



Prez Release

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With the passing of Easter 2009, the Cross, as a symbol of faith, topic for preaching or theme for theological discussion, usually gets placed on hiatus. Even during the Lenten season, we happily allow the exuberance of the Resurrection to marginalize the agony present in the Cross. It seems like such a downer to talk about self-denial when “resurrection” can be a real boost to our quest to be on the winning side.

Popular culture’s dominating influence captures our attention and interest largely because of its “cool” factor and high visibility to a broad scope of our population, regardless of age. The reality of the Cross doesn’t yield much that can be considered cool, hip, or popular and inevitably gets ignored. At its core, the message of the Cross is focused on the intersection of our will and God’s character, challenging all people to face the limits of human achievement.

The simple fact is that the more we are bombarded by information and experiences that value self at their center, the less likely any person is to acknowledge or even care about the message of the Cross. To the Corinthian world that the Apostle Paul spoke to, the Cross seemed to be utter foolishness. One “market niche” of Paul’s day saw the Cross as a symbol of weakness because “bigger is better” dominated their expectations of successful living. Another market niche saw the Cross as an affront to their religious “preferences” because it simply didn’t fit the “theology of nice” that culture had allowed for symbols of faith. Thomas Merton has said that the Cross is a sign of contradiction that reminds us that Jesus the Christ has exposed, as false gods, the very powers in which humanity take most pride and invest most hope.

To move the Cross beyond a fashion statement or religious accommodation in the nominal Christianity of our day, there will need to be some significant activity. Self-centeredness is not a quality limited to any particular generation, because all people have the capability to squeeze God out of the personal equation for life. In addition, all persons, regardless of the era (generational tribe) you hail from, can jettison God’s eternal challenge to decide where they will place their ultimate allegiance. *The seismic shift that needs to occur in our lives is seeing the clear, but often avoided quality in God’s character: that of humility.* St. Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, hoarded or merchandised. Jesus surprises us on the Cross as He demonstrates humility, when it is least expected.

Theologians have posited their explanations of the Cross and what it means. Creedal lines that separate US and THEM have been with us for centuries. It’s interesting how self-sufficiency sought and even achieved can keep us from grasping the impact that Calvary’s Cross offers. At the risk of being overly simplistic, an old gospel song really captures the essence of my thoughts: *Years I spent in vanity and pride, caring not my Lord was crucified, Knowing not it was for me He died, at Calvary! Mercy there was great and grace was free. Pardon there was multiplied to me. There my burdened soul found liberty...at Calvary.*



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