

The Cross of Surrender

Mark 10:35-45, Mark 14:32-36

At the end of Jesus' earthly life, he utters these final words from the cross: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." They are words that express a dramatic conclusion to a mission given to Jesus by His Heavenly Father. The work of atonement had been accomplished, finished, and as we said last week his death would point to a victory soon to be realized -our greatest enemy, death itself would be defeated.

And for the follower of Jesus, we are called to come to that place of surrender as we take up the cross and follow him. "United with him in his death" means coming to that place of surrender. Here at the cross, where we grasp what it meant for Jesus to give his very life, to take upon our sin so that we could know life and life eternal...here at the cross, when we think about Jesus' precious sacrifice, we cannot help but declare the words of verse 4 of our hymn: "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small"...(no matter what I possessed it would not be enough) because His "love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

The wondrous cross...a cross of forgiveness, a cross of sacrifice, and today we see the cross as a cross of surrender. As painful and excruciating as it would be, Jesus surrendered his will to God crying in the Garden of Gethsemane...If it be possible, take this cup from me...nevertheless, not my will but Your will be done." There were 4 cups on the table at the Passover feast, and the third cup was the cup of redemption. It was in the offering of this cup at the Last Supper, that Jesus said, "this is my blood of the new covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." It would be the cup of great suffering and sacrifice. And so when Jesus said not my will, but your will be done, it was his willingness to give himself in sacrifice for us. And in that place of surrender demonstrated for us what it meant to take up our cross.

Some of the disciples had a hard time getting that through their heads. They were still fighting for personal recognition when they want to know where they would sit in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus pointedly asks them: Are you able to drink the cup that I will drink? Obviously they were still missing what God's

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kingdom was all about. Who is the greatest in God's kingdom...the one who is the servant...for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. The one who gives of himself or herself for others.

To take up the cross is to be willing to surrender your life to God. It's not the popular way, or the way we have taught, but it is following the example of our Lord. Maybe part of the difficulty we have is that when you hear the word "surrender" you think of giving up...to be in a position of weakness or resignation. But we are talking about a different kind of surrender.

To be in a posture of surrender is to place yourself into the hands of God and to be willing to allow God to lead your life. It is recognizing that the One who created you wants what is best for you. So it becomes a matter of trust...trusting in the Lord to guide your steps knowing God will be with you all the way. Like we sing in one of our hymns: "Have thine own way, Lord, hold o'er my being absolute way..." it is letting go and believing God will be with you no matter what you face. It is putting yourself into the hands of God.

There is a story about a young boy of about fourteen, who went fishing with a friend. They caught four nice trout, but it took almost the entire day to do it. As the sun went down, they chose to walk along the railroad tracks as a quicker way of getting home. Neither of the boys had taken this way before but they'd heard it was easy if you didn't mind crossing a series of narrow trestles that spanned some deep ravines along the way. The boys came to the first bridge, just wide enough for a train, or two foolish boys to cross over, and then the second bridge. They crossed both without incident. By the time they came to the last trestle it was so dark they could barely see where to place their feet between the tracks as they crossed the trestle on that starless night. The boys held hands and felt their way in the darkness along the tracks. Suddenly a bright light blinded them. A locomotive was rounding the curve and coming toward them full throttle. The frightened boys didn't know whether to run forward or back, in desperation they began running away from the train. But they couldn't even begin to see the end of the trestle. There was only one thing to do.. laying their fishing poles across the timbers between the rails, they slipped between the ties and hung by their arms

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beneath the tracks. The train roared overhead, knocking cinders in their eyes and nearly shaking them loose. The cars kept coming, coming, coming. Then the last one clacked over. They tried to pull back up onto the tracks, but their arms were too tired. So they hung there desperately calling for help. They hung in the pitch darkness, their legs dangling as they looked down into the emptiness. They knew they couldn't last much longer. Finally one of them called out, "God, help me!"

Suddenly a small beam of light from under the bridge approached them. "What's going on here," a voice cried out. And two eyes peered out of the darkness.

"Could this actually be God coming to rescue us," But then a voice rang out, "Why are you boys hanging there from those tracks? And the man shifted his flashlight toward the boys feet so they could look down to see the gigantic distance of ten inches below their dangling shoes. All the time they hung there in fear of their very lives, they could have simply let go, and landed safely on the ground below.

Most of the things we are anxious about, indeed most of the things we fear in life lose their power over us when we simply let go of our fears, and place our trust in God. Surrender is all about letting go and putting your trust in the God who made you. The God who loves you as His creation.

That leads me to mention an important point that is often misunderstood about surrender. And that is the belief that when I surrender I must give up who I am. When you surrender to God it doesn't mean a change in your personality.

God created you as a unique individual, and God wants to use the gifts He has given you to carry out His purposes. When we surrender ourselves to God, what is unique about us individually is now fully to be expressed for kingdom purposes. Listen to the observation of C.S. Lewis. "The more that we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because He made us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be...It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."

In other words, we can be the person God created us to be. I know this can be a hard spiritual lesson for all of us. It is hard to let go of control. We try to work things out; we want to be in charge, we often live with our own agendas. Surrendering to God means I am asking God to work out the situations in my life. I

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am giving myself over to the Lord. A. W. Tozer in the book The Pursuit of God describes it like this: “ The (person) who surrenders to Christ exchanges a cruel slave driver for a kind and gentle Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. Made as we were in the image of God, we scarcely find it strange to take again our God as our All...While we take to ourselves the place that is His, the whole course of our lives is out of joint. Nothing will or can restore order till our hearts make the great decision: God shall be exalted.”

I like how one pastor talked about surrender: “Surrender isn't trying harder, but instead (it is) trusting more. You know that you are surrendered when you don't react to criticism and rush to defend yourself. Surrendered hearts show up best in relationships. You don't edge others out but let them shine and help them shine. You don't demand your rights, and you aren't self-serving when you've surrendered. Jesus was the supreme example of surrender. He didn't pray for God to take away what He was about to face but acknowledge His struggle to God and then prayed God's will be done, not His own.”

Judson Van de Venter (1855-1939) was raised on a farm near Dundee, Michigan. After graduating from Hillsdale College, he taught art in public schools in Sharon, Pennsylvania. Van Deventer was active as a layman in his Methodist Episcopal Church, including participation in revivals held at the church.

Based on his fervent faith and service to the church, friends encouraged him to leave his field of teaching and become an evangelist. It took five years for him to finally "surrender all" and follow the advice of his friends. His ministry took him to various places in the United States, England, and Scotland. He also became a writer of hymns, his most famous one being the hymn we will sing at the close of this service: “I Surrender All”. This is Van de Venter’s testimony about that hymn: “The song was written while I was conducting a meeting at East Palestine, Ohio, and in the home of George Sebring (founder of Sebring Campmeeting Bible Conference . . .). For some time, I had struggled between developing my talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life. I became an evangelist and discovered down deep in my soul a talent hitherto

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unknown to me. God had hidden a song in my heart, and touching a tender chord, he caused me to sing.

Perhaps the most important influence that Van de Venter had was on the young evangelist who cites this hymn as an influence in his early ministry. That young evangelist was the Rev. Billy Graham.

Today we come to receive communion and to remember our Lord who went to the cross for us. He lifted the cup at that last supper, the cup of redemption and became the means for our salvation. And so we come, ready to drink the cup, willing to take up the cross, and offer ourselves into God's hands saying in our hearts: "I surrender all."

I close with one of the prayers of A.W.Tozer: "Lord, I would trust Thee completely; I would be altogether Thine; I would exalt Thee above all. I desire that may feel no sense of possessing anything outside of Thee. I want constantly to be aware of Thy overshadowing presence and to hear Thy speaking voice. I long to live in restful sincerity of heart. I want to live so fully in the Spirit that my thoughts may be as sweet incense ascending to Thee and every act of my life may be an act of worship."