

THE WAY OF THE CROSS



DOUG WELCH | 7 SESSIONS

**NEXT
LEVEL**  **ONLINE**

OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

The Way of the Cross
Session 1: Father, Forgive Them: From Ignorance to Empathy
Doug Welch

- What does it mean to grow in Christ?
 - Maybe the reason we feel stuck — we think “salvation” was the one-time moment that happened at baptism (when we said “Yes” to Christ).
 - The New Testament realizes that the “moment of salvation” is not the end, but the beginning — salvation is an on-going life that we live with Christ.
 - We need continual redemption — freed from the desires of flesh and sinful habits that we continue in after we became Christians.
 - As the cross saved us — paid the penalty of sin, made us new, reconciled us to God — it also motivates us to continue to live in the way of Christ.
- The words of Jesus from the cross — help us see 2 things:
 - What exactly Jesus is saving us from — see salvation as an on-going process in our lives (providing continual freedom from our old lives —and our sinful habits)
 - Where Jesus is leading us as people of the cross — recreating as new people, living as new creation (2 Cor 5:17), willing to sacrifice for the sake of others (how Jesus is the ultimate example for selfless love)
- First word: “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing”
 - Jesus is freeing us from our ignorance.
 - How does Jesus free us from this ignorance? The cross reveals to us that the “them.” in “Father, forgive them” is not just the Roman soldiers or the Jewish leaders or the disciples who ran away, but us — you and me?
 - That honesty should lead to a level of empathy for others — this isn’t just the truth about us, it’s the truth about the world.
 - And this empathy allows us to forgive as freely as we have been forgiven (Eph 4:32).
- Let me give you a simple exercise that will help you to start thinking this way:
 - At the end of your day, right before you go to bed, think back over your day.
 - Remind yourself of God’s incredible grace that surrounds you — but be honest about what you’ve done, what you’ve thought, what you’ve said.
 - Confess those sins before God, and ask Him to reveal to you the people you should forgive or ask forgiveness from (and then follow up on that later).
- This statement from Jesus reminds us that discipleship takes place in a messy world.

The Way of the Cross
Session 2: Today You Will be With Me: From Failure to Hope
Doug Welch

- We shouldn't want to be taking this journey — talking about being disciples in the way of the Cross through the 7 words of Jesus from the cross.
 - I don't think we really fully appreciate what crucifixion meant in the time of Jesus.
 - It's obviously a means of execution — but it's more than that.
 - Generally, the Romans saved crucifixion for those they wanted to make an example of — specifically in a political way. It was generally reserved for those who were rebelling against Rome or inciting others to rebel.
 - So for these failed rebels, the Romans would execute them in a public way — outside the city along a major road, with a sign over the criminal's head stating what they did.
 - It was basically Rome's way of saying "Don't mess with us. This is what happens to those who mess with us."
- So to be on the cross is to be a failure. It was to be shamed.
- The cross enables us to be honest with ourselves — here we can be honest about our failures.
 - Somehow, someday, that failed rebel saw victory when others only saw defeat. Saw a coronation to a Kingdom when others only saw shame.
 - He understood (how? No idea) — the hopeful aspect of the Kingdom — that what God is doing in the world requires trust, it requires the kind of hope that sees beyond present suffering.
- And to this failed rebel, Jesus says the 2nd word from the cross: "Today, you will be with me in paradise."
 - This word teaches us that Jesus is setting us free from the shame of our failures
 - In Romans 5:6-11 Paul reminds us who we used to be — here are the words he uses for us: "powerless," "ungodly," "sinner," and "enemy."
 - But it's failures like us that God is restoring and reconciling to Himself
- And to that one failed rebel, that hope came "Today!"
 - The difference between a wish and a hope is how it affects you right now in the present.
 - We have been reconciled to God.
- We cannot bring about paradise by ourselves, despite how well things might be going at the moment.

The Way of the Cross
Session 3: Woman, Behold Your Son: From Isolation to Family
Doug Welch

- It might seem that the Way of the Cross is a very lonely journey. That's often how we describe it — in individual terms (my life, my story, my journey with God). And in many ways, Jesus is entirely alone on the cross; but, surprisingly, in other ways, He isn't.
 - While discipleship is personal, it does not have to be individual — even the Son of God needs emotional support.
- In this midst of this isolating world, what kind of relationships can God's people encourage?
 - One of the most uncomfortable things about Jesus for us, the church in America anyway, is what He consistently says about families — and how He messes with families.
- For these, for all in this world who are isolated and lonely, “family” can't just be a metaphor for the church — the church quite literally needs to become their family.
 - Psalm 68:6 “God sets the lonely in families.”
 - 1 Tim 5:1-2 “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”
 - Jesus, from the cross, tells John that their relationship is no longer teacher/student — they're now brothers (they share a mother).
- But we need to realize that it takes a measure of risk.
 - If I invite someone into my life — to treat as a family member — I'm giving that person power to hurt me. Emotionally. Spiritually. In all kinds of ways. This is why church splits often feel like a divorce. That's what they are.
 - To treat someone as a family member gives up a measure of control — and that's why we don't do it. That's why we isolate ourselves, sit in coffee shops with earbuds in, staring at computer screens.
 - So here's your assignment for this session — take a risk with a relationship. Show hospitality. Give up control over your home and your stuff by inviting someone to share them, and when you say “make yourself at home,” really mean it.
 - Because discipleship may be personal, but it's never merely individual. We're a family of disciples, taking this road trip together, following Jesus on the Way of the Cross.

The Way of the Cross
Session 4: My God, My God: From Abandonment to Confidence
Doug Welch

- In most visual depictions I've seen of the cross, the scene always seems to be very serene — quiet, almost peaceful. You've seen pictures of the silhouette of 3 crosses on a hill against the sky.
 - And yet, I can't imagine the scene would have been very calm.
- And yet, there's a disturbing quiet in the mind of Christ. A quiet He's never before experienced, even from eternity past. In that noisy scene, He's experiencing for the first time what's like to not hear the voice of God.
- That's what silence does. It's adding insult to injury. It's bad enough that we have to suffer, but at least you, God, could show up and tell us that everything is going to be alright.
- But it's that question that makes this scene so incredible. Because, when you think about it, God is saying this to God.
 - You realize that Jesus isn't the first person to use these words. He's quoting David, who for being a "man after God's own heart" had a lot of painful days and seasons in his life. And during one of those he writes Psalm 22.
 - Isn't it incredible that not only is God experiencing what we experience, He's using our words (David's words) to describe it?
 - So for all those who question God's power and God's love in the midst of their own feelings of abandonment — here is God's power (taking your sin and guilt and the claims of death on you). Here is God's love (forgiving you, making you holy and blameless in His sight, reconciling you to Him, giving you a hope beyond all hopes).
- Jesus suffers our fear, our doubt, our abandonment — and in return He gives us His confidence.
 - Jesus gives us confidence when we should be afraid because He is participating with us in our suffering — this is how God is showing His power and love.
- So how do we practice this truth?
 - Jesus is participating in our suffering — we need to do that for one another.
 - I want you to think about intercessory prayer — where we pray for one another needs — as an act of participating in their suffering.
 - So maybe we should stop praying for people and start praying with people.
 - Make prayer an act of participating with them in their struggle, as Christ is participating with us.
 - Use their words (or words you would think they would use) in your prayers for them. Pray with that kind of fervor — if we're going to love our neighbors as ourselves, we should pray with that kind of passion, that kind of boldness.

The Way of the Cross
Session 5: I Thirst: From Weakness to Control
Doug Welch

- John's gospel tells us of the 5th word that Jesus says from the cross. And it's shocking given what John has told us about Jesus.
 - One of John's focuses is how Jesus is the source of a never-ending supply.
- So it's surprising that it's John who tells us that Jesus says from the cross, "I am thirsty."
 - The one who has provided and provided for so many is now exhausted. His life is being poured out. John will tell us later that after He died, Roman soldiers stabbed Him with a spear, and "blood and water flowed from His side."
- The cross shows us this. Jesus is weak. His body is failing. He needs help.
 - But here's the paradox: because He's also completely in control.
 - The passage where this story is found in John 19 begins this way: "so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'"
 - As in the previous session, He is fulfilling prophecy — this time from Psalm 69.
 - So which is it: is Jesus weak and thirsty, or is He strong, in control? The answer, of course, is both.
- Paul understood this — all the moments in his life when he was most in need is when God worked so powerfully for him and through him for others.
- So here's your exercise for this session. We do this with our students during one of their spiritual formation classes here at Ozark.
 - You stand in front of a mirror. And you look at yourself, and you describe what you see — your weaknesses, your limitations — you pour it all out.
 - And then, you look at yourself from God's point-of-view, and see how all those limitations become opportunities for God to show you how you can trust Him, how you can depend on Him, and how He can use your frailty for His glory.

The Way of the Cross
Session 6: It Is Finished: From Ambition to Contentment
Doug Welch

- It might well be the greatest single word ever uttered.
 - You think of the great words of history
 - Neil Armstrong (“One small step for man. One giant leap for mankind.”)
 - Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural (“with malice toward none, with charity toward all”)
 - MLK at the Lincoln Memorial (“I have a dream”)
 - Martin Luther (“Here I am. I can do no other. God help me. Amen”)
 - Jesus beat them all with one word. Tetelestai.
 - With that one word Jesus brought to a close the entire story of Israel and the Old Testament, the Law and its requirements of us, God’s wrath, the authority of Satan and the reign of sin and death in the world.
 - With this one word Jesus opens the doorway to a new life, a new creation world where we have been reconciled to God, our sins have vanished, the guilt and shame in our past is forgotten, and we can go forward to honor and serve God with everything we have. One word for one brand new world.
- And yet, the old world (the old self) still has its hooks in us.
 - Jesus says, “It is finished.” He has done it. He, no one else.
 - And yet, we pursue our own ambition — march to the beat of our own drummer, follow our own dreams, be true to ourselves.
- But here’s the uncomfortable question this statement of Jesus forces to ask our busy selves: Why are we so busy when it is already finished — when Jesus has already accomplished everything we really need for life and hope?
- How do we do that? We pursue something different than achievement. We pursue contentment.
 - Contentment is a foreign word for us — we always want more and more — but to be satisfied with what you have? That feels wrong.
 - But contentment is grace — it’s a life that recognizes that God has provided more than enough for us, and that His goodness is all we really need. And it’s that kind of trust that allows us to rest from all our busyness.
- When John tells us about Jesus saying “it is finished,” he adds a little interesting detail. He tells us that after Jesus said that, He “bowed His head.” The word there for “bowed” is the same word used throughout Scripture for when God “inclines His ear” toward us. To listen to our needs. To provide all that we need.
 - Contentment is trust — it allows us to rest knowing that God has turned His ear toward us, and in Christ, He has finished the work — given us everything we need.

- So here's the exercise for this session. Make a list. And make it as specific as you can. Don't just write that you're thankful for someone — really think about why you're thankful for that person, how God is really using them.

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Session 7: Into Your Hand I Commit
Doug Welch

- This is the last saying of Jesus on the cross. And it's a perfect way of summarizing Jesus' life (which really shouldn't surprise us — this is Jesus we're talking about, after all, so His last words will be perfect).
 - And that's what He does. As His life is slipping away, He's able to put it so perfectly. What His life was all about — and what we should be striving for as we walk on the Way on the Cross.
 - "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." It's not just Jesus saying, "I'm ready to die now." It's Jesus encapsulating His entire life — as I have served you with purpose and focus and intention my whole life, I'm doing that again here at the very end.
- How intentionally do we really live? Are we really taking the long view with life, and maintaining a focus, a consistent direction? Or, are we just kind of wandering around, trying to just make it through today?
- What's the solution to this apathy? Solomon says at the end of Ecclesiastes, the other thing that really has meaning is to "fear God and keep His commandments."
 - In other words, make a commitment — commit your life to God's hands.
 - The word here for "commit" is a word used for placing an offering on an altar. It's like what Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, that we would strive to be "living sacrifices" for God, holy and pleasing to Him.
- But if we want our lives to have meaning, that's what we have to do: we have to follow Jesus.
- But coming to that level of commitment is difficult — because it involves having at least some kind of sense of what you think God is leading you to do.
 - What are we supposed to do? Pray, and forgive, and meet needs, and show hospitality, and rest. It may not get any more uniquely specific for you than that, but He's told you enough in His Word to keep you for the rest of your life.
 - And making this level of commitment is not easy — nor really should it be. It should take time, it should take thought.
- Take 8 hours - I know that's a challenge — but isn't the direction of your life worth it? Isn't the One who sacrificed everything to give you a hope, a future, and a direction in life worth it? Take 8 hours to be alone with God — open up your life to Him, and ask Him this question, "what do you want me to do?" and listen for His voice — I don't know how He'll respond: maybe a Scripture will come to mind. Maybe a word someone had once said to you. Maybe with an inner conviction. Maybe an audible voice — I don't know. But the One whose hands we put our lives in raised Jesus from the dead. And the same Spirit that did that is, according to Romans 8, at work in you — directing, guiding, leading.