Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

When a person is describing the central point of an issue or a problem they might speak about “**the crux of the matter**.” Have you heard that expression before? Crux is the Latin word for cross and those who study the origin of expressions believe that the point on the cross where the horizontal beam meets the vertical pole is what is in view with that expression.

Well, when it comes to Christianity, the crux of the matter really is the crux of the matter – the core or central point of Christianity is the cross. And this is something that the Bible itself is very clear about.

* The Apostle Paul summarized the work of ministry in 1 Cor. 1 by saying, “*We preach Christ* ***crucified***.” And in that same chapter he talked about the “*word of the* ***cross***” and the “***cross*** *of Christ*.”
* In Galatians 5:11 he talks about the “*offense of the* ***cross***,” in Galatians 6 he speaks about believers being “*persecuted for the* ***cross*** *of Christ*,” and in Philippians 3 he calls unbelievers “*enemies of the* ***cross*** *of Christ*.”

So the cross is the core and centre of Christianity.

And let me just say here that when we talk about the cross we are not excluding the resurrection. OK? And this is illustrated by the fact that crosses in Christian churches, like that one, are always empty. The Christ who we worship is not on the cross anymore; He has risen and ascended to heaven! So the message of the cross includes the resurrection.

And today we come to the beginning of the account of the crucifixion. And in terms of our overall approach to this passage, while we will say something about the physical realities of crucifixion, have you noticed how little attention the Gospel authors give to the ***physical*** horrors of crucifixion? I mean, look at v18: “*There they crucified Him*.” You couldn’t say less if you tried! What the Gospel authors focus on is the ***spiritual*** anguish of the Lord Jesus.

* And this comes out most plainly in the cry of Jesus that Matthew and Mark record, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*?”
* But the way that John emphasizes the spiritual anguish of Jesus is by pointing out that the main ‘actor’ in every aspect of the crucifixion is the Father. **Isaiah 53** is a passage of the OT that plainly looked forward to the crucifixion of Jesus. Verse 10 says, “*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief*.” John wants us to see that the Father is crucifying His Son here. And the way that he does this is by pointing out how everything that happened was a fulfillment of Scripture. He states it explicitly in vv24&28 but it is meant to be seen throughout the passage.

So what we will do today is to briefly note five fulfillments of Scripture in these 2 ½ short verses. And it’s fitting that we speak about these things on a Lord’s Supper Sunday, for the broken bread and the poured out wine are signs and seals of Jesus’ work on the cross. And as we consider these things together may the Spirit of the Lord make a deep impression on our souls as we see what Jesus suffered for our sins.

1. As the passage begins, we see that Jesus was handed over to the soldiers for crucifixion and we read, “***So They took Jesus***…” Matthew, Mark, and Luke all say that the soldiers led Him away.
   1. And this is significant because historical accounts of other crucifixions explain that the soldiers typically had to drive the one about to be crucified like a wild animal. And it is not difficult to imagine why. They knew what was coming so they were hardly likely to just walk in front of the soldiers or meekly follow along behind. And so, soldiers had to use prods or whips to force the victim along the way, and that many times the criminal was literally roped up and dragged along, kicking and screaming.

But this was not the case with Jesus. We know that He submitted, *perfectly*, to the will of His Father and it was the father’s will that He be crucified. So there was no need for whips or a rope to drag Him along because He obediently went with the soldiers to the cross.

* 1. And this was a fulfillment of Scripture. **Isaiah 53:7** says this of Jesus, “*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter*.” Apparently, it doesn’t matter whether it is to the shed where a lamb is killed or the back of the truck that takes them to the abattoir, sheep will calmly follow the shepherd all the way in. And Jesus, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, followed His executioners all the way to the cross.

1. And that brings us to the second instance of Scripture fulfilled, which is the first phrase of v17, “***And He went out***…”
   1. And we are told that the place that they went out to was called “*The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha*.” And some think it was called this because the skulls of executed criminals were left there, or that the hill was shaped like a skull, and there is even a tradition which says that this very spot is where Adam was buried.
      * But congregation, John does not give us this location as some sort of holy place that we can find and make a pilgrimage to. Jesus said in ch. 4 that there is no special holy place in the world where we must go to worship God. In fact, Jesus is present wherever two or three are gathered in His name.
      * No, the reason John gave us this location was because His original readers would have known that Golgotha is *outside* the city of Jerusalem. The most important word in this phrase is “**OUT**.” And v20 reinforces this when it says, “*The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city*.”
      * And this too was to fulfill Scripture. You see, God’s OT law for Israel said that nothing unclean was allowed inside the camp when they were journeying to the Promised Land or inside the temple in Jerusalem. But of course, the sin of the people made them all unclean. So as we read earlier, God made it possible for the priest to present a sin offering on behalf of the people so that they could stay inside. And the sin offering required that an animal be killed and its blood poured out “*at the base of the altar*.” But the body of the animal, as the unclean substitute, had to be burned **outside the camp**. And that is what this phrase in our text is about. **Hebrews 13:11** says, “*The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood*.”
        1. **Isaiah 53:6** says, “*The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*.” God took all your lies and lusts, and all your greed and anger, and all your gossip and disobedience and He put it all on Jesus. He became your unclean substitute and He died outside the city so that you can be holy, clean, pure, spotless!
2. But the third phrase in our text that fulfils Scripture is “***Bearing His own cross***.”
   1. The horizontal beam of the cross was called the *patibulum*. The vertical pole was called the *staticulum*. And most commentators agree that what Jesus would have carried was just the *patibulum* because the *staticulum* stayed in the ground at the crucifixion site. And the *patibulum* was around 30-40kgs in weight (small child) and it was placed behind the neck of the condemned criminal and their arms were typically tied to it and they carried it all the way out to the site. But because Jesus had been flogged to the point of having muscle and bone exposed, He was physically unable to make it all the way to Golgotha and the cross was given to another man to carry.
   2. But even His “*bearing His own cross*” was a fulfilment of Scripture. Boys and girls, can you think of a Bible story that pointed forward to this moment? Brothers and Sisters, how about you? In **Genesis 22:6** we read about the time when Abraham was told by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. And A&I headed off to the place God had told A to do this at and we are told that “*Abraham* *took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son*.” So almost 2000 years before the event, Isaac was a picture of Christ as he carried the wood for his own offering himself! And later on, when Isaac asked about the lamb for the burnt offering, Abraham said, “*God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering*.” And that’s exactly what happened, isn’t it. Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God said, Stop, don’t do it! And Abraham saw that there was a ram caught in the hedge and the ram died in Isaac’s place. So as Jesus bore His own cross, He truly was the substitute lamb that the story of Isaac pointed forward to.
3. But the fourth phrase of our text that is a fulfilment of Scripture is: “***They crucified Him***.”
   1. In **v32 of ch. 18**, the Jewish leaders demanded that Pilate condemn Jesus because it was not lawful for them to put anyone to death. But we do know how the Jews executed those guilty of capital crimes. Do you remember what method the Law of God mandated? They were to be **stoned** to death. And I have always thought that meant just throwing stones at someone until they died but I learned this week that this was done using a deep pit that had stones in the bottom. And the lead witness in the case had to push the condemned person down onto the rocks in the pit. And if that did not kill the person, then the other witnesses and the congregation would drop or throw stones at the body until the person was dead.
   2. But Jesus could not die by stoning. Back in **v32 of ch. 12**, Jesus spoke about being “*lifted up*” and John said, “*He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die*.” So Jesus was **lifted up** on a cross. And people of God, even though the focus of Scripture is His spiritual agonies, we cannot ignore the physical agonies that He suffered.
      * Jagged nails were driven into His hands or wrists and as best as we can tell the two feet were turned sideways and a single nail was driven through the ankles.
      * And on the vertical pole of the cross there was a kind of a seat thing called a *sedile*. And the crucified person could push or pull against the nails to perch on the seat but gravity and sweat and blood meant the person eventually sagged until they had to push up again. But that seat meant it usually took a few days for a person to die. And what they typically died from was blood poisoning or asphyxia because they got to a point where they just lacked the strength to prop themselves up anymore.
      * Crucifixion truly was an horrific method of executing people.
   3. But still we must ask the question: Why was Jesus crucified? Why not stoning or drowning? Why did He die *this* way? Well, that question is answered in **Galatians 3:13**. There it says that “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."*”
      * You see, while stoning was the God-mandated method for executing covenant breakers, **Deuteronomy 21** says that the body of a person who had been stoned was to be hung on a tree for “a *hanged man is cursed by God*.” So Jesus was crucified, or hung on a tree, because that made Him cursed by God.
      * And He became cursed by God so that you do not need to be cursed by God. **Romans 6:23** says, “*The wages of sin is death*.” You are a sinner and you deserve death and eternal condemnation in hell. But “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*”
4. And that brings us to the fifth and last phrase of our text that is a fulfilment of Scripture, and it is: “***and with Him two others***.” And we know from the other Gospel authors that these two were guilty criminals.
   1. And this is a fulfilment of Scripture because **Isaiah 53:12** says that in His death Jesus would be “*numbered with the transgressors*.” And ‘transgressor’ is another word for a law-breaker or a criminal. So because Jesus was dying the death of a criminal, and because He had a criminal on either side of Him, He truly was “*numbered with the transgressors*.” The three crosses were the literal fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.
   2. So together with the excruciating physical agonies of His flogging, the crown of thorns on His head, the exertion of carrying His own cross to Golgotha, and the pain of the nails in His hands and feet, the Father was saying to the Son, I see you and I will punish you as an unclean, cursed criminal. And this is why Jesus cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Not even the deepest wound on His back or head or feet or hands hurt more than becoming cursed or forsaken by His Father.

So now we have seen how every aspect of these two and half verses are fulfilments of Scripture. And the question we asked a moment ago – Why was Jesus crucified? – was answered by Jesus back in **John 3:14-15** where He said, “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life*.” Jesus went to the cross as an unclean, cursed criminal so that by believing in Him you might have eternal life. He took the agony and the forsakenness and the wrath of the Father so that you could have eternal life.

But to receive eternal life you must understand that **you** crucified Him.

It says in v18, “*There they crucified Him*.”

* And ‘they’ obviously means the Romans soldiers who nailed Him to the cross.
* And it is also includes Pontius Pilate who handed Jesus over despite declaring Him not guilty, three times.
* And it also includes the Jewish leaders who cried out for Jesus to be crucified because they envied Him and hated Him and rejected Him.
* But it also includes you. The hymn-writer understood this when he wrote:

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?*

*Alas, my treason, Jesus, has undone Thee.*

*'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee: I crucified Thee.*

Do you get this? Do you see that the physical and spiritual agonies that Jesus endured were because of *your* sin? Every lie, every loss of temper, every failure to obey, every act of sexual impurity, every broken road rule required Him to endure another spiritual lash from His Father. So think about that when temptation comes.

But praise God that Jesus was crucified so that we might have eternal life. Amen.