one of 582 languages. Do you know about this amazing enterprise in evangelistic cinema from Campus Crusade? Do you know which scene triggers the strongest responses?

Yes, it is the crucifixion scene. I have read accounts of peoples who never had heard the name of Jesus nor had seen the Bible nor had any inkling about the church—who then saw the Jesus story on film for the first time. And when this powerful scene is displayed the crowd begins weeping and even wailing. Sometimes they see in the *weakness* of the cross, the **Power** of God! And then they see in *the foolishness* of the cross, the **Wisdom** of God!

And behind all this? **The love of God**. Can you see it? *He who has eyes to see, let him see!*