

Shepherd's Staff

April 2025

We gather to worship, we go to serve our Lord.

"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth!"

Parkersburg Christian Reformed Church

Sunday Worship 9:30 a.m. ~ Church School 10:45 a.m



Tree of Shame The Horror and Honor of Good Friday

Source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/tree-of-shame>

Author: David Mathis

Even death on a cross.

The apostle dares to add this obscenity as the low point of his Lord's self-humbling. Jesus "humbled himself," Paul says, "by becoming obedient to the point of death, ***even death on a cross***" (Philippians 2:8).

Today, with crosses on our steeples, and around our necks, we scarcely perceive the original scandal of such a claim. But to any new hearer in the first century, Jew or Greek, Paul's words were almost unimaginable. ***Crucified?***

We grimace today at the thought of nails being driven through human hands and feet. We squirm at a crown of thorns pressed into the brow, piercing the skin, sending blood streaming down the face. And once these violent acts had torn flesh and bone, the pain of crucifixion had only begun. Hours later, many bled out; others died of asphyxiation, eventually too decimated to even breathe. This was not just death, but ***torture unto death***. It was nauseatingly gruesome.

But not only was it calculated to amplify and prolong physical pain; it was designed, almost psychotically, or diabolically, to utterly shame the victim. The horror of the cross was not only that it was done, but that it was done ***to be seen***. It was not only literally excruciating but humiliating in the extreme.

Some of us might find the tune of "The Old Rugged Cross" too light for the weight of Good Friday, but the second line of George Bennard's 1913 lyrics captures well the significance of the cross in the ancient world: "the emblem of suffering ***and shame***."

"The horror of the cross was not only that it was done, but that it was done to be seen."

Device for Disgrace

In his book, *Crucifixion*, Martin Hengel produces examples of “the negative attitude towards crucifixion universal in antiquity.” In short, far more than just *negative*, the whole spectacle of “the infamous stake” or “the tree of shame” was so offensive, so vile, as to be obscene in polite conversation. Hengel observes “the use of *crux* (cross) as a vulgar taunt among the lower classes.” The mannerly did not stoop to such a ghastly subject, whether with tongue or even pen, which accounts for “the deep aversion from the cruelest of penalties in the literary world.” Few ancient writers dared to provide anywhere near the crucifixion details we find in the four Gospels.

In the century prior to Christ, Cicero (106–43 BC) called crucifixion “that most cruel *and disgusting* penalty.” The historian Josephus (ca. AD 37–100) referred to it as “the most *wretched* of deaths.” Celsus, a second-century opponent of early Christianity, asked rhetorically about a crucified Christ, “What drunken old woman, telling stories to lull a small child to sleep, would not be *ashamed* of muttering such preposterous things?” Not only was a crucified Messiah preposterous. It was shameful.

In first-century Palestine, Jesus’s contemporaries were haunted by the regular spectacle of crosses — and their manifest pain and shame — and, added to that ignominy, they knew of God’s own curse, in Scripture, of anyone hanged on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Is it any wonder, then, that Paul would speak of *a crucified Messiah* as utter folly, sheer madness, among unbelievers in his day (1 Corinthians 1:18)? The honor of *Messiah* and the disgrace of crucifixion made the idea nonsensical and disgusting, contradictory and offensive, preposterous and shameful.

And it’s the *public shame* of the cross — rather than the *pain* we might be prone to think of first — that Hebrews mentions at the climax of his rehearsing of the faithful: “For the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, *despising the shame*” (Hebrews 12:2).

Enduring the Cross

This crushing shame of crucifixion offers a vantage on Good Friday that few today emphasize. Theologians often have spoken of Christ’s *active obedience* in life and *passive obedience* in death. We might find some help in this distinction, but passivity is not the emphasis in Hebrews 12:2.

The image in Hebrews 12 is strikingly active — unnervingly so. We might even call it athletic: a race to be run, surrounded with onlookers, and a prize to be claimed at the end. Jesus’s *enduring the cross* in verse 2 parallels *enduring the race* in verse 1, where to finish is irreducibly to achieve.

Which we see in Jesus “despising the shame” at Calvary. As David deSilva comments, to *despise* the towering, paralyzing shame of the cross “entails more than simply enduring the experience of disgrace rather than shrinking from it.” Rather, when Jesus *despised* the shame of the cross, he scorned it and determined to overcome it. He confronted it. He looked the looming shame in the eye, and disregarded what would have been the final barrier for other men.

But simply knowing himself innocent would not be enough against the extreme suffering and shame of the cross. Endurance to the finish demanded more. Hebrews, memorably, tells us he endured “for the joy set before him.” But specifically, what joy could that have been? What reward could have been powerful enough to pull him forward, to finish *this race*, with the very emblem of suffering and shame standing in the way?

What foretaste of joy, or joys, could endure *the cross*?

Pleased to Be Crushed

The Gospel of John, written by Jesus’s closest associate, gives us the best glimpse into his mind and heart as he readied himself for the cross. Two particular sections, among others, speak to the substance and shades of his joy as he owned and embraced the cross in the hours leading up to his sacrifice.

The first section is John 12:27-33, sometime after Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Previously, Jesus had said “his hour” had not yet come (John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20). Now he owns that it has:

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” (John 12:27-28)

Whatever we uncover of Jesus’s joy, it will not be trouble-free. Three times in these climactic chapters, we read of his being **troubled** (John 11:33, 12:27, 13:21). But the presence of trouble does not mean the absence of joy. In fact, the reality of such trouble demonstrates the depth and power of his joy, to move into and through the trouble, rather than flee.

Here we find a first source of his joy: the glory of his Father. When Jesus owns the arrival of his hour, this is the first motivation he vocalizes. He had lived to his Father’s glory, not his own (John 8:50), and now, as the cross fast approaches, he prays first for this, and receives the affirmation of an immediate answer from heaven: “I have glorified it [in your life], and I will glorify it again [in and through the cross].”

“The tree of shame, in time, would shame the foe.”

Next comes a second joy: what the cross will achieve over the ancient foe. “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31). Satan, whom Paul would call “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), would be decisively unseated as “ruler of this world,” and Jesus would experience the joy of unseating him, and being his Father’s instrument to “disarm the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Colossians 2:15). The tree of shame, in time, would shame the foe.

Jesus then mentions a third joy: the saving of his people. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). He would be **lifted up** from the earth — first in being lifted up to the cross, as John immediately adds (John 12:33). Make no mistake, in the “joy set before him” was the joy of love. He had come to save (John 12:47), and on Thursday night, he would wash his disciples’ feet to show them the love that, in part, sent him to the cross: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

‘My Joy in Them’

The second passage — Jesus’s high-priestly prayer in John 17, on the very night when he gave himself into custody — echoes two of the joys already introduced, and adds one further “joy set before him” that brings us back to Hebrews 12.

First, Jesus prays explicitly about sharing **his own joy**, and that (again) as an expression of his love for disciples: “These things I speak in the world, that they may have **my joy** fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). Jesus’s joy — deep enough, thick enough, rich enough to carry him to and through the cross — will not only be his, but he will put it in his people, through both his words and sacrificial work: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Second, Jesus also prays in John 17 in anticipation of his Father’s glory. He recalls that his life has been devoted to his Father’s glory, to making known his name (John 17:4, 6, 26). But now, in the consecration of prayer, and on his final evening before suffering and shame, he prays, third, for his own exaltation:

Father, the hour has come; **glorify your Son** that the Son may glorify you. . . . Now, Father, **glorify me** in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. (John 17:1, 5; see also verse 24)

Misunderstand the utter holiness of Christ, and of this moment, and we will misunderstand this culminating joy: returning to his Father, and taking his seat, with his work accomplished, on the throne of the universe. The joy of being enthroned in heaven — glorified — at the right hand of his Father, will not come any other way than through, and because of, the cross. And his exaltation and enthronement will mean not only personal honor but personal nearness. “At the right hand” is the seat of both honor and proximity to his Father. He wanted not only to have the throne but again to have his Father.

This coming exaltation, and proximity, is the particular joy, among others, that Hebrews 12:2 points to: “For the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is **seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**”

Foretaste of Glory — and Joy

We return, then, to the honor that overcame the “tree of shame.” Good Friday tells us of the cosmic war between honor and shame. At the cross, that obscene emblem of shame,

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

Good Friday is the great reversal. The utter humiliation and imponderable disgrace would have kept lesser souls from **choosing** Calvary. But Jesus willed it, for joy. Even as horrible as it was, it pleased him. Knowing his innocence, he anticipated the joy of glorifying his Father, and defeating Satan, and rescuing his people in love, and these **joys set before him** came together in his victorious return to his Father’s side, now as the exalted God-man.

As Isaiah had prophesied seven centuries before, “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11). In the agony and ignominy of Good Friday, he saw. He saw the joy set before him, and began to taste it, and he was satisfied enough to endure.

Even death on a cross.





4/4 Kevin Meester
4/5 Shelly Meester
4/8 Mary Johnson
4/10 Michael Allspach
4/22 Paul Bruns



4/30 Rollyn & Kathy DeGroot



Reminder: If you have anything you'd like included in the Shepherd's Staff, please try to have it to Wendy Armstrong by the 20th of the month. The goal is to have the newsletter in your mailboxes on the last Sunday of the month.

Empty Tomb Rolls



Servings: 8 rolls

Prep Time: 10min

Cook Time: 15 min

Total Time: 25 min

Ingredients

- 1 8 ounce or 12 ounce package refrigerated crescent rolls (the bigger size makes it a little easier to wrap around the marshmallow)
- 1/4 cup [sugar](#)
- 1 tablespoon [ground cinnamon](#)
- 8 large marshmallows
- 1/4 cup [butter](#), melted

Instructions

1. Separate rolls into eight triangles. Combine sugar and cinnamon. Dip each marshmallow into butter, roll in cinnamon-sugar and place on a triangle. Pinch dough around marshmallow, sealing all edges. Make sure to seal well or all the marshmallow will escape.
2. Dip tops of dough into remaining butter and cinnamon-sugar. Place with sugar side up in greased muffin cups. It helps to use jumbo muffin tins so that the juice doesn't overflow.
3. Bake at 375 degrees for 10 to 15 minutes or until rolls are golden brown. Allow to cool slightly then eat warm.



WORD SEARCH

S	C	F	T	P	R	E	N	K	A	L	L	E	R	B	M	U	R	APRIL
R	B	M	A	L	Y	M	I	P	A	A	B	K	N	T	N	A	F	APRIL FOOLS
E	P	U	P	F	L	S	A	R	P	I	D	R	I	F	S	Y	I	BIRDS
W	E	N	N	E	R	M	E	A	R	T	H	D	A	Y	T	K	S	BLOOM
O	D	P	T	N	R	C	E	D	I	R	V	X	R	S	A	N	B	BUNNY
H	G	L	R	R	Y	S	S	I	L	I	R	P	A	E	W	M	A	CHICKS
S	W	F	I	C	T	P	B	D	F	R	E	H	F	K	F	L	P	EARTH DAY
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