

Message Seven

The Cross—the Center of the Universe

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 43:13-18;
Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Col. 1:20; 2:14-15

- I. According to the record in Ezekiel, the altar is the center of the compound, the center of the premises of the temple—43:13-18:**
- A. The altar is the center not only of the inner court but also of the whole premises of the temple.
 - B. The altar, which signifies the cross, is actually the center of the universe:
 - 1. The altar is the center of the temple compound; the temple compound is the center of Jerusalem; the city of Jerusalem is the center of the good land; the good land is the center of the inhabited earth; and, as far as the relationship of God and man is concerned, the earth is the center of the universe; thus, ultimately the altar is the center of the universe.
 - 2. Since the altar signifies the cross, the cross is the center of the universe.
 - 3. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not the death merely of one person; it was an all-inclusive death involving God, man, and all the creatures—Rom. 6:6; Col. 1:20; Heb. 2:14.
- II. The principle of the cross is that by the cross everything of the old creation and all things related to us have been terminated, put to death—Col. 1:20; 2:14-15; Rom. 6:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 2:14; John 12:31; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 2:14-16.**
- III. The crucified Christ was the unique subject, the center, the content, and the substance of the apostle's ministry—1 Cor. 2:2:**
- A. The death of Christ has become God's power to eliminate all the problems in the universe; thus, Christ crucified is God's power to abolish all negative things and carry out His plan—1:23-24:
 - 1. The human way of solving problems is to negotiate, but God's way is to terminate; the best way to solve problems among people is to terminate everyone involved—Gal. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 6:7-8.

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2. The crucifixion of Christ has silenced the entire universe and simplified the extremely complicated situation in the universe—cf. 2 Cor. 11:2-3.

B. When we experience the crucified Christ, all that we are, all that we have, and all that we can do are completely terminated, and His resurrection life is imparted through us into others—John 12:24-26; 2 Cor. 4:10-12.

IV. In His economy God gives us one person—Christ—and one way—the cross—1 Cor. 2:2; Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 6:14:

A. The one person—Christ—is the center of God’s economy, and the one way—the cross—is the center of God’s government—1 Cor. 2:2; 1:17-18, 23; Gal. 6:14:

1. God governs everything by the cross and deals with everything by the cross—Col. 1:20; 2:14-15.

2. By the cross God has dealt with all the negative things in the universe, and He is still governing everything through the cross—Eph. 2:14-16.

3. In the church life Christ must be all and in all; everything that is not Christ must go to the cross—Col. 1:18; 3:10-11.

4. Through the cross we need to become nothing, to have nothing, and to be able to do nothing; otherwise, what we are, what we have, and what we can do will become a substitute for Christ—1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23.

B. In the book of Colossians we see a clear vision of the cross as God’s way in His administration—1:20-22; 2:11-15:

1. “Through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens”—1:20:

a. To reconcile all things to Himself is to make peace with Himself for all things; this was accomplished through the blood of the cross of Christ.

b. Because we were sinners, we needed redemption, and because we were also enemies of God, we needed reconciliation—vv. 14, 21-22.

2. “Wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross”—2:14:

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- a. *Ordinances* refers to the ordinances of the ceremonial law with its rituals, which are the forms or ways of living and worship—Eph. 2:15.
- b. *Nailing it to the cross* means to abolish the law of the commandments in ordinances.
- C. “Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it”—Col. 2:15:
 - 1. This verse portrays the fighting that took place at the time of Christ’s crucifixion:
 - a. Activities involving Christ, God, and the evil angelic rulers and authorities were brought to a focus on the cross; thus, the cross became God’s eternal, central, and unique way—vv. 14-15.
 - b. At the same time, the evil rulers and authorities were busy in their attempt to frustrate the work of God and Christ, pressing in close to God and Christ; thus, a warfare was raging at the cross.
 - 2. God openly made a display of the evil angelic rulers and authorities on the cross and triumphed over them in it, putting them to shame—v. 15.

V. In Matthew 27:51-53 we see the effect of Christ’s crucifixion:

- A. “The veil of the temple was split in two from top to bottom” (v. 51a), which signifies that the separation between God and man had been abolished because the flesh of sin taken by Christ had been crucified.
- B. “The earth was shaken” (v. 51b), which signifies that the base of Satan’s rebellion was shaken.
- C. “The rocks were split” (v. 51c), which signifies that the strongholds of Satan’s earthly kingdom were broken.
- D. “The tombs were opened” (v. 52a), which signifies that the power of death and Hades was conquered and subdued.
- E. “Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (v. 52b), which signifies the releasing power of the death of Christ.

VI. In the Gospel of John we see the life-releasing aspect of Christ’s crucifixion—19:34, 36; 12:24:

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- A. The water that flowed out of the Lord's pierced side is for imparting life, dealing with death, and producing the church—19:34; 3:14-15; Eph. 5:29-30.
- B. As a grain of wheat, the Lord Jesus fell into the ground and died in order to produce many grains for the church—John 12:24.
- C. The bone is a symbol of the Lord's resurrection life, which nothing can break; this is the life with which the church is produced and built—19:36.

VII. The cross leads us to the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:18; 12:12-13, 27:

- A. The cross operates in the sphere of the Body—Rom. 6:6; 8:13; 12:4-5:
 - 1. The work of the cross goes as far as the Body of Christ and consummates with the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:1-2; 12:12-27.
 - 2. Not only does the work of the cross bring us into the Body, but also the Body becomes the realm within which the cross works—Col. 1:20; 3:15.
- B. In the Body of Christ we cannot go on without the cross—Eph. 2:16:
 - 1. The cross will dig away our natural life, our own activities, and any disproportionate growth—Matt. 16:24-26.
 - 2. Life and work in the Body necessitate drastic dealings with the flesh, and such dealings necessitate a deep knowledge of the cross of Christ—Gal. 5:24.
 - 3. The restriction of the Body will take away our freedom and drive us to the cross—Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:13-15; Eph. 4:7, 16.
 - 4. All of God's dealings with us have been with a view to prepare us for the Body; all His work in us is a process of elimination so that we can become functioning members of the Body—Rom. 6:6; 8:13; 12:4-8.
 - 5. If our natural life is dealt with by the cross and if we submit to the headship of Christ and live the Body life, we will have the Spirit's anointing and enjoy the fellowship of the Body—Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 10:16.

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VIII. Although we meet the cross everywhere in our Christian life, we experience the cross in a particular way when we come to the altar at the center of God's building—Ezek. 43:13-18:

- A. To come to the altar at the center is to realize that all that we are and all that we have, have been terminated at the cross—Rom. 6:6.
- B. In our fellowship with the Lord, we are brought to the point where we touch the cross in a definite way and sense that God will no longer allow us to live in our natural man—Gal. 2:20.
- C. As we pass through the cross, our flesh, our old creation, our self, and our natural man with the natural life will all be dealt with—6:14.
- D. This is the experience of the cross—the center of the universe—Matt. 16:24.