

CHAPTER 1

GETTING THINGS STARTED

The Day the Revolution Began, Chapters 1-3

Wright opens the book with a telling of the death of Jesus in story form. Such an opening is a sign of things to come. He emphasizes the narrative nature of the gospel in the context of the larger story the Scripture tells. In the opening paragraph he imagines the death of Jesus in its historical setting without much fanfare. Rome has executed another political rival because this is what Rome does. But death is not the end of the Jesus story. As followers of Jesus look back at the cross through the resurrection they see that a revolution was launched when Jesus died.

The resurrection completely changes how we see the cross. Instead of reflecting on the cross as a sad, pitiful end to another Jewish revolutionary, we see the cross as the beginning of a

worldwide revolution. Today we often assume Jesus died so we could go to heaven when we die; the early Christians talked about the death of Jesus in ways that were bigger, more subversive, and downright revolutionary. Wright has been criticized for not emphasizing the personal implications of salvation including the hope of heaven, so he makes a clear statement in the beginning of Chapter 1 that the personal meaning of the cross as related to an individual's forgiveness and assurance of heaven is not forsaken in this more revolutionary view of the cross. Personal forgiveness and the experience of heaven upon death are included in Wright's view, but we can no longer go on talking about going to heaven when we die as we have in the past. These experiences are themselves short chapters in a much larger story of creation and new creation.

We can find agreement and a common confession with the Apostle Paul when he writes, "...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Praise directed to God rises in our hearts when we think about the great expression of love displayed in the death of Jesus for each of us individually. However, if we limit the meaning of the cross to simply the personal benefits we receive, we run the risk of reducing the faith to a private and ultimately self-focused experience. A bigger view of the cross reveals that the death of Jesus makes an incredible difference not just for individuals but for the entire world, which prompts the "why" questions. *Why is the cross so powerful? Why does the cross continue to captivate our imaginations? Why does the death of Christ continue to change the lives of millions?*

Wright tells the story of an unnamed Roman Catholic archbishop who tells a story of three troublesome boys who continually played jokes on the priest at their local parish. When the priest confronted the boys, two ran off, but he stopped one of them. He instructed the boy to stand in front of the crucifix and say out loud to Jesus three times, "You did all that for me, and I don't

give that much” (Wright, 12). (The boy was instructed to snap his fingers the second time he said “that.”) The boy did it twice, but on his third attempt he broke down crying. The archbishop who tells the story said he was that boy who that day became completely overcome by the cross. According to Wright, “You don’t have to have a theory about why the cross is so powerful before you can be moved and changed, before you can know yourself loved and forgiven, because of Jesus’s death” (Wright, 12). A person may be as unassuming as a mischievous boy in a local parish and still be moved by the power of the cross.

While exploring the meaning of the cross is a worthwhile endeavor, it isn’t necessary to be able to articulate with theological depth the implications of the cross in order to encounter Jesus and enter into the kingdom of God. We don’t have to fully understand the cross any more than we need to explain how the elements of communion connect us with Jesus; we just need to be present in humility and faith. Many of the great hymns and prayers of the Church help us encounter the reality of the living Christ and experience the love of God through the death of Jesus. We are well served to pause and stand in awe of the beauty and the mystery of Christ, but Wright argues it is vital to our faith to search out the meaning of the cross, to seek to answer the “why” questions as we worship the crucified Christ.

Asking ourselves why Jesus died includes two different sets of questions. First, we have to ask historical questions, asking why Jewish leaders and the Roman governor wanted to execute Jesus. Second, we have to ask theological questions of which there are many. As Wright has advised in other works, it is critical that we answer the big questions by marrying together the historical questions with the theological questions. The strength of Wright’s approach to understanding the death of Jesus is rooted in his desire to bridge the gap between history and theology. History, the record

of what has occurred in the past, and theology, the ongoing conversation about what we think and say about God, are natural partners. Wright's preaching, teaching, lecturing, and writing have reverberated with this theme: history and theology go together hand in hand.

Holy and inspired Scripture is the table where all Christian theology comes to sit, and biblical theology focuses specifically on how the writers of the Bible spoke about God and God's work in the world. Without reading the biblical writers in their historical context, it is too easy to misunderstand biblical texts by allowing modern cultural perspectives to reshape texts into what we want them to say, instead of allowing them to speak on their own. One classic and common error in biblical interpretation is importing a modern concept or theme into a specific Bible passage. We do want to understand what the Bible means for us today, but before we can understand what it *means* we have to work hard to understand what it *meant* at the time it was written.

Asking the Right Questions

Asking ourselves "Why did Jesus die?" first prompts historical questions: *Why did Jewish leaders and the Roman governor want to execute Jesus?* This is followed by theological questions: *What does the death of Jesus reveal about God? What did the death of Jesus accomplish? How did this awful implement of torture and death become the enduring symbol of a worldwide movement?* Roman crucifixion was so shameful that it wasn't talked about openly in the first century world. Early followers of Jesus could have brushed over the cross and focused solely on the resurrection of Jesus in order to avoid the ridicule and confusion, but they did just the opposite. They followed the lead of the Apostle Paul who wrote: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him

crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Early Christians celebrated the cross, but they did not define it.

Modern Christians have the opportunity to grow in their understanding of the cross because we have two thousand years of reflection on it, but we don’t start with the theological puzzles created by theologians over the years. Rather, we start by looking at the crucifixion of Jesus within the context of the big story the Bible is telling. When we step back from the discussions and debates about atonement theories and take a look at the death of Jesus inside the big story the Bible is telling, then with fresh eyes we can make sense of some of the theological puzzles created by various atonement theories. *What did the biblical writers and the early Christians mean when they wrote about Jesus dying for our sins?*

During the first four hundred years of Christian reflection, we find no clear, universally recognized statement on the exact meaning of the cross. We don’t find finely tuned conversations on the cross in the same way Christians talked with precision about the human and divine nature of Jesus and the fantastic mystery of the Trinity. Early Christians, like the biblical writers, used various metaphors to describe the cross, but the Church adopted no credal statement defining with specificity how the cross saves us. The important early creeds of the Church did not contain what we now know as atonement theories. However, three recurring themes regarding the cross can be found in the writings of the early church fathers: (1) Through the cross God secured victory over the powers of evil. (2) Jesus died in our place so we do not, in one sense, need to experience death. (3) Jesus’ death was sacrificial.

These themes did not exist as stand-alone theories, but as metaphors within the story the Bible tells. For early Christians it was not necessary to specify a particular explanation of exactly *how* the death of Jesus saves. Many of the current debates surrounding the meaning of the crucifixion are rooted in the Protestant

Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformers did not devote as much attention to the future of God's people as they did to the salvation of God's people, which is problematic. Understanding the implications of salvation, what we are saved *for*, is crucial in understanding how the cross saves. If what we are headed for is spiritual union with God in a disembodied heaven, where our spiritual feet will walk on streets of gold forever, then what we need to be saved from are those things that would prevent us from experiencing this heavenly bliss. However, if what we are being saved for is more than going to heaven when we die (and it is!), then what we are being saved *from* and what Jesus saves us *for* are altogether different. The Reformation was, in part, a response to two doctrines within Roman Catholicism: purgatory and the Mass. Refuting these two doctrines had a direct effect on how the Reformers talked about the cross. The questions the Reformers were asking shaped the answers they found in the cross.

The Reformers and Their Questions

During medieval Catholicism, purgatory developed as the belief in a place of temporary punishment whereby Christians could suffer, fully paying satisfaction to God for their sins before going to heaven. The Reformers opposed this teaching. Behind this doctrine was the emphasis within Roman Catholicism on heaven or hell as the final destination of the human soul. Absent from their view of the future was the biblical emphasis on new creation. Heaven was the goal, not the reconciliation of heaven and earth. The Reformers argued that purgatory was unnecessary. Christians didn't need to suffer after they died in order to be purified from their sins and enter heaven because, according to their interpretation of the cross, Jesus was punished for sinners on the cross. In this regard Jesus not only bore our sins on the cross but also the wrath of God against

sins. Since Jesus was punished in our place, there was no need for Christians to be punished temporarily in purgatory. The connection between a refutation of the need to “make satisfaction to God” through penance and purgatory and the necessity of Jesus satisfying the wrath of God can be found in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.4.25-26.

The particular point of opposition for the Reformers in their critique of the celebration of the Mass was the Roman Catholic understanding that, in one sense, the priest was sacrificing Jesus again in order to make atonement for sins. The Reformers again looked to their understanding of the cross to point out the impossibility of sacrificing and re-sacrificing Jesus at every Mass. According to the Reformers, Jesus suffered on the cross in our place once for all. They pointed to the “finished worked of Christ” upon the cross where he suffered punishment in our place. Our justification was made secure by Jesus’ death alone without the need for any further works, like the work of the priest during Mass. As with purgatory, the Reformers drew upon penal substitutionary atonement to form their argument against the Mass and their interpretation of justification by works. What they missed was questioning the assumption of divine wrath and the need somehow for that wrath to be pacified.

The Reformers provided correct answers. They were just asking the wrong questions. We are indeed justified by faith and not by works, but the problem was not that we required justification because God was angry and his justice required his anger to be satisfied. The question we need to ask in light of the big story of Scripture is not: *What is necessary for individuals to escape the wrathful punishment of God?* The right question in light of Scripture is: *What is necessary for us to participate in God’s work of redeeming and restoring the world?* The right answers about justification to the wrong questions about pacifying an angry god mixed with a limited

vision of the future has created what Wright calls a “paganized vision” of the cross, a vision not consistent with the early Christians. We will look at this topic in more detail in Chapter 3.

For Wright, atonement is connected to eschatology. The meaning of the death of Jesus is connected to how we understand “end things.” Eschatology is the study of the end—that is, the end of our lives, the end of the world, and the end of this present age. Justification is a present pronouncement concerning a future event. God declares that all who believe in the crucified and risen Jesus are in the right, in the covenant, and therefore justified participants in God’s new creation. The Reformers remained fixed on an eschatology of going to heaven or hell shaping their interpretation of justification in terms of being right with God so that individuals could go to heaven and miss the punishment of hell. In retrospect, they would have seen a broader view of the end, which includes new creation, had they emphasized Ephesians in the same way they emphasized Romans and Galatians. Ephesians 1:10 describes this broader view to include God’s purpose “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” This view includes the remaking and ultimate marriage of heaven and earth, whereby God’s space and humanity’s space are permanently joined together that God may dwell in his creation with his people forever.

What we believe about how the cross saves (atonement) is connected to what we believe about how things end (eschatology). Working towards an understanding of atonement that is consistent with the vision of the New Testament writers and the early Christians requires a biblical vision of the end. Wright has helped us rethink our eschatology in many of his works including the popular *Surprised By Hope* and his large academic work on Paul’s theology, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. His book on the cross follows the implications of our rethought eschatology. If the end is not enjoying God forever in a disembodied heaven and is instead bodily

resurrection and new creation, then maybe the death of Christ is not a matter of appeasing an angry God so we can go to heaven when we die. Wright helps us rethink atonement with words like these, “The cross was the moment when something *happened* as a result of which the world became a different place, inaugurating God’s future plan. The revolution began then and there; Jesus’ resurrection was the first sign that it was indeed underway” (Wright, 34).

The mistakes made by the Reformers were compounded by the influence of the Enlightenment on Protestant churches with an exaggerated emphasis on the individual. The popular assumption in Protestant Europe and the United States in the 1800s had become: Jesus died for *my* sins to take *me* to heaven when *I* die and because of *my* sin *I* am under the wrath of God. Thankfully *my* Savior died for *me*, saving *me* from *my* sin and the wrath of God. The problem with this heightened view on the individual was the division it created between personal sins and systemic sins, the big systems of evil in the world.

Popular atonement theologies during this time saw the cross as the remedy for our personal sins while societal problems and global evil had to be dealt with by means other than a deep reflection on the cross. This thinking fed into the pervasive secularism deeply imbedded within the Enlightenment, where religion found a home in the private lives of Christians, but had little to say about global and political problems. American Christianity by the 1900s found much energy in evangelicalism whereby the cross became the centerpiece of saving souls for heaven. By the time of the second World War, the cross had been stripped of all its revolutionary power to fuel the breaking in of new creation into our broken-down world. This poor way of thinking continues into modern times. For example, the popular reaction to the September 11 terrorist attacks was to call it “evil” and then go drop bombs, as if dropping bombs would somehow rid the world of evil. When we begin to see the

cross as revolutionary, we begin to see the truth that the cross is how God has dealt with evil, all evil.

The Gospel in Modern Ears

The most popular gospel “formula” for modern American evangelicals is one that goes something like this: *You have sinned. Sin separates you from God. Jesus died for your sins to bridge the gap. Accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior so you can have a personal relationship with God and go to heaven when you die.* This formula is not altogether untrue, but neither is it what we find in the New Testament, at least not the New Testament read in the context of the history of the first-century Jewish and Roman worlds. This shrunken view of the gospel has no power to confront evil.

The problem with the popular American evangelical formula is that it completely ignores the story of Israel, as if God’s dealing with Israel and most importantly God’s covenant with Abraham has no relevance to the story of Jesus. I remember entering into seminary a bit embarrassed that my working knowledge of the Old Testament was so weak. Growing up in American evangelicalism, particularly of the Pentecostal/charismatic variety, formed me in a way to overlook the old covenant in favor of the new covenant, a better covenant based on “better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). In one sense the old covenant has become obsolete, but there is no way to understand the intricacies of the new covenant without understanding the nature of the old one. I am now convinced that removing the death of Jesus from its historic and particularly Jewish setting is the fastest way to shipwreck our faith in the shallow waters of individualistic biblical principles. The cross viewed from the perspective of the Jewish and Roman worlds expands our faith whereby we can see the overthrow of the powers of empire. This kind of faith is a faith that has something to say to the real world about real world problems. A

historically grounded view of the cross enables us to see God's solution not only for personal sins, but systemic sins energized by the idols of secularism, individualism, and nationalism.

Some people hear the gospel as the answer to the problem, not of evil, but of an angry God. I do not know of any theologian who would state it quite like this, but sadly some Christians seem focused on an angry God who stands ready to pour out retributive wrath on them. They think God is love, but he's also angry. The good news they hear is that Jesus satisfied the wrath of God for us. This version of the gospel leaves many with the impression that God is not pure love, but a god mixed with love and wrath. Unfortunately, some people reject the Christian faith over this misunderstanding of the gospel. Others reread the Scriptures and the early church fathers to discover God is always and only love; the cross reveals the co-suffering, self-giving love of God who has defeated the powers of sin, death, and hell. The death of Jesus and his subsequent resurrection form the climax of the story of God's kingdom of heaven coming to earth, the story of the God of Israel renewing the covenant, forgiving sins, and bringing an end to the exile of God's people. This is the story the Bible is telling.

The vision of a "holy" god who justifiably requires violence in order to save has been called into question by many who have looked with horror and disgust at a world at war. Questioning the necessity of violence and punishment in considering the meaning of the cross has raised a number of questions: *Does the God and Father of Jesus use violence for his purposes? Does the Father use violence against the Son? What about divine punishment? Does God use violence to punish people?* We see both punishment and violence in the Bible, but the Church offers a number of different ways to interpret divine punishment. One way is to say that God hates sins and punishes sinners, but luckily for us Jesus has stepped in and taken the punishment God intended for us. Some Christians interpret divine punishment like this, but *is this the consistent picture of God we see*

throughout the entire story of Scripture? Is this the God we see revealed supremely in Jesus? Again while no respected theologian or preacher would say it like this, some people in the pew hear the gospel sounding something like: “God so hated the world, that he killed his only son” (Wright, 43). This rewriting of John 3:16 is the very distortion we end up with if our view of God is one of an angry deity hell-bent on violent punishment.

The story of a “holy” angry god sounds like human bullies who use their power to intimidate and threaten to get their way. If God required his anger to be appeased and we want to call that “love,” then many people will gladly say, “No thank you. I don’t want anything to do with that God.” This interpretation is only one of the ways to talk about how the death of Jesus is connected to punishment. There are better and more biblical ways to talk about the punishment of sin, which we will discover as we look at the Scripture with fresh eyes. Some Christians will argue that if God is willing to employ violence to accomplish his saving, forgiving, work then we human beings have an example to follow. We too can justify violence if our anger is “righteous.” How Christians talk about issues like global terrorism and capital punishment is rooted in our views of the atonement. *If we are to reject the view that depicts a wrathful God using violence to pacify God’s own anger in the death of Jesus, then what are the alternatives?*

First, the death of Jesus wins a decisive victory over the “powers” of this dark and evil age dominated by sin and death. This view raises a number of questions that we will explore in later chapters. Second, the death of Christ reveals the love of God in a unique and powerful way so that it becomes an example for us to follow. However, this view also raises questions, primarily: *How does Jesus’ death necessarily reveal the love of God?* I could try to prove to my wife that I love her by jumping into a freezing cold lake in the middle of winter, but that doesn’t demonstrate love or courage unless jumping into the lake was in

some way necessary, if for example my wife was drowning in the middle of that lake. However if she was not drowning and there was no reason for jumping into an icy lake in winter, my action would demonstrate my foolishness, not my love. If the death of Jesus achieved something that could have been achieved many other ways, then the particular death of Jesus neither demonstrates God's love nor provides an example to follow.

Jesus' death on the cross was not accidental. Jesus died for a distinct purpose. *What was that purpose?* This is the question Wright will pursue throughout the rest of the book. This pursuit has led to a variety of different discussions regarding Christian nonviolence, the Trinity, the relationship between the Father and the Son, the incarnation, and the nature of God. Wright does not discuss all of these issues in depth, but grounds our discussion of the meaning of the death of Jesus in an eschatology shaped by the story of new creation, the story of Scripture itself.

A Historical Point of View

History matters. We understand the various meanings of the cross when we seek to understand them in the historical context of the writers of the New Testament. A wide-angle view of the history surrounding the crucifixion begins with a look at the world of the Roman Empire built on top of an older Greek culture. Homer's epic poem *The Iliad* is all about wrath, the vengeance of the Greeks. It opens with a reference to wrath. Virgil, the Roman counterpart to Homer, opens his epic poem with a nod towards weapons of combat. These two classic works of Greek and Roman literature dealing with the subjects of war and violence provide some of the backdrop to the crucifixion. While followers of the crucified Christ see wrath and arms, war and battle differently, this world of violence helps modern-day readers understand why a Jewish prophet proclaiming the

kingdom of God at the beginning of the first century would be killed in such a cruel and merciless way.

Crucifixion was perfected by the Roman Empire as a way to execute rebels, traitors, slaves, and violent criminals in public view to remind people of the might and sovereignty of the empire. Romans and Jews alike viewed crucifixion as abhorrent and a public humiliation, too ghastly to talk about in public. Crucifixion had both political and cultural meanings which help us understand the cross theologically. Victims dying on a Roman cross died slow agonizing deaths, adding unspeakable shame to their pain. While Rome did not invent this form of public execution, they experimented with forms of crucifixion in order to assert Roman dominance over all political rivals. Jesus, according to Wright, “grew up under the shadow of the cross” (Wright, 57). Jewish revolts had sprung up in the days before Jesus, and Rome had crushed them every time. Jesus grew up hearing the stories and seeing the horror of Roman crosses. As Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom of God, his Jewish audience would have known of Jewish rebels who had been executed by Roman officials. When people of Jesus’ day heard anyone talk about “the cross,” they knew all too well the shameful cruelty of it.

This historical account of crucifixion stands in the background of how early Christians understood the meaning of the cross. Their view of the cross was loaded with social, political, and religious meanings, all surrounding the might of the Roman Empire. The question for readers of the New Testament is: *How did the cross acquire such a fundamentally different meaning by the followers of Jesus?* Wright leads us into a discovery of the meaning of crucifixion from the perspective of the earliest Christians which will underscore the biblical and revolutionary roots of the cross in early Christian thought.

The ancient world of Greece and Rome was filled with stories of people who were sacrificed, or sacrificed themselves, to secure blessings or turn away divine wrath. These stories are almost never

found in the Hebrew Scriptures. As Jewish leaders were plotting Jesus' death, Caiaphas argued that it was better that one man die for the people so the nation might be spared. According to Wright, this view is replete in pagan literature, where those who died on behalf of other people were considered to be dying an honorable sacrificial death. No one living in the Roman Empire would have called death by crucifixion "honorable." For Christians to speak of the death of Jesus upon the cross with any kind of significance would have been brushed off by Roman citizens as pure foolishness.

The Jewish World of the First Century

Within the wider cultural context of the Greco-Roman world, Wright looks with a more narrow focus on the Jewish world of the first century and offers three important considerations.

First, no Jewish festival was more important than the Passover, the commemoration of the time when the God of Israel delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery. When Jesus chose to reveal the meaning of his death in the clearest terms, he did so at Passover during his final meal with his disciples just before his arrest. The Passover event became the primary way for early Christians to work towards understanding the implications of the death of Jesus.

Second, Jewish people of Jesus' day still saw themselves as exiles. While living in their homeland, they were still under the yoke of a foreign, pagan, occupying force. The Babylonian exile of more than five centuries had been extended into the present day. According to the prophet Jeremiah, God promised to do a new thing—to make a new covenant where sins would be forgiven, bringing their exile to an end. Daniel 9 also speaks of a coming day of renewal when sin will be put away with and the people of God will be restored.

Third, while many first-century Jews expected God's Messiah, God's reigning King, to come to enact this new covenant, none of

them expected Messiah to come in the way Jesus did. They looked for Messiah to come to restore the kingdom to Israel, but none expected Messiah to suffer in the way Jesus did. In other words, they didn't have the complex understanding of the death of Messiah that the early Christians had. The Messiah was expected to be a conquering King, not a crucified one. They had no conceptual framework to match the intense suffering of crucifixion with the reign of Messiah. While the early Christians proclaimed Jesus as King who was crucified and raised, the first-century Jewish world shook their heads. For them, a crucified Messiah was a failed Messiah.

Wright will dedicate a large portion of the book to how early Christians read the Old Testament in light of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, but he offers a few observations regarding the specific world of the first-century Christians. This world existed within a Jewish world, within the world of the Roman Empire. Wright describes early Christian reflections on the death of Jesus as the turning of a kaleidoscope, very familiar colors and shapes that have been configured in a new way. The themes of the New Testament writers included metaphors from the Jewish world in new and surprising ways. Wright will show how the themes work together later in the book. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) fit together with the Epistles (the letters of Paul, Peter, John, and others) in a cohesive way under the banner of the early Christian confession: "The Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Bible," (1 Corinthians 15:3, Wright's translation). Early Christians interpreted "in accordance with the Bible" not as a few select verses in the Old Testament pointing to the death of Jesus, but as the entirety of the Old Testament, the law and the prophets, pointing to the death, resurrection, and reign of Messiah.

How do we see the meaning of the cross work out in the diversity of writing and writers in the New Testament? Wright sketches out his plan to answer that question with these points:

1. We need to reject the popular view of going to heaven when we die as the sole purpose of salvation, and replace it with the more biblical view of the new heavens and new earth at the end of the age.
2. Sin isn't what prevents us from going to heaven, but it is sin and the idolatry standing behind it that keep us from bearing the image of God in and for the world.
3. Idols have been empowered by human sin. When we participate in idolatry we give power to idols, a power that should be ours, a power they should never have had. For God's new creation to break in and renew the old broken-down creation, the power of idolatry must be broken.
4. God's act of dethroning the power of idols is God's way of dealing with sin so that human beings can be restored to God's image-bearers and thus fulfill their primary vocation.
5. God's single plan of dealing with the human plight, sin, corruption, and idolatry is centered in the story of Israel.
6. Jesus comes as Israel's Messiah and Israel's representative to do for Israel, and ultimately for the world, what Israel could not do for herself.
7. The climactic act of Jesus' death enacts God's revolutionary plan to rescue the world God loves.

Wright does not prefer the traditional word "atonement," and chooses to use it sparingly throughout the book. He does note that the English word "atonement" appears often in English translations of the Bible, but it means different things in different settings. It does not simply mean "what Jesus achieved on the cross" (Wright, 69). The New Testament in various places extends what Jesus has done for us and the world to the entire work of Jesus, not just his death. Furthermore, John's Revelation speaks of the Lamb slain

from the foundation of the world. The idea of “atonement” reaches forward to the ascension of Jesus and reaches backwards to the foundation of human civilization.

CHAPTER 1 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe your earliest encounter with the message of the cross? Was it one of awe, fear, love, or devotion?
2. What value is there in becoming aware of the history of the Church?
3. In what ways is our understanding of the end (eschatology) connected to our understanding of the meaning of the cross (atonement)?
4. Do you now or have you ever had a vision of an angry god who determined to punish you for your wrongdoing? Where do you think that image came from?
5. How do things change if you begin to see salvation in terms of what God is doing in and for the world more than simply what God is doing for you?
6. What are the differences in how people hear: “God so hated the world that he killed his only son” and “God so loved the world that he gave his only son”?
7. Why do you think Jesus waited until the Passover (the Last Supper) with his disciples to speak so clearly about his pending death?
8. Why do you think so many Jewish people did not expect the Messiah to come the way Jesus did?