

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

I hope that members of the Church will carry the message of Christ's Atonement and its blessings deeply within their heart and share that message with others.



GRAY DAY GOIGOTHA, © BY J. KIRK RICHARDS

By Elder
Gregory A. Schwitzer
Of the Seventy



All of us have passed by churches that have a cross on their steeples or cupolas, and we've all seen people wearing a necklace with a cross, indicating they are Christian or a member of a certain Christian denomination. Some of our new members may even continue to wear a cross, feeling that it connects them with their past or other religious traditions.

We may wonder why we Latter-day Saints don't place a cross on our churches or wear a cross to show that we are Christians, thereby making it easier for others to identify in whom we believe. Is the cross important to our faith?

The answer is an unequivocal yes! The Redeemer's suffering on the cross is vitally important to us and is an inseparable part of the Atonement, through which He suffered and died for our sins and thereby provided us with a clear path to salvation and exaltation. The Savior was clear when He stated that in following Him we should take upon ourselves a cross—not the Roman cross that was the instrument of death but our *own cross*, whereby we present a sacrifice to the Lord of our own heart to be obedient to His commandments.

“And he that taketh not his cross,

and followeth after me,” Jesus said, “is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul indicated that the “preaching of the cross . . . is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). We understand through this scripture that the meaning of the cross is much deeper than just a symbol or outward sign, especially for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is the preaching of what happened on the cross that is more important than the symbol of the cross.

As I Have Been Lifted Up

When the Lord appeared to the Nephites just a short time after His death and Resurrection, He clearly indicated that the cross He expected them to take upon themselves was that of denying themselves the sins of the world: “For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, *wherein ye will take up your cross*, than that ye should be cast into hell” (3 Nephi 12:30; emphasis added).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1926–2004) said:

“The Church would grow much faster now, numerically and spiritually, if it were not for the wickedness of the world (see 1 Nephi 14:12). It



HE IS RISEN, BY DEL PARSON

A DECLARATION OF THE LIVING CHRIST

I do not wish to give offense to any of my Christian colleagues who use the cross on the steeples of their cathedrals and at the altars of their chapels, who wear it on their vestments, and imprint it on their books and other literature. But for us, the cross is the symbol of the dying Christ, while our message is a declaration of the Living Christ. . . .

“ . . . The lives of our people must become the most meaningful expression of our faith and, in fact, therefore, the symbol of our worship.”

President Gordon B. Hinkley (1910–2008), “The Symbol of Our Faith,” *Liahona and Ensign*, April 2005, 3.

would also grow much faster if you and I were better by taking up the Christian cross daily (see Luke 9:23). Part of taking up the cross is denying ourselves the lusts and appetites of the flesh. . . .

“Thus, the *daily* taking up of the cross means *daily* denying ourselves the appetites of the flesh.”¹

What happened on the cross and in the Garden of Gethsemane is the essence of our faith in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. The Savior taught this clearly to the Nephites:

“And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

“And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

“And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world” (3 Nephi 27:14–16).

The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ includes what happened on the cross, but this message and meaning is within each of us and requires no external symbol to manifest our faith. Our cross is the giving up of worldly sins and following the Savior with a humble heart and an obedient spirit.

The Lord, in choosing a new king

for Israel, taught the prophet Samuel a great lesson when He said, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Peter wrote, “But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4).

Paul said, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Holding Up Our Light

We should all carry the testimony of the Atonement deep within us. The blessing of what happened on the cross is witnessed in our behavior, our families, and our standards. We are Christians in the true inward sense, and we display Christ to the world through our lives, our message, and our love rather than through a symbol whereby we are identified.

In the process, we follow Jesus Christ’s admonition to hold up our light. “Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24).

I hope that members of the Church will carry the message of Jesus Christ’s Atonement and its blessings deep within their heart and share that message with others, as He has asked us do. ■

NOTE

1. Neal A. Maxwell, “Overcome . . . Even As I Also Overcame,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 71.