

## “The Mystery and Meaning of the Cross”

1 Corinthians 1:18–25 • Mark 8:31–37 • Isaiah 55:8–9

### I. Introduction — Permission to Wonder

- Lent invites us to ask the honest question: “**Why did Jesus have to die?**”
- Christians have wrestled with this from the apostles onward (Paul, early church, disciples).
- C. S. Lewis: Christ’s death “somehow puts us right with God... what all Christians are agreed on is that it *does* work.”
- Isaiah 55:8–9 — God’s ways transcend ours.
- Lent is not about mastering a concept but being **mastered by grace**.
- We enter the season with **humble wonder**, not certainty.

### II. Movement 1: The Cross — Foolishness & Wisdom

#### A. Paul’s Message

- To the world, the cross looks like **foolishness** (1 Cor. 1:18).
- A world obsessed with power, success, winning cannot fathom a crucified Savior.

#### B. The Paradox of God’s Wisdom

- Jews sought signs. Greeks sought wisdom. Romans sought power.
- God gives a **crucified Messiah**—a shocking reversal of expectations.

#### C. Illustration: Parent in the MRI

- A mother entering the frightening MRI machine to hold her terrified child.
- Looks irrational—yet every parent understands.
- **Love enters dark places**. This is the cross: God choosing closeness over comfort.

### III. Movement 2: What the Cross *Does*

#### A. The Cross Is the Power of God

- Not domination or force—but **self-giving love**.

#### B. Biblical Images of the Cross (Multiple Lenses)

- Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–19) / Breaking down hostility (Eph. 2:14–16)
- Freedom from sin (Rom. 6:6–7) / Redemption (Gal. 3:13; Titus 2:14)
- Peace (Col. 1:19–20) / Revelation of love (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9–10)

Each image = a **window**; together they form the full **cathedral**.

### **C. Redefining Power**

- Jesus redefines power as **love poured out**.
  - We know this instinctively through sacrificial acts: parenting, nursing, forgiving, serving.
- The cross is not merely remembered—it becomes a **pattern for life**.

## **IV. Movement 3: Invitation to the Hard and Holy Path**

### **A. Jesus' Call**

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me." (Mark 8:34)

### **B. What Taking Up the Cross *Is Not***

- Not seeking pain / Not tolerating abuse / Not glorifying suffering

### **C. What Taking Up the Cross *Is***

- Choosing forgiveness (Col. 3:13) / Choosing generosity
- Choosing service over status (John 13) / Choosing courage over fear (Josh. 1:9)
- Choosing Jesus even when costly

This is the **hard and holy path** Jesus walked first.

## **V. Conclusion — Living the Paradox of the Cross**

- The cross:
  - Rome's tool of death → **God's doorway to life**
  - Humanity's cruelty → **God's mercy**
  - What looked like the end → **Resurrection's beginning**

As we enter Lent:

- We dwell in mystery, not certainty.
- We allow wonder, not explanation, to shape us.
- We trust the God whose wisdom transforms the cross—and us.

**"To us who are being saved, it is the power of God." Amen.**