**LOGO FOR LOSERS:**

In 1971, a college professor who also moonlighted as a sporting goods salesman was in need of a logo. He happened to meet a graphic design student where he taught looking for some extra money. So he asked the young student if she would do some freelance work on coming up with a new logo for his company.

That logo that was created in less than a total of 18 hours It cost Phil Knight the modern equivalent of about $200 to pay Carolyn Davidson for her freelance work. Now the Nike swoosh is the primary symbol of a company that is worth billions. And today the swoosh dons the chests and feet of the masses around the world.

The company’s name, Nike, is of course taken from the greek goddess of victory. It is a brand that is meant to embody strength and domination. Only the most elite athletes are approached to wear their clothing and use their equipment. But as a result those who wish to aspire to the same greatness also follow the likes of LeBron and Serena.

The masses want to robe themselves in this kind of victory and uses sport:

* The weekend warrior wanting to find purpose outside the cubicle
* As well as the kid at the community center who works for a path out of the neighborhood

Christianity has a symbol or logo of sorts. But in stark contrast, this symbol is synonymous with loss. It is also widely adorned. It too summarizes the core idea of what it symbolizes. It too is a symbol for victory but ironically represents the greatest possible loss.

It is the modern equivalent of wearing a noose or an electric chair. Like the old hymn states, the cross is an emblem of suffering and shame. The swoosh of victory seems also casts the shadow of death. The cross is essentially a logo of loss.

**LOGO OF LOSS: Why the Cross of Christ is our Victory Symbol**

The cross embodies both the essence of our faith but also its greatest paradox. God gives the greatest victory to us by his greatest loss.

And yet it as ugly and shameful as it may be it is also the the logo for losers than gives us the greatest sense of beauty and victory.

Today we are going to go to the cross of Christ to understand the essence of what it means for us that Jesus was “crucified, died, and was buried.” For in so doing we will see the central ugliness of who we are as human beings and the central beauty of God’s loving justice.

We’re going to first read from passages in John 19. I invite you to read along as I do in your own bible. If you don’t own one then please go to the back corner where you can take one for free.

Let’s begin in John 19 verse 1.

**John 19:1-3**

**Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. 2 The soldiers also twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and clothed him in a purple robe. 3 And they kept coming up to him and saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and were slapping his face.**

**John 19:14-18**

**14 It was the preparation day for the Passover, and it was about noon. Then [Pilate] told the Jews, “Here is your king!”**

**15 They shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”**

**Pilate said to them, “Should I crucify your king?”**

**“We have no king but Caesar!” the chief priests answered.**

**16 Then he handed him over to be crucified.**

**Then they took Jesus away. 17 Carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called Place of the Skull, which in Aramaic is called *Golgotha*. 18 There they crucified him and two others with him, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle.**

**John 19:28-34**

**28 After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said, “I’m thirsty.” 29 A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it up to his mouth.**

**30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.**

**31 Since it was the preparation day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a special day). They requested that Pilate have the men’s legs broken and that their bodies be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other one who had been crucified with him. 33 When they came to Jesus, they did not break his legs since they saw that he was already dead. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.**

**John 19:38-41**

**38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus—but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus’s body. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and took his body away. 39 Nicodemus(who had previously come to him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. 40 They took Jesus’ body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the fragrant spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. 41 There was a garden in the place where he was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it.**

This is God’s word.

The crucifixion accounts in each of the gospels are brutal, physical, and emotional depictions of the suffering of our savior. It has been depicted in art over the years in paintings and even in film. Many of you may remember when Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” came out in theaters nearly 15 years ago. It was very successful at the box office and yet no one wanted to see the movie again. It was absolutely gruesome.

Following that movie it was clear that no one- Christians and non-Christians alike… no one likes a bloody Jesus. One of the most historically agreed upon fact about Jesus was that he was crucified around AD 30. And that fact is also the source of the most disagreement when people try to explain why. But we need to see the crucifixion for what it was because...

1. **The cross is offensive… but our sin is even more offensive to God.**

The cross has always bewildered people. The Jews were offended by it. Jesus’ most frequent description of himself was ‘Son of Man’. This was an allusion to the prophet Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7 where he see this powerful one descending from heaven with authority and glory to establish an earthly kingdom. For Jesus to claim he was that Son of Man and then wind up dead on a cross was inconceivable to most Jews. The cross offended the Jews because God’s kingdom and doesn’t begin by losing your Messiah on a cross.

The Romans were offended at the notion that the central figure of a religion would be subjected to a criminal torture device. Romans were essentially offended by the cross because Jesus died, not as a hero, but like a criminal.

The Romans made crucifixion famous. And they did not hesitate to implement crucifixion to keep those whom they conquered under their subjection. It has been argued that crucifixion is the most extreme kind of execution because it can prolong the torture and torment of its victim for days.

And crucifixion was not just about capital punishment. It was meant to completely torture and totally humiliate its subject. It was public. Victims would be nailed, completely naked to their cross in a location plainly visible to others. Their shame, their exposure, and their torment would be put on full display. It was not uncommon for those crucified to still be alive and in agony for 2-4 days until they died.

Jesus experienced this kind of death. And he experienced all this after he had already been beaten, slapped, flogged, spit upon, and forced to carry his own cross to its location.

But why all the blood? Why all the gore? Why the torment?

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus:

**ISAIAH 53:5**

**5 But he was pierced because of our rebellion,**

**crushed because of our iniquities;**

**punishment for our peace was on him,**

**and we are healed by his wounds.**

**1 Peter 2:24**

**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.**

As you imagine the ugliness of Jesus upon the cross you are getting a glimpse into the terrifying and destructive effect of your sin. Our sin is an absolute offense to God. And Jesus died on the cross for our sins. The entirety of scripture points to the hideous, insidious, destructive nature of sin. It separates us from God. It hides God’s face from us. It mars the way we view God and the way we view other people. It turns the good creation God made into a broken mess. Not only this but we also actively reject God and rebel against him in so many ways.

You may have a picture of Jesus on the cross representing a weak God. One who is loving but not powerful enough to be just. Or you may want to remove Jesus from the cross so you can preserve God as just but without succumbing to a form of faulty love.

God is both loving and just. And neither of those things are points of weakness. These qualities are both God’s defining strength. He is loving enough to want to provide a covering for your sin. But he is also holy and just and must penalize it.

What we see on the cross is the utter seriousness of God’s love and justice. Atonement is the word used for covering sin. Jesus is acting as our substitute. We should be on that cross. But he has stepped in our place. He takes on God’s full wrath. He absorbs the blow that we should have taken. Through Christ’s death and seeming loss he triumphs over all evil.

It is a bloody mess. And it had to be. He was bearing the fullness of penalty for our sin. Don’t look away. Behold the man upon the cross. Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

**2. We don’t want to look at Jesus exposed on the cross… because we don’t want sin and selfishness exposed in us.**

It may or may not surprise you that there are some people that don’t believe Jesus actually died on the cross. In what is called the Swoon Theory, different ideas are concocted to explain away how Jesus might have resurrected later apart from the miracle of coming back from the dead. Again, despite the fact that Jesus’ death is one of the most agreed upon fact about Jesus, detractors still try to explain how Christ’s body was somehow replaced with a look-alike or that he just played possum until later.

Ultimately the effort to cling to this theory is also an attempt to cling to one or both of two false ideas. I don’t need Jesus, I’m not that bad. Or I don’t need Jesus, God isn’t that mad.

That’s what we see happening in the text too.

The Roman centurions in their irreligion were too distracted during the crucifixion rolling dice for Jesus’ Nike pullover.

**John 19:23-24a**

**When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, a part for each soldier. They also took the tunic, which was seamless, women in one piece from the top. SO they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it, to see who gets it.”**

They were too distracted in that moment to notice what was happening. They were just doing their job, as horrible as it was and trying to get all the fringe benefits they could. They don’t see their sin. They’re sinfully coveting Jesus’ stuff at the foot of the cross instead of longing for the salvation that is found there.

But during this whole debacle the religious leaders are clinging to their own distractions.

**John 19:31**

**Since it was the preparation day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for the Sabbath was a special day). They requested Pilate have the men’s legs broken and that their bodies be taken away.**

These religious leaders made a direct connection between the roman crucifixion and an obscure command in Deuteronomy 21.

**Deuteronomy 21:22-24**

**If anyone is found guilty of an offense deserving the death penalty and is executed, and you hang his body on a tree, you are not to leave his corpse on the tree overnight but are to bury him that day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not defile the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.**

The Jews directly correlated crucifixion with hanging on a tree. And in their religious zeal they were wanting to preserve their view of God by sticking to the rules. The great irony is that they crucified an innocent man. Which also means they disobeyed Deut. 5:17 which says: Do not murder.

Jesus’ death, that mind you they were partially responsible for pursuing, is now an inconvenience to them. Their religion is actually attempting to move Jesus out of their way so they can get on with their festivities.

My guess is that most of you don’t ascribe to the swoon theory. And you probably don’t think you’re much like the centurions or religious leaders.

But a very valid question we all need to ask ourselves is whether we’re clinging to something besides our savior on the cross? What are you really consuming? What are you really worshiping?

Because Jesus’ death is also exposing those sins of trying to avoid him on the cross as well.

Are you a consuming Christian? Or are you a consumer who is not a Christian at all?

* Are you showing up here just because you want to get filled up?
* Are you using serving at this church or in some ministry as some sort of release valve for your self-centeredness?
* Are you wasting your time, your money, and your mental energy on frivolous things? Giving up sleep so you can binge Netflix. Throwing away your money on Fortnite, newer cars, better vacays, and nicer digs.

Or are we clinging to our religiosity?

* Are you so wrapped up in your routines of righteousness that you forsake brokenness around you? You pray all the time and read the bible every day. But are you missing out on an actual relationship with Jesus?
* Are you a belligerent religious person at your work or in your home? Resting on your good deeds and belittling others for their lack of them.
* Or are you thinking that your good will somehow outweigh the bad in your life and God has to just accept you at no cost to you or himself?

These questions (LISTEN GUYS), these questions we all need to ask ourselves. Because God forbid we walk away from a crucified Jesus just to get right back into our cars today and right back to our consumerism and fake religiosity.

Don’t miss the miraculous grace of seeing Jesus and the fullness of your sin exposed on the cross! Don’t be like the centurions with only a bag full of new clothes and receipts but miss Jesus. And don’t be like the religious leaders who walk away to another bible study or opportunity to serve someone but miss Jesus.

If we’re being honest, we have a problem with a bloody Jesus for the same reasons we don’t have a problem with our own sin. We just want to keep our relationship with Jesus casual. We want the benefits of Jesus’ cross without having to carry one ourselves.

But what we hear from Jesus on the cross are things like

**Luke 23:34**

**Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**

**Matthew 27:46**

**"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"**

I want you to hear Jesus’ desire for your forgiveness while also hearing the absolute torment he endured so you can get it.

Whether by your religion or your rebellion we must admit that we all want to avoid a crucified savior. But we know deep down inside that it was our sin that put him there. He absorbed our sin upon the cross.

If you see no beauty in the cross and only and opportunity to make excuses or dismiss Jesus you’re missing the point entirely.

But if you see Jesus for who is really is and what he’s really saying about your sin as he absorbs God’s full wrath for your it on the cross, you will know peace, humility, and boldness in a way you can find nowhere else. And then...

**3. Through the cross the emblem of shame becomes our victory symbol.**

You see it is with this kind of peace, humility, and boldness that Joseph of Arimithea and Nicodemus is able to walk into Pilate’s presence and ask for Jesus’ body.

**John 19:38**

**After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus- but secretly because of his fear of the Jews- asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus’ body.**

Nike has become so synonymous with victory and success that it only chooses to benefit itself as a company when they extend an endorsement deal to athletes or when they pay universities or professional leagues for the rights to make their apparel.

Nike is, as a business, a self-serving company. They extend contracts to people that help preserve their goodness. They also end contracts with those who make them look bad. Like many other companies, they try to bury ugly stories about the athletes they’re associated with as quickly as possible so they preserve their identity and brand.

But that’s not what we find with Joseph and Nicodemus. We know little about Nicodemus and even less about Joseph. But what we do know is that they followed Jesus enough to be the only ones to step forward and claim Jesus so they could bury him in a new tomb in a garden.

And it points me to believe that Nicodemus finally understood about what it meant to be born again.

In the end we know that Nike can’t give the kind of victory we’re all really looking for. Just look at Zion Williamson.

But all kidding aside Christ took all of your sin upon himself so that he could give all of himself to you. What a great exchange!

And he offers forgiveness. Through faith in him he eliminates the penalty and debt you have to pay God because of your sin. But through Jesus you get access to God the Father. Christian, do you believe that? Non-Christian, will you accept that?

See the man upon the cross. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Does he take away yours?