

## The Old Rugged Cross (A Sermon in Song & Scripture)

Call to worship (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

Opening prayer:

**Introduction: In our call to worship we heard Paul speak about the ancient world's revulsion to the cross. To the Greeks the idea of salvation by a cross was foolishness; to the Jew to think of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block.**

**Yet in our modern world most crosses are viewed quite differently. Most are made to appear very attractive. Those that are worn are usually plated with silver or gold. The wooden ones that adorn steeples and church buildings are typically made of beautiful wood and are smoothly finished. But the cross of Jesus was neither smooth nor plated with precious metal. It was a symbol of the greatest shame and torturous pain. In fact we do best to think of it as "the old rugged cross."**

**That is our theme today we worship together. We'll focus on the old rugged cross of Jesus—what it meant to the heavenly Father, what it meant to Jesus, and what it means to the sinner and the saint. Hopefully as we do, we'll appreciate the importance of keeping the cross near in our thinking. Let's begin with a prayer in song:**

*Jesus, keep me near the cross #383 (v. 1,2,3)*

In our modern world we have difficulty grasping both the pain and shame of crucifixion. The NT writers presume that their readers knew what crucifixion was like; little is said of the mechanics of crucifixion or its effect on the victim.

In a moment we'll sing a song that speaks of the cross as the emblem of suffering and shame.

Crucifixion was a shameful experience. There was the shame of being punished as a criminal and the shame of being stripped of all clothing and publically exposed.

In addition, crucifixion was designed to bring the greatest possible physical suffering to the victim. Without going into the glory details of crucifixion, we must at least be aware of the horrific burning produced by the severing of the median nerves in the wrists and ankles through which large iron nails were driven.

As the victim hangs on the cross the muscles of the upper body must bear the weight of the body hanging down until they begin to cramp with great pain. Likewise the muscles of the hips and legs likewise experience the same pain as they attempt to push up to relieve the pain of the upper body. And so the process of alternating muscular cramping continues for hours.

In addition, the separation of the arms from the shoulder joints makes it extremely difficult to breathe. The body becomes oxygen-starved and the heart begins to race. The feeling of suffocation takes over and the victim is forced to push up for air only to exacerbate the pain that comes from putting pressure on the hands and feet.

So horrific was the pain of the cross that our own word for the greatest pain is derived from the Latin word for crucifixion—*excruciating*. Keep these thoughts in mind as you sing about the suffering and shame of the cross.

*The old rugged cross #313 (v. 1)*

**In addition to the physical pain of crucifixion, one must also be aware of the mental anguish Jesus experienced as His enemies stood around the cross mocking and ridiculing him. Their taunts; their mockery was itself a great source of psychological pain to Jesus.**

*And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him." "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET HIM DELIVER Him now, IF HE TAKES PLEASURE IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him." (Matthew 27:39–44)*

*Oh Sacred Head #318 (v. 1,2)*

**When we think of the cross we must think with sorrow of the reason why Jesus had to die. It was for our sins that He had to suffer. From the beginning Jesus knew that this was his destiny:**

*"... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)*

And so the Hebrew writer declares:

*But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9)*

*Alas! And did my Savior Bleed #324 (v. 1,2,3 then chorus)*

**When we consider the pain and suffering of the cross, we must marvel even more at the love that caused Jesus to yield to the Father's will when he could have stopped it in a moment.**

Jesus himself knew this. He said to his disciples:

*“Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? “How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?””*  
(Matthew 26:53–54)

*Ten thousand angels #349 (v. 1,2,3,4 then chorus)*

**The cross was the manifestation of God’s great love and grace toward sinners.**

*Grace that is greater than all our sin #111 (v. 1,2)*

**Indeed for all of us who have trusted in Christ’s sacrifice through obedience to the terms of the gospel, our sins have been nailed to the cross.**

*Nailed to the cross #361 (v. 1,2)*

### **Lord’s Supper**

**God never wanted us to forget what Jesus did for us. He calls us together each first day of the week to remember his great sacrifice in the Lord’s Supper. Jesus instituted this supper in the shadow of the cross.**

*And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”* (Matthew 26:26–28)

**As we think about the cross, it is not only important to think about what it meant to the Father, the Son, and to us. We also need to think about how the message of the cross should change us.**

**Consider now what it means to live in the shadow of the cross:**

*Beneath the cross of Jesus #314 (v. 1,4)*

**Earlier we sang about how that our sins were nailed to the cross. What then should be our response? It should cause us to love and cling to the Savior for the rest of our lives:**

*Nailed to the cross #361 (v. 3)*

**The thought of the cross should humble us, since it makes clear our desperate need for forgiveness and our helplessness to earn it. Paul wrote:**

*“But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* (Galatians 6:14)

*When I survey the cross #315 (v. 1,2,4)*

**The thought of the cross can sustain us in times of weakness.**

*When my love to Christ grows weak #350 (v. 1,2,4,5)*

**Those who follow Jesus also have a cross to bear.**

**Jesus reminded his followers that they too have a cross to bear:**

*“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24)*

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone? #319 (v. 1,2)*

**Invitation**

**All hope for sinners is found at the cross. It is the only means of human redemption. We must come humbly to the cross to receive God’s forgiveness.**

*Kneel at the cross #945 (v. 1,2,3)*