

When I Survey The Wonderous Cross

This morning we are going to talk about the very center of the Christian faith. I would like to lay out for you what this church is rooted in and really what Christianity, as a faith, as been rooted in. The text that I want to employ to begin with, is a text found in the book of Galatians. It is Galatians 6:14. Paul says, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” Other translations of this read, “But may it never be that I should boast...” I like the Old King James version. “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ Jesus.”

Paul is saying that for him the source and the center of every blessing, of everything that he could enjoy in life, flows out of the cross. There is nothing ultimately good that doesn't come through the cross, he is saying. It is the cross that opens up the heart of God. I can't get into God, I can't get into God's heart and God can't give me anything except through the cross. This is the way I reach into God and God reaches into me. It is through the cross. So, he is saying the very center of Christianity is the cross of Jesus Christ. And you can see how important it is if you just change the sentence into something that Paul would never have said. For example: “God forbid that I should boast except in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ or in the Sermon on the Mount.” And I have heard many, many people say, “This is really the heart of Christianity—the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' wonderful teaching.” There are many people who are not

Christians like Ghandi from India who respected Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, that viewed it as the highest ethical teaching and something that we needed to put into practice in order to have a better world. That is not the center of Christianity. The center is the cross.

What I want to do in order to establish this for you is to pose a few questions that you might have and then to attempt to show you in simple terms how the cross of Christ speaks to or basic questions and concerns. The first question deals with those of us who have experienced emotional or physical pain in the past, some trauma, some tragedy or loss. And when you look back at the particular trauma, tragedy, pain or loss in your life, or in the life of someone else that you care about, you have said, "Where was God when this tragedy happened?" Let me just explain what I mean and then I am going to go on to the second question.

You are a wife who was abused by your husband. A child who was abused by a father or mother, physically, verbally, or perhaps, even sexually. The wounding of life, the blows that we suffer and the question that has come into your mind is "Where was God when this very terrible thing was happening to me? Where was he?" I am going to attempt to answer that.

The second question that many, many people ask is, "How can I change? I have a habit, there is an area of my life that I don't like, how can I change?" Goodness knows, there are a thousand self-improvement books in the marketplace. America is crazy wild about our need to change ourselves. The cross of Christ speaks to that.

The third question is perhaps a little less personal and more global. That is "How can America deal with its current crisis?" It is impossible to look at the United States today

and not see that we are in crisis. I will go through a few statistics with you in just a moment. But in broad strokes, if you look at the educational system, the violence in the streets, the violence in our homes, violence in our schools, the racial conflict, the sense of economic stress that we are facing—how will America cope? What is the answer to the crisis in America?

I am going to attempt to answer each of these three questions by the cross of Christ. The cross that Paul said was everything that he gloried in. But first, let's ask God's presence on this message.

We are tackling one of the most profound questions that any of us could ask of God or each other. It is a question that I have had posed to me over and over again by people who are in the midst of real pain. Often it is a question asked with tears. It is not just theoretical, in any case. The question was "Where was God?" I have had it asked in a number of different contexts. Usually it is "Where was God when I was repeatedly being abused by my husband? Where was he?" "Where was God when I was being abused as a child by my father? By my uncle? By the Boy Scout leader? By my mother's boyfriend?" "Where was God when my child was being abused, or injured, or raped?" "Where was God when I was crying out to him for deliverance from this terrible situation and it just went on and on and on? Where was God?"

And of course the question is loaded with feelings of "Does God care? Did he care? And, perhaps, even more than that is there any meaning in the things that I have gone through? Was it just sort of pointless and meaningless to God, to me, to the world? Did I have to go through all of this? Where was God?"

In tackling this question, what I would like to do is to look at what one writer, John Piper, says is the most important paragraph ever written. Romans 3:21. We are going to be particularly focusing on verses 25 and 26. But let me go back to verse 21. In Romans 3, Paul writes, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Now here are some of the key phrases: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

Here is Paul’s basic argument that everyone in the world pours scorn on the glory of God. It is everyone who has ever lived fails to give the worth to God’s glory that it deserves. We put worth and weight and trust in things that aren’t worthwhile that we should not have put trust in, that are meaningless and that shouldn’t be weighty in our lives. We exalt money, relationships, our jobs and ourselves and sex. And we say, “These kinds of things are going to be number one in our lives, and we diminish the worth that the glory of God deserves. And God weighs in at #10 or #20 in our lives, or nowhere on our list. He says everyone that has ever lived has poured scorn on the worth of the glory of God. There is no difference for all have sinned, everyone, and fallen short of the glory of God.

So what should God do to people who continually heap scorn on his glory? Well, let's look at verse 25. "God presented him [that is Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement [and we will get into the meaning of that] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins unpunished, he did this to demonstrate his justice."

God devised a way, through the cross of Jesus Christ, to give hope to people, to save people who regularly insult him, who pour scorn on his glory, he devised a way to save people. To give hope to people. And two times Paul makes the startling statement, "He did this, this cross of Christ, to demonstrate his justice." Now immediately that should shock us, because what we should expect Paul to say is that he did this, this cross of Christ, he devised this way to demonstrate his mercy.

He says in verse 25, "he did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he left former sins committed beforehand unpunished." That is, the fact that God is patient and long suffering and just doesn't come down on people, it appeared to be a demonstration of mercy. But a demonstration of justice? Sending Jesus to die on the cross a demonstration of justice? What does he mean?

Let's talk heart to heart here for a moment. I believe that underlining the question "Where was God when this terrible tragedy occurred?" is a more fundamental question. That is "Is there any justice in this world?" Does it matter to anyone, but especially God, that I was abused 10 times? Is it all the same? You know, 10 times is the same as 2 times, is the same as 100 times.

So much of our struggle with the pain inflicted by someone else and by the church upon us, another person upon us, our boss, our co-workers, our parents, our ex-spouses—

so much of our struggle with pain is a struggle with justice. Is there any justice? I believe that the modern world has put so much emphasis on the love of God that it has eliminated the justice of God from our understanding and our thinking. As a result, we have no grid, we have no way to handle personal tragedy, because we don't understand that there is justice. And it is God's justice that is the great answer for all of the garbage that people go through in life.

Let me put it this way. Do you realize [so that you understand what it is that you are struggling with when you struggle with tragedy or hurt] do you realize that because you are created in the image of God, you have this in-built, unerasable passion for justice that cries out for the scales to be evened whenever something happens in your life that you perceive is unfair. It is like God designed this computer program and ran it into our memories. A computer program that pulls us toward wanting things to be rightened and the scales to be evened.

Now, it is evident that because we are faulty, because of what the Bible calls the fall, this program doesn't always work right and sometimes we don't see what is just and what is unjust and we read it through our own faulty lens. But there is this passion in us that says, "I have been treated unfairly." And no matter what we do to try to convince ourselves otherwise, this thing rises up in us saying, "I want justice." You can see it in the case of a child. You don't have to tell children when something is fair or unfair. They immediately will tell you that. Right, parents? "It's not fair. My brother or sister got more than me. That is not fair. They get to stay out to a certain hour. They got to stay up last week. You are not treating me fairly." Did any parent not hear that from their child? A child wouldn't be a human being without saying something like that to

you. And, oh, when your child's sense of fairness and justice has been violated, that is creating a wound.

I can remember very distinctly as a child, I was maybe 7 years old, and I was taking a bath. I could hear through the closed bathroom door, my father yelling at my two sisters [my two sisters were older than me and had gotten in a fight]. I was sitting in the bathtub and I could hear my dad yelling at them. Then I could hear them being whacked by my dad. I remember sitting there in the security of that bath water thinking to myself, "Good." I mean life doesn't get any better for a 7 year old. To be in warm bath water and to have your older sisters being disciplined by your father. "Ha! They got theirs!" There is something in children that takes a perverse pleasure at the misfortune of their brothers or sisters, especially at the hands of their parents.

So, here I was happy as a clam. I got out of the bath tub and dried myself off. And I was going inside to smugly check out the wounds of my sisters when my turned around and hit me and said, "There is one for you, too." I can remember just bursting into tears and running into my room saying, "But I didn't do anything." I mean the unfairness of that situation is so plain to me. This is unjust. Why did I get hit? They were the ones messing around. I was sitting innocently in a bath tub.

I want justice. That is in my wiring. And Paul says the cross of Christ is God's demonstration of justice to the world. This is how you know that God is just, you look at that cross.

Well, in what way is the cross of Christ the demonstration of the justice of God? Well, we must go to the phrase before it. Paul says in verse 25, "God presented him as a

sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood, he did this to demonstrate his justice.”

Well, let’s break this down, phrase by phrase.

The cross is a presenting of Jesus Christ as a propitiation. “As a sacrifice of atonement” what does that mean? The word “propitiation” means to avert the wrath of God. By the cross, Jesus Christ took on himself God’s wrath, God’s anger for every person’s scorn that they heap on God’s glory. You see, it is not as if God could just forgive sins with a wave of a hand. There have been repeated assaults, repeated insults done to God. And there has been all of this massive injustice. All the ways that we rip each other off and hurt each other, wounding each other. How is all of that going to be evened up?

Let me put it this way. I want you to picture giant scales that demonstrate perfect justice. On to one side of the scales, we place one little tiny sin, one sin. And so now the scales are out of balance and the scales have to be recalibrated to be brought back into balance. Each time that we add something to this side of the scales, we must recalibrate the scales to bring it back. You say, what does this have to do with the cross of Christ?

Do you understand what he means by propitiation as a demonstration of God’s justice? It means that every single sin, every bit of abuse, every time a wife is struck by her husband, that increased the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. I want you to think about that for a moment. Every time you were hit unfairly as a child, that increased the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. Every time someone is verbally abused, sexually abused, slandered, gossiped about, made fun of, told that they are ugly, that they are stupid, that they are idiots; every time someone is pummeled or beaten or have something stolen from them or are raped; every time someone is stepped on by someone

trying to gain position, every time, every one of those things increased the suffering of the Son of God because the scales continually had to be recalibrated. And each one of those things added to the wrath poured out on the Son of God.

Do you understand this? Can anyone understand this? The profound depth of suffering of the Son of God on the cross? Is it possible that the human mind can wrap our intellects around something like this? I think it is impossible.

I recall that the night that Jesus was betrayed, he knelt down in a garden that was named Gethsemane. The night that Jesus was betrayed and the day before he hung on the cross, Jesus knelt down and he prayed, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” Some years ago I meditated on that phrase over and over and I thought what was that cup, Lord? What was the cup that you wanted to have passed from you? What was it that caused your soul to shrink back, Lord? Have you ever wondered about that?

Well, some people say it was the beating that he thought he would endure. Some people say it was the physical suffering that he was going to have to go through on the cross and the humiliation of all of that. I don’t think it was that. Lots of brave men have faced their imminent death without shrinking at all.

The cup that Jesus was referring to is the same cup mentioned in Revelation 14. It says in Revelation 14:9, “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives the mark on his forehead or on his hand, he too will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured out full strength into the cup of his wrath.’” The cup that Jesus was forced to drink was the cup of the wine of God’s wrath poured full strength, the very last drop. Jesus had to drink into his being every sin that has been committed since the beginning of the world.

Now, you ask “Where was God when I had to go through what I had to go through? Where was he?” Does it matter? Does he know? Does he care? Did he care? Did he know? The way these questions are commonly answered is to say, “Well, God knew what you went through in the past. Sure he knew. He knows everything. He was there.” We perhaps go through an inner healing approach which you picture Jesus being there with you. Or he knows in the sense that he went through something similar. He was rejected. He was humiliated. He lost his friends.

I want to tell you that I believe all of those answers to be inadequate. His omniscience and the fact that he was present spiritually in the room with you, the fact that he went through something similar is not enough. I say not enough! The cross is the demonstration of the justice of God. That means that Jesus Christ in his own body, in his own person, experienced exactly what you went through. Exactly balanced out the scales. He knows the suffering in his own being of a rape victim. In his own being, he knows the suffering of verbal abuse. Infinite. That is why it takes an infinite person to make the atonement. That is why the only one who could have made it is the Son of God. No one could drink a cup like that. Every single blow that men and women have ever suffered increased his horror.

Let’s turn the next question then that the cross answers is this one. “How can I change?” You know, this is almost the national obsession in the United States. There are literally thousands of books in every bookstore in America purporting to assist you to change from being a smart woman who makes foolish choices in picking men who can’t love you because you love too much and they are suffering from the Peter Pan Syndrome of not being able to grow up because they have had their inner dog improperly healed.

You know, the literature on trying to change is huge. And I am making a joke out of it, but this is one of my basic questions, “How do I get rid of bad behavior and break bad habits and come a better person?”

Well, let’s look at Romans 6 and see how the cross deals with this. Paul writes, “What shall we say then? Shall we go of sinning that grace may increase?” I have heard it said and I honestly believe that one of the best ways to tell whether you are expressing the New Testament message of the cross, the gospel of grace, whether it is coming through clear—total, free, full, absolute grace is whether somebody immediately raises the objection, “Well, then, based on what you are saying about Jesus drinking all of this wrath, paying the full price, based on all of what you are saying, are you saying then that we should continue to sin? That it doesn’t matter what I do?”

Do you understand that if you say to someone, “Look, Jesus died for your sins on that cross and all you need to do is to clean up your act. Get rid of major areas of sin in your life, the big ones, and come to him.” No one is going to object and say, “So, what you are saying is that I can go on living as I please and still be a Christian?” As long as the message comes out as a mix of grace and works, then there isn’t anyone on earth that is going to say, “So, you are saying I can just go on sinning.” It is only if the message is pure grace, full free grace, that somebody is going to say, “Hey, wait a minute. Are you suggesting that I can just continue the way I have been and everything is going to be OK?” Again, if you start saying that Christ died for people who never gave God a passing thought. He died for people who are not seekers after God. You know, I always hear about someone who says, “I was really passionate about seeking the truth and I

really wanted the truth and I tried this faith and I tried that. Finally, I came upon Christianity and, oh, Jesus is so wonderful. I found the truth.”

I think, well, God bless them. But if the only people who can become Christians are people who are like fascinated by religion, man, that would have excluded me. Because I had no interest in religion at all and I sure wasn't a seeker after God. And Paul says, “Even for the non-God seekers, people who are ungodly, unrighteous, folks whose life revolves around what is on TV and what is on sale at the mall and how much their salary is going to be in the New Year—even for people like that, Christ died. And if you start saying that, somebody is going to say, “Well, then, what are you saying? That you can just live any way you feel like and still become a Christian?”

Paul says in verse 2, “By no means, we died to sin. How can we still live in it?” In other words, this whole objection to grace, that if you start preaching grace, people are going to misunderstand it, this whole objection rests on this profound misunderstanding. We died to sin when we encountered grace.

Here is the bottom line. When a person meets the grace of God, the grace of God found in the love and acceptance expressed by God through the cross, when a person experiences grace, real grace, “I accept you. I forgive you. I love you, says the Lord to you. When a person is embraced by that grace, a person can not stay the same. You can't receive this grace and stay as you are. Paul says that the idea of meeting real grace and being the same, just going on sinning, is ridiculous. It is unthinkable. It is like grabbing a hot coal and not getting burned.

Let me give you a statistic that might surprise some of you. According to one of the largest surveys on American religion ever taken in this country, 62% of Americans said

that they made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today. And almost 40% of Americans say that they are “born again.” So, somewhere between 40-60% of Americans are claiming to be Christians. Not just church goers, but related to Jesus. They have made a commitment. They have made a decision. They did something. They walked an aisle. They did something. Well, they think they are born again.

As you look around at the United States today, just your daily life here in Columbus, as you watch TV and the news; as you go to different cities and travel; you sit on a plane; as you look at what goes on; as you drive through urban areas of our country, would it be your impression that almost one out of every two people you meet has encountered the grace of God that has changed them so that they have actually died to sin? One out of every two Americans thinks that they have a commitment to Jesus. Ninety percent of Americans believe that they are going to heaven. About 1% of Americans believe that they are going to hell. When you look at this country would say about 90 times more people that you meet are connected to Jesus?

What’s your point, Rich?

My point is real simple. I believe, and I think that you have got to believe when you look at the surveys and the situation here in life, that whatever people are saying that they are doing, they are getting connected and touching something other than the grace of God. Because verse 2, “We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?” is not what we observe, if we are honest with each other, this is not what we observe in 50% of Americans, or even 30% of Americans. And if we are honest with each other, “We died

to sin. How can we live in it any longer?” is not what we observe in this church as we look at ourselves and each other and our behavior.

Somehow, whatever it is that we have attached ourselves to, at least some of us haven't grabbed onto grace that changes us. What is going on with the millions upon millions upon millions of people who made some decision somewhere along the line?

You know what I think? I am not their judge, it is just a private opinion, think what you will. I think that many, many people have heard a list of propositions about Jesus, they have been intellectually explained. Propositions about who Jesus is. They have had a doctrinal presentation of the cross of Christ as the way of salvation and Christ as the sin-bearer. Then someone basically asks them, “Do you agree with this and will you accept Jesus?” And the person said, “Yes, I agree with all that you said in laying out this doctrinal proposition and I do want to go to heaven. I accept Jesus.” And then they were immediately patted on the back and told, “You are now a Christian.”

No miracle of God was worked in their lives. Nothing really happened of any eternal nature. They got assured that something did happen. But you see nothing of verse 2. The definition of a Christian is someone who has encountered the grace of God and in that encounter they died to sin.

Let me put it a different way. I must believe, the evidence from the survey and my own observation of life, forces me to believe that millions upon millions upon millions of people in this country have been given false assurance of salvation. And some of the people are sitting here in this church and some of the people are sitting in other churches. Because whatever happened, you never died.

Let me work this out. Frederick Bonhoffer, who himself died at the hands of the Gestapo in a German prison camp just a couple of days before the end of the war, was hung at the orders of Himmler the head of the Gestapo for preaching against Nazism. Frederick Bonhoffer, a pastor, during the war said, “When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die.” It isn’t possible for a man or a woman to come to the cross, to grace found at the cross, without at one and the same moment dying.

You say, “What does that mean, Rich?”

It means that in one and the same moment as you touch grace, if you are touching real grace, you, your ego, your self-will, that part of you that says “I have a right to rule me”, that self-determination; self-autonomy; that part of you that says that you have a right to control your future and destiny and call all of your own shots; that inner, autonomous, egotistical self dies when you touch grace. In order to become a Christian compare it to driving a car, you must climb into the back seat of the car and let Jesus take the steering wheel. Paul says that it is unthinkable that you would still hold onto the steering wheel and still control your destiny and your future and also think that Jesus is your Savior as well. You haven’t touched grace because you haven’t died.

Who died at that cross? Jesus died. Yes, that is right. But Paul says something else. At that cross, by faith, as you reach up to receive Jesus, you die. Self rule, self will, self determination—you died. My control, my rights, the moment I touch the cross those go. The nail that runs through Jesus’ hands runs through my hands. The spear that ran through Jesus’ side runs through my side.

How is it then that when we meet someone who has no yieldedness to Christ at all, who says “No” repeatedly to Jesus and to Jesus’ rule, who says repeatedly “I will not

bow. I will not serve. I will not give. I will not stop this pattern of sin. I will not do it.” How is that we come along and say to that person, “You are still a Christian?” There is no death of self evident in us. How is that we pat each other on the back and say, “It’s OK.” Why do we hand out so much false assurance in America today and keep somebody from really touching the cross?

Are you saying, Rich, that I have to be perfect? That the only people who are true Christians are the people who are perfect? Listen to what Paul is saying here. He didn’t say that in touching the cross sin died in you. He says that you die to sin. Sin doesn’t die. Man, my sin is alive and well. My flesh is like the Ever-Ready Bunny. I mean it keeps going and going and going. But I died to it. When you are dead, and you believe that about yourself, that you are dead, that when you touched that cross you died, then the power of self-will and self-control and self-rule and self-assertion and my rights—that just loosens over you because you are dead. And so now you are able to make some other decisions about giving, about service, about love, about forgiveness, because this other stuff has no power over you because you died.

Let me explain what I mean with a little illustration and then we are going to go on to our third point. Several years ago I had the unfortunate responsibility of confronting a man who was involved in an adulterous affair. The man was really quite hostile. This wasn’t a person who felt bad about what he had done and just wanted somehow to change, having gotten himself in a bad situation and saying, “Oh, my goodness.” No. This was a guy who basically wanted to hold onto it and justify it. He was quite angry with me when I confronted him with his sin. And you can imagine the awkwardness and

the tension of this conversation. I talked with him and I said, “Look, you have to break this off.”

He said, “Well, I am concerned about this person.”

I said, “Well, that needs to change. That needs to be broken because you are a married man.”

And he said, “What should I do? Pretend that she is dead?”

I said, “No, no she is not dead. But you need to die. However alive this other person still is, however much they still exist, you need to die to that. That means your selfishness and your desire for her needs to die. You die.”

Here is what I am saying: I am saying that Jesus is presented in a faulty way in America today. I believe that. I believe that the way that Jesus is presented is as a self-enrichment program. That if you accept Jesus Christ, your current life, all that you are, will continue only it will get better. And you will be happier and wealthier and better looking and all of that. It will just enrich your life. Jesus will be this wonderful little add-on to your life.

What I am saying is that is not the way that the Bible expresses the radical change that takes place when a person becomes a Christian. Jesus is not an add-on to an existing life. Jesus kills the life that you had. You die when you touch the cross. And then his life is exchanged for your life. And what a blessing that is. Do you want to know how to change? You get a hold of his life because his life is so much better than my rotten life, my angry life, my jealous life, my selfish life, my lustful life. All of that has to be put to death when I touch the cross and I get hold of is divine life.

And so, in changing I need that original change of death and then I need to keep reminding myself that this thing doesn't have any power over me because I died. When I touched that cross, I died.

The last question is, again, perhaps one that you have asked yourself. I certainly hear it being repeated in every editorial page of every newspaper in the country. That is what is going to heal the current crisis in America? It is really becoming impossible to look at America anymore and not be concerned, sometimes to the point of alarm. On almost any measurable standard, we are a nation in crisis. (Statistics:

What is going to heal this country? I want to finish with one simple point and that is human beings apart from coming to the cross cannot produce peace. We can have cease fires in Israel and treaties for what that is worth. We can try to produce cease fires in Bosnia. We can have high level meetings between leaders of various racial groups in Los Angeles. But apart from the cross, we cannot have peace.

See, I believe that the Lord will allow human beings to have a tremendous number of things without coming to the cross. God will allow people to be economically successful without ever touching the cross. God will let people have nice houses. God will allow people to do well in business. God will let people be sports heroes. God will let people's faces be on every magazine in America. God will allow people to make platinum records and drive great cars. Isn't that true? That you don't ever have to come to the cross to make a pile of money or to get a great tan at a tanning salon? You can have so much in

life without ever coming to the cross. God will let that happen even with people who have never said “thank you” in prayer at Thanksgiving time.

But there is one thing that you can never have apart from coming to the cross in your house, in your family, with your kids, in the nation, there is one thing that you can't have any other way than by coming to the cross and that is peace.

Again, Paul writes, “Therefore being justified [therefore being set, made, declared in the right by God] we now have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ.” That means through his death on the cross. There are so many divisions in this country. I can't talk with a racial minority in this country without feeling the upset, the rage. We have racial divisions. We have class divisions. There are divisions over what we are going to do with the economy. There are divisions in our own families. Forget the global, American crisis. We have crises in our own families. Can you honestly say, “In my home I have something that goes beyond a cold war with my spouse?” Or with your kids. Do you have peace?

In many marriages, even here in the church, husbands and wives simply cannot talk with each other about certain subjects without fighting. We never talk about our sex life. We can't talk about money without fighting. We can't talk about in-laws without fighting. We can't talk about your job without fighting. We can't talk about this particular habit without fighting.

And if we plow in even more from the nation to the family down to you, as an individual, many of us as individuals are in crisis. There is this internal battle going on in us. There is anxiety. There is internal frustration. You ask the average person, “What sort of mental attitude do you carry most of the time, through most of the day?” It would

be negative. If you ask the average person, “Could you honestly say that most of the time there is an inner quietness in you, there is a sense of harmony, there is a genuine peace in your heart most of the time?” Most of us would have to say, “Absolutely not.”

Where are we going to find healing for this country? It is not going to come from educational task forces, however valuable those are. It is not going to come from a new government commission designed to pare back government. It is not going to come by spending more money so that we can find out more ways to save money. It is not going to come from building boot camps for prisoners. It is going to come only as people touch the cross.

You see the cross deals with the ultimate problem. The ultimate problem is inside of you, inside of you. And it is inside of me. And until where we see where the ultimate problem is, we will never be well as a country.

Recently, I had the opportunity to talk with a marriage counselor. He said, “One of the most difficult things, Rich, in doing marital counseling is to attempt to create inside human beings some level of personal humility.” As people, husband and wife, come in and there is so much “self” being held onto, so much of “my rights” and “I have a legitimate gripe with this other person” that they simply cannot see, will not see, their own sins.

Only when you stare face to face with Jesus hanging on the cross, only when God says, “I did this for you.” Maybe one by one, folks would kneel. One by one in places like this and say, “My God, I never realized how selfish I really am. And I never realized how much grief I give to other people. And I never realized how difficult I am sometimes to live with. How critical I am. How cynical I am. How much garbage flows

out of my mouth. How wounding some of my words are. How I sound when I am angry.” If it took nails to be pounded through the hands of Jesus and nails to be driven through his feet and a spear to be driven up into his side so that his heart burst and poured out in order to save the likes of someone me, then I must be a pretty bad person. Whatever else somebody has done to me or with me, past, present or future, I must be a pretty awful person to have to have that done. That is the thing that I have never owned.

God is going to heal the crisis in America when one by one people kneel and look at the cross, seeing themselves in light of that cross and then say, “God, only this, only this bloody death can make peace with you. This is where I need to start. If indeed I am in your hands, inescapably in your hands whether I realize it or not, then I have to first of all be at peace with you.”

We are going to pray about this with each one of you right now...why don't you stand?