**LESSON SEVEN - A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**

**Intro:**

The cross is the primary symbol of Christianity. Many people wear it as jewelry, not realizing what death via the cross meant. Images are powerful - more powerful than words. The cross is a symbol which in our day has lost much of its impact because we know so little about what crucifixion actually involved. Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” vividly portrayed what Christ suffered for our forgiveness/reconciliation with God, the cost of grace, the depth of God’s love for us, for the world.

The cross reveals many things:

**A. The Cross as Revelation**: a light shining into the darkness (John 1:4-9)

**1. The Darkness**: 1 John 5:19 tells us the world is in the power of the evil one. This is the situation into which Christ is born.

* The cross speaks of the guilty killing the innocent, the creature killing the Creator, man killing God - the darkest of the darkness. It is nearly incomprehensible that this should happen. For Muslims this is one of their main objections, thus their rejection of Jesus being God, as well as their historical revisionism re: the crucifixion). Read:1 Cor 1:22-25 – foolishness to Gentiles, a stumbling block to Jews.
* The cross, the ultimate price which had to be paid for our redemption, reveals the depths to which humanity has fallen, the wickedness of evil. All of humanity has “gone astray like sheep, every one to his own way, falling short of the glory of God.” (Isa 53:6; Rom 3:10-12) Our thinking is also darkened!
* It reveals the heart of God - compassion, self-sacrifice, a seeking heart, a God reaching out to His creation costly grace.
* It reveals the truth - the need for God's redemptive plan, both in words: as prophet, teacher, sage; and in His deeds: illustrating, demonstrating, bringing the Kingdom to bear in individual lives as well as in the cosmic battle with Satan.

1. **The Light**: (Manger scene) - Into this darkness God shines His light. Jesus is the light of the world (Jn. 3:18-21). In darkness evil doesn't look so bad. If you don't want the flaws in your house to show - the spots on the carpet, the marks on the walls, put in 25 watt bulbs rather than 100w, or, when company comes, light candles instead of turning on the lights.

* Things that used to violate community conscience could not be shown or said on public TV/radio. We have gradually been desensitized so we are no longer appalled by sin.
* Homosexuality - don't want people to actually see people showing affection publicly, or knowing what explicit acts are done (research done by media) Much easier to handle as a theoretical issue.
* Abortion - pro-abortion people don't want abortion techniques described or the products of abortion to be shown. That is why they tried so hard to discredit the "Silent Scream". For the first time in history an abortion could be viewed from the victim's viewpoint.

1. **The cross is evil's response to the light**. Note the Pharisee's response to the light in John 5:39-47. Jesus warns them: Matt. 23:33-38 "You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you ...’), instead of repentance, they determined to get rid of him.

He exposed their motivations: **(discuss in groups)**

Lk. 18:10-14 (publican and Pharisee) - self-righteousness

Matt. 5:20-48 - inadequacy of legalism for righteousness

Matt. 6:1-18, 7:3-5 - hypocrisy

Matt. 6:19-21 - false values (treasure on earth or in heaven?)

Matt. 21:12-13 - distortion **(“My** house shall be a house of prayer, you have turned into a den of robbers”)

Jn. 8:57-59 - His true identity and their response to God.

**Question: What happens when you stand for truth, uncompromising?**

* Sexual purity – archaic
* Homosexuality - homophobic
* Sanctity of life - rage, hostility, profanity.
* Stand against consumerism, justice for the poor - "Trying to make us feel guilty?
* Uniqueness of Jesus - Don't be so bigoted, narrow-minded.

**B. The Cross Predestined** (white clouds, beam of light)

The cross was God's plan from the beginning

* John the Baptist knew it - "Behold ***the Lamb of God*** who takes away the sin of the whole world.” (Jn. 1:29) Jesus' was not a good ministry gone bad. Before his ministry had even begun or drawn opposition, John knew that Jesus was to be a sacrificial lamb.
* The cross was a planned event. It was not God making the best of a bad situation. Eph. 1:4-7 speaks of us having been chosen by God before the foundations of the earth -
* It was not an accident. Jesus said, "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord." (Jn. 10:18) He intentionally set out for Jerusalem knowing He would die there: *“As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem* (Lk.9:51).
* When Jesus heads to Judea to raise Lazarus, even Thomas knows it means death: *"Let us also go that we may die with him"* (Jn. 11:16)
* When Pilate claims to have power over Jesus' life or death, Jesus makes clear he would have no power over him if it had not been given by God, i.e. It was God's plan, will, intention. (Jn. 19:11)

(Infant/crucified hands) - The infant was born to **die,** born to be crucified. It was pre-destined. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were united in purpose.

**C. The Cross as Atonement**

**Atonement** – “to make one” through the cross. We have been made one with God, reconciled to Him (2 Cor 5:17-21; Rom.5:6-8). The cross reveals God's love for us (1 Jn 4:9-10).

**Aspects of atonement**

1. Sacrifice – (Heb. 10:5-18; 13:10-14) Jesus becomes our Sin offering. Remember John's prophetic words of 1:29: Jesus is shown to be the Passover Lamb, the sacrifice, in Matt. 26:1-5, 27-29, as he plans to go to the cross on Passover weekend – the perfect Lamb sacrificed once for all.
2. Propitiation - "to appease the anger of one who is rightfully angry". God *is* really angry at our sin. Jesus bore God's righteous anger on the cross - he appeased God's anger, which could not be satisfied by our justifying ourselves. – we cannot forgive ourselves. The consequence of sin must be born, and Jesus bore it for us. For God to ignore sin would be just as unjust as it would be to punish the innocent. Even as sinful as we are, we can get angry over injustice and sin; how much more God, in his holiness.

Jesus removed the barrier on God's side. (Rom. 3:25-26; 1 John 2:1-2; 4:10). God sent His son to appease *His* anger toward *us*.

1. Reconciliation - Removing the barrier from *our* side. We are reconciled to God (Rom 5:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-19). Our hostility is removed (Eph. 2:16). Do you know people who are angry at God? Feel He is their enemy, out to get them, or that he has treated them unjustly/unfairly? Although that is not reality - we *are* God’s enemies.

* We were God's enemies and were made friends (Col. 1:20-22)
* He removes ***our*** rebellion against Him. He was never hostile toward us. Angry at our sin, yes, but that's different than hostility.

1. Redemption - "to buy back"

Satan owns his captives. Jesus’ body is payment for *our* bodies (in the sense of an exchange). We are held hostage and Jesus takes the place of a hostage, doing so voluntarily. Matt. 20:28: He came to *"give his life as a ransom for many,"* just as something is given in exchange for a hostage when a terrorist has taken captives.

1. Substitutionary atonement (Penal) (Rom. 5:15-17) While the word is not used, this is the concept. Just as Adam is represents all of mankind in the fall, Jesus represents us in redemption. But it is limited atonement, only for those who want it. The rest remain captive.
2. Justification - the impact of the cross from God's viewpoint. It is "just as if we'd never sinned.” When God looks at us now all He sees is Jesus, and the result is that we are no longer under condemnation. We are seen as God's children, Christ's bride.
3. Forgiveness - the impact of the cross on us from our side. We are forgiven, no more guilt, a clean conscience. Leads us to worship and praise, as well as obedience, which we can't do if we feel guilty.

**D. The Cross as Victory** (golden crown)

1. Through his death on the cross, Jesus ushers us into the Kingdom of God. In the book Christ as Victor, Gustaf Aulen says, "All that we have said so far is true, biblical, etc., but misses the simple theme, not directed towards God at all, but towards the devil, and that is simply this: on the cross Jesus beat the devil. Jesus took him on, on his own turf, and beat him fair and square, not as God against creature (that would be unfair advantage), but as perfect man, as God intended him to be, against the devil.”

Some early Christian theology was very visual and graphic:

* Saw the cross as the fishhook (God's trap)
* Christ as the defenseless worm (God's bait for the trap)
* Satan comes and swallows the bait, and a three day struggle in hell ensued
* Jesus emerges victorious with Satan impaled on the cross, tricked into battle and defeated, now on Christ's leash waiting, while yet struggling, for judgment.

1. The cross as Victory is a very important theme:

* The cross as atonement relates to our relationship to God. Christ is victorious over Satan, therefore *we* are free from his tyranny in our lives and engage in ministry to the oppressed. (Jn. 8:32-36; Rom. 6:18; 8:2; Gal. 5:1; Ps. 116:8-9, 16
* We are reigning with Christ in the heavenlies, and God has put all things under Christ's feet (Eph 1:18-2:7), therefore the devil is under OUR feet! Jesus said, when Christ makes you free you are free indeed.
* The cross as victory over Satan gives the basis for "liberation theology," which prominence in the Majority World (Latin America, Africa, Asia) in the 60’s and 70’s.

**Liberation theology**: Luke 4:18-19 is the basis for liberation theology - the positive aspect is to free the oppressed (be it from sickness, poverty, racism, social structures, guilt, fear, etc.) all of which issue from Satan himself. All of our physical symptoms are manifestations of a spiritual reality - our being under Satan's rule, "under his thumb.”

When you look at the cross remember all it reveals: Jesus as the Light overcoming darkness, God’s plan from the foundation of the earth to reconcile us to himself and defeat Satan once and for all! As we approach Christmas, meditate on this picture and all it stands for, and worship.