



## Our 2007 Lenten Journey

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*

*"...God has poured out His love into our hearts..." (Romans 5:5)*

This study booklet has been written for use by both individuals and groups, and is designed to accompany the Lenten sermon series by Dr. Rich Hansen during the forty days of Lent, 2007. Choosing to explore and deepen your understanding of the Cross of Jesus Christ begins as a love gift to Him. Entering into Lent with an open and seeking heart gives God new possibilities for whispering His great love, as you gain new experience with how "He gave His only...Son" for you.

### **For Individuals...**

- As a part of your Lenten journey, this study can be the focus of your daily time with the Lord. Working your way through the scripture and the application questions can easily take several days within the week, especially if you consider writing out answers to the questions. The "Personal Meditation" is especially designed for individuals to focus on one element of the Passion each week. Reading the scriptures from this section daily will help you live in the reality of the cross, and experience how "God has poured out His love" for you. (Romans 5:5) The final section of the study gives individuals further opportunity to ponder and pray over the words of Jesus in the Upper Room right before He submitted to the cross. You are encouraged to read and reread these words during Holy Week itself.

### **For Groups...**

- Being in a small group as you are using the study deepens the richness and the understanding of the cross of Christ through the opportunity for personal sharing. The study is under-girded with scripture, but is not intended to be used as simply a factual Bible study to gain head knowledge. In small groups, each section is intended to be a vehicle for deepening our walk with the Lord as *we live in community in the body of Christ*. As a member OR as a leader, help move the group toward the section "Exploring Our

Own Journeys,” which is the heart of the study. Your participation helps others see how this Jesus is working in their lives today, how His journey to the cross, and through the cross, brings daily salvation to each of us.

### **For Leaders...**

- As a group leader, always begin the gathering with prayer which invites the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of participants to risk in sharing and to listen to the personal whisperings of God to them. Please especially make your primary task of the evening be to provide ample time for the partner sharing in the section called “Exploring our Own Journeys.” Do not let your group become bogged down in the heavy theology of some of these particular Bible passages. Use a rapid ask-and-answer technique after scripture has been read. ***Facilitating partner sharing is your most important role.*** The study is designed so that after 20-30 minutes of such sharing, you can pull everyone back together again with the whole group using one or two of the suggested group questions OR by simply asking people to reflect on a question which particularly touched them.

For all those who use this little booklet, may the Holy Spirit bless your Lenten journey as you deepen your understanding of the enormity of Jesus’ choice to travel the way of the cross.

Sunday, February 25, 2007

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*

**Sermon #1: "The Cross Reveals God's Foolishness"**

I Corinthians 1:17-30

**Warming Up** (*Partners; 5 minutes*)

- Without using names, share a time when you or someone you know acted very foolish, or very wise. What mental criteria or standards in your mind led you to this judgment?

**Searching the Scripture** (*Group; 10 minutes*)

- *Note to leaders: Assign scriptures in question four to individuals as they arrive so they can be prepared to read each passage quickly to the group.*

Read I Corinthians 1:17-30.

1. What is the message of the cross to those "who are perishing"?
  - ...to those who are "being saved"?
  - What makes the difference?
2. What is it that the "wise man" (probably Gentile philosophers), the "scholar" (probably Jewish teachers of the law), and the "philosophers of this age" (probably the Greek philosophers) cannot understand?  
[Explanations in parentheses from the NIV study Bible]
3. Paul preaches Christ crucified. Why was this message a "stumbling block to the Jews" and "foolishness to Gentiles"?
  - What expectations of God do you think these people had which were contradictory to the cross? What attitudes toward human strength and wisdom kept them from understanding God's agenda?
4. Paul says that God chose a different way in verse 27. Briefly look at possible examples of God's choices by reading the following verses.
  - "foolish things"           Mark 1:6
  - "weak things"            Luke 21:2-3
  - "lowly things"            Luke 2:7
  - "despised things"        Mark 5:18-19

## **Exploring Our Own Journeys** (*Partners; 20-30 minutes*)

1. How and where do you “look” for God? When you look for Him, what do you expect to find? Do you find Him?
2. The world offers a constant menu of human wisdom, in every conceivable arena, from personal relationships to international politics. In what arena are you most likely to trust human wisdom? Are there ways this human wisdom might be contradictory to the ways of God?
3. Have you ever felt foolish socially because of your faith? As a believer, have you ever experienced someone regarding you as foolish because of your belief in the cross of Christ?
4. How is the cross of Christ (His crucifixion, His execution if you will) the “power of God” to you personally? What is this power doing in your life, as one who “is being saved”?
5. About what are you most inclined to boast? Indulge in a little boasting in your sharing right now.....
  - Then read verse 31 again and discuss what Paul meant in his comments to the Corinthians. How can we as Christians take joy in our children or our golf game and still find ourselves affirming Paul’s statement?

## **Sharing with the Group** (*Closing; 10 minutes*)

- Discuss the impact of our opportunity through Christ to have access to the very “wisdom of God.”
- What does this mean for us as individuals and as a body of believers as we seek to live out our faith each day? How might we as Christians be called to be fools for God?
- What are some obvious contradictions between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this current American culture?



## **Personal Meditation: The Scourging**

1. Read Matthew 27:24-26; Mark 15:12-15; John 19:1.
  - What is the setting in each of these scriptures?
  - Who is present in addition to Jesus?
  - What prompts this treatment?

2. Read Isaiah 53:3, 5.
  - How does this Old Testament prophecy mirror the suffering of Jesus?
3. Ponder and pray about the enormity of Roman scourging, done with a “whip made of several strips of leather into which were embedded pieces of bone and lead.” (NIV Study Bible) Often the multiple lashings caused death before a criminal could be crucified. This was a part of “God’s choice” to bring salvation to you. Praise God through your tears that by “His stripes you are healed.”

## **Notes**

Sunday, March 4, 2007

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*

## **Sermon #2: "The Cross Removes Our Punishment"**

Romans 5:6-15, 18-19

### **Warming Up** (*Partners; 5 minutes*)

- Think back to your childhood days. Share a time when you got in trouble and faced some sort of punishment for what you did. If you are comfortable, share the circumstances, and how you felt knowing that you would be punished. Did you ever get out of the punishment?
  - How did reconciliation happen afterwards, or did it?

### **Searching the Scripture** (*Group; 10 minutes*)

#### 1. Read Romans 5:6-11.

- For whom has Christ died, according to Paul?
- For what kind of person might another person "dare to die"?
- How has God demonstrated His love to us?
- From what have we been saved?
- How have we been reconciled with God?
- List the labels Paul uses to describe unreconciled people in the following verses.
  - a. "we were still \_\_\_\_\_" (verse 6)
  - b. "for the \_\_\_\_\_" (verse 6)
  - c. "we were still \_\_\_\_\_" (verse 8)
  - d. "we were God's \_\_\_\_\_" (verse 10)

#### 3. Read Romans 5:18-19.

- What are the consequences of Adam's trespass?
- What are the consequences of Jesus' act of righteousness?

### **Exploring Our Own Journeys** (*Partners; 20-30 minutes*)

1. Being reconciled to God through faith in Jesus means we are no longer "God's enemy." "We have peace with God" says verse one. How have you experienced this peace in your life?

2. The NIV Study Bible explains the phrase “God’s enemies” by saying that “man is the enemy of God, not the reverse.” What does this mean to you in your life and your experience with God? Does your life history in any way demonstrate being an active “enemy” of God? Are there areas where you are still fighting God?
3. Even though we all have made ourselves God’s enemies, at “just the right time” God demonstrated “His own love for us.” Share an experience where God’s love invaded your life at “just the right time.”
4. In this passage, the consequences of choice are extended to all humanity, the choice of Adam to disobey, the choice of Christ Jesus to obey. Share an experience in your spiritual journey where the consequences of your choice to obey/disobey clearly affected the lives of others.
5. What does it mean to you that Christ died for you as a “powerless,” “ungodly” “sinner” and “enemy” of God? How is the cross your crossroads?

### **Sharing With the Group** (*Closing; 10 minutes*)

- Being a “sinner” is an old-fashioned word. Does it still apply today? To understand the cross, is it really necessary to understand the sin in our lives individually? Is there a difference between being able to explain the theology of Romans 5 and the reality of it personally?



### **Personal Meditation: Spittle and Fists**

1. Read Matthew 26:65-68; Mark 14:63-65, 15:16-20; Luke 22:63-65, 23:10-11; John 19:2-3.
  - What is the setting in each of these scriptures?
  - Who is present in addition to Jesus?
  - What prompts this treatment?
2. Read Psalm 22:6-7.
  - How does this Old Testament prophecy mirror the suffering of Jesus?
3. Ponder and pray about the choice of God to subject His own Son to such torment by bullies. Isaiah says “the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.” Allow your heart to be moved by these images of your Savior who “at just the right time” endured this suffering for you.

## Notes

Sunday, March 11, 2007

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*

**Sermon #3: "The Cross Forges Our New Identity"**

Galatians 2:15-21

**Warming Up** (*Partners; 5 minutes*)

- Think of a significant person in your life who is no longer living. How does some quality or value of this person live on in you?

**Searching the Scripture** (*Group; 10 minutes*)

Read Galatians 2:15-21.

1. What is the difference between being a "Jew by birth" and a "Gentile sinner"?
2. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary says that to be justified means "to be declared and considered righteous in God's eyes, to be vindicated of any charge of sin or failure to keep God's holy law." What is the only basis for justification before God according to Paul?
3. Who can be justified by observing the law? (verse 16)
4. Why does Paul say "I no longer live"? Who lives in him?
  - What is the one basis for his whole existence now?
5. What has the Son of God done for Paul? (verse 20b)
  - Why is this grace?
6. Can righteousness be obtained by observing the law?

**Exploring Our Own Journeys** (*Partners; 20-30 minutes*)

1. What are some aspects of your identity you have acquired by birth?
2. If possible, think of a time when you needed to be humanly justified; that is, a time when it was important that some other person declared you "right" in some situation. How did that justification affect your identity?  
(For example, in a sibling argument, a parent might say "Bobby is right," and Bobby might then be reinforced in his choices and values and thus in his emerging identity.)

3. If you had been in Jerusalem and had found yourself in the crowd, would you have watched? Jesus was innocent but was being executed as a criminal.
  - Given your own history of assumptions and judgments, would you have just assumed He deserved what He was getting?
  - How has the vantage point of history softened your view of the death of Jesus?
  - Why are you comfortable being identified today with a 2000 year old criminal as far as humanity is concerned?
4. How does the knowledge that you will face God's judgment affect how you live?
5. How is Christ living in you and giving you a new identity? Read Galatians 5:22. Which of the fruits of the Spirit do you think is displayed in your life in Christ most frequently?
6. Peter helps us understand being crucified with Christ and receiving a new identity when he says "do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ." (1 Peter 4:12-13). How is the life you "now live in Christ," your new identity, marked with the sufferings of Christ?

### **Sharing With the Group** *(Closing; 10 minutes)*

1. Since crucifixion in Paul's time was the chief means of public execution of non-Roman criminals, it is possible to rephrase verse 20 to say "I have been executed with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Does this change the meaning of the verse for you? How? How does question 3 in the partner sharing relate to this question?
2. How do the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:24-25 apply to this whole discussion?



### **Personal Meditation: A Crown of Thorns**

1. Read Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-17; John 19:1-6.
  - What is the setting of each of these scriptures?
  - Who is present in addition to Jesus?
  - What prompts this treatment?

2. Read Isaiah 52:14; Psalm 22:8, 12.
  - How do these Old Testament prophecies mirror the suffering of Jesus?
3. Pray and ponder that Jesus knew he must “suffer many things at the hands of men” long before He entered Jerusalem for this last time. The “whole company of soldiers” used him for sport before He was crucified. Ask this same Jesus to strengthen you today as you live your life “by faith” in Him. Thank Him for His unfathomable love and that by choice He endured such humiliation.

## **Notes**

Sunday, March 18, 2007

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*

**Sermon #4: "The Cross Creates Community"**

Ephesians 2:14-18

**Warming Up** (*Partners; 5 minutes*)

- What aspects of the appearance of a stranger are most likely to cause an initial mental barrier in you towards that person?
  - Possible answers could be age, clothing, accessories (including piercing, tattoos), skin color, hairstyle, facial expressions, observed behaviors such as a certain walk, language, or gestures, etc.
- Give an example of a time when such a mental barrier emerged in you. Did the barrier remain, or was it dissolved through experience?

**Searching the Scripture** (*Group; 10 minutes*)

Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

1. What had been the spiritual condition of Gentiles according to Paul in verses 11-12? Specifically, Paul says the Gentiles were "without \_\_\_\_\_ and without \_\_\_\_\_ in the world." Why was this so?
2. What has brought Gentiles and Jews together? Why is "the blood" specifically stated?
3. How did the cross destroy the hostility between Jew and Gentile? (verses 14-16)
4. What does Paul mean that Jesus "Himself is our peace"?
5. To whom does the cross provide access? By what power?
6. Therefore, all believers, Jew and Gentile, are now members of what? Who is the foundation? Who lives in this "holy temple"? What power enables this intangible "building" to exist?

**Exploring Our Own Journeys** (*Partners; 20-30 minutes*)

1. Paul says the Gentiles were "without hope and without God in the world." Have you ever felt like this in your own spiritual journey?

2. What is the most meaningful reconciliation you have ever witnessed or experienced between two alienated/estranged people or groups? What particular joy do you associate with genuine reconciliation?
3. The world is arguably a more hostile, factionalized, violent place today than at any time in human history, given the technological capacity we have for instant international communication. Briefly share a recent experience you have had when incoming knowledge of local or even world events has built up new barriers within you against a group of people.
  - How does Paul’s statement, “for He Himself is our peace” speak to your heart, and provide direction for you as you process this feeling of hostility? Does it matter to you as a Christian to resolve such feelings?
4. Peter echoes the words of Paul in I Peter 2:9, 10.
 

“But you are a chosen people...Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

  - How have you received mercy through “the blood of Christ”? (Ephesians 2:13)
5. Have you ever felt like a “foreigner or an alien”? Share your experience and what group of people generated such feelings. Was this experience grounded more in fact or emotion?
6. When Paul says we, as believers, are all part of God’s “holy temple,” and together we create this temple, how do you fit into this image? How are you part of “a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit”?

**Sharing With the Group** (*Closing; 10 minutes*)

1. On this historical side of the cross, what is the difference between the fact and the feeling of being “without hope and without God”?
2. Why does this *fact* create an imperative in believers to bring the message of hope to those whose *feelings* are without God? How does Isaiah 49:6b speak to this?



**Personal Meditation: Iron Spikes**

1. Read Matthew 27:32-44; John 20:24-29.
  - What is the setting of each of these scriptures?
  - Who is present in addition to Jesus?
  - What prompts this treatment?

2. Read Isaiah 53:7-8; 49:16; Psalm 22:16.

–How do these Old Testament prophecies mirror the suffering of Jesus?

3. Pray and ponder the enormity of the wounds made by 6 inch spikes, driven into the wrists and feet of our Lord. Consider the effect of lifting the cross beam upward as the nails bear the weight of Christ's body. Remember how often you have sung that His blood was shed for you. Bring to the Lord your tears and your faith, even as Thomas did so long ago.

## **Notes**

Sunday, March 25, 2007

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*

**Sermon #5: "The Cross Defeats the Powers of Evil"**

Colossians 2:6-20

**Warming Up** (*Partners; 5 minutes*)

- Who or what has power over your life? What are the effects of this power on your choices and priorities?

**Searching the Scriptures** (*Group; 10 minutes*)

Read Colossians 2:6-20.

1. In verse eight, what does Paul say can take believers captive?
2. Who is head over every power and authority? (verse 10)
3. How are we dead even though our body lives? (verse 13)  
–How does God make us alive?
4. What has Christ done with the written code? What is the "written code"?
5. What two things has God done at the cross to "powers and authorities"?
6. Where is the only place reality is found? (verse 17)

**Exploring Our Own Journeys** (*Partners; 20-30 minutes*)

1. The imagery of a kingdom and a king with Jesus as Lord is foreign to Americans steeped in independence and democracy. How do you honestly respond to Jesus as your Lord and King, as opposed to your Friend, Helper, Guide, etc?
2. How were you caught up in this cosmic battle between good and evil before you became a Christian?
3. How has that battle affected you as a believer?
4. Share an experience where "hollow and deceptive philosophies" influenced your walk with Christ. How did you come to see that "reality is found in Christ"?

5. Whom do you let “judge you”? Whose influence subtly molds your life by what they think or value? How can such influence be used by Satan to move you into losing “connection with the Head,” with your Lord?

### **Sharing With the Group** (*Closing; 10 minutes*)

1. How can embracing a particular value or cause become more important than the Lord Himself?
  - How can Satan subvert honest intention in such a situation? For example, consider a political activist whose commitment to a particular cause or candidate begins to trump the authority of his Lord. How does the power of the cross refocus and defeat such an encroachment of evil?
2. What deceptive philosophies might entice us to dance to a false reality today, much as the Colossians had been deceived by Gnostics 2000 years ago?
  - How as a body of believers can we continually help one another to see that “reality is found in Christ”?



### **Personal Meditation: The Cross**

1. Read Mark 15:21-32, 37-39; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:16-22.
  - What is the setting of each of these scriptures?
  - Who is present in addition to Jesus?
  - What prompts this treatment?
2. Read Psalm 22:1; 14-18; Isaiah 53:3-4.
  - How do these Old Testament prophecies mirror the suffering of Jesus?
3. Ponder and pray to the Lord whose journey of love was the way of the cross. Consider how lightly we adorn ourselves with such an emblem, and compare such jewelry with the reality of execution. Sing of “the very dying form of one who suffered there” for you. Praise God that at the very place where evil was most manifest in human nature through deliberate torture, that evil was defeated once and for all. Kneel at the foot of this cross, and embrace the life you now live “by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you.”

Palm Sunday, April 1, 2007

*"At the Crossroads: How the Death of Christ Impacts Our Lives Today"*  
**Sermon #6: "The Cross Embodies the Love Choice of God"**  
Mark 10:32-34

**Warming Up** (*Partners; 5 minutes*)

- Once in a while in the course of living, we choose to do something incredibly difficult or unpleasant because of some larger goal. For example, a cancer patient commits to a regime of chemotherapy in the hope of survival. Think of a time when you made such a choice to endure personal hardship. What motivated you?

**Searching the Scripture** (*Group; 10 minutes*)

*Note to leaders: Please assign the scripture passages to individuals as they arrive to expedite the reading.*

Read each of the following passages without discussion, one after another, listening carefully to the nature of the choices portrayed.

- John 10:14-18
- Mark 8:31-33
- Mark 9:31-32
- Mark 10:32-34
- Philippians 2:5-8

1. What is the "good shepherd" willing to do for His sheep?
2. In Mark 8 and 9, what does Jesus *know* about His future?
  - What do the disciples not understand, and cannot accept?
3. According to Mark 10:32, where are Jesus and His disciples going?
4. What four things does Jesus say will happen to Him at the hands of the Gentiles? (Mark 10:34)
5. In Philippians, what is the "very nature" of Christ Jesus?
  - If God is omniscient, what does this imply that Jesus knew about man's capacity to inflict torture and humiliation upon another man?
6. What ultimate obedience did Jesus submit to (8b) by making Himself "nothing"?

### **Exploring Our Own Journeys** (*Partners; 20-30 minutes*)

1. Many voices speak to our heads and hearts from the culture we now live in. How do you recognize and “know” the voice of the Good Shepherd?
2. Peter had in mind “the things of men” and not “of God” when he rebuked Jesus. From the vantage point of hind sight, share a time when your perspective clearly emphasized a human solution and you wanted to dismiss the Divine.
3. Facing our own death or the loss of a loved one is one of the most difficult of tasks for the human psyche. The defense mechanism of denial helps protect us initially from painful reality. Can you think of a time when, like the disciples, in Mark 9: 32, you were “afraid to ask” about news concerning someone’s suffering, illness, or pending death? What did you do? How did you come to face the truth?
4. Has Jesus ever led you into something where you were “astonished” and/or “afraid”? (Mark 10:32) Did you go to this “Jerusalem” with Him?
5. Christians sometimes say “Jesus died for me.” Do you find yourself including His mental suffering through the humiliation of the mocking, the spitting, the flogging as part of what you mean? How do you respond to the images of this aspect of the pre-crucifixion torture?
6. What is the difference to you between the humiliation of Jesus’ ordeal at the hands of those who arrested, “tried,” and executed Him, and Paul’s statement that “He humbled Himself”? (Philippians 2:8) Have you ever chosen to humble yourself? Have you ever suffered public humiliation?

### **Sharing With the Group** (*Closing; 10 minutes*)

- Discuss as a group the question posed in number 6 in the previous section. What is the difference between humiliation and humility? How does each apply to our Lord?
- Ask for volunteers to share how this sermon series and study of the cross have deepened for them the meaning of Paul’s statement in Romans 5 that “at just the right time...Christ died for” each of us.



## **Personal Meditation: The Spear**

1. Read John 19:31-37.

- What is the setting in this scripture?
- Who is present in addition to Jesus?
- What prompts this treatment?

2. Read Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 53:5.

- How do these Old Testament passages mirror the suffering of Jesus?

3. Read John 14:27; 15:13; 16:33.

- Pray as you ponder this final disfiguring of the body of Jesus. What unfathomable love our Savior has for us. "...the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him." His mutilated body has "overcome the world" so that "you may have peace." He gives you His peace, and leaves it with you. Therefore, "do not let your hearts be troubled" any longer. Go in peace.

## **Notes**

Palm Sunday, April 1 – Good Friday, April 6

## A Holy Week Communion in Scripture John 14-17

One of the few real blessings of terminal illness is the opportunity for deep personal communication, sometimes so intimate that one might even use the word communion. All pretense is stripped away before the naked reality of impending death, loss and separation. Many tender declarations of love, many genuine reconciliations occur in the honesty of such a setting.

Scripture provides such a window into the soul of Jesus in John 14-17. These precious words occur in the Upper Room right after the Last Supper. Then Jesus, “knowing all that was going to happen to him,” leaves for the Garden of Gethsemane.

- Read and reread these words during Holy Week. Let the power of them settle down in your soul. Commune with your Savior. Let the Holy Spirit, the very Comforter He promised, italicize and illuminate a daily message to you. In these words is distilled the holy truth of God’s enormous love. Jesus knows “the cup of suffering” He is facing, and He has chosen to do this for you.