The Wonder Of The Cross

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Visit Brenton's regular column at ***www.vineyardmusic.com***. In this issue of *Inside Worship*, Brenton addresses how the reality of the cross should affect us as worship leaders.

How does our understanding of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us apply to how we approach leading others, as worship leaders and creative leaders?

The reality of Jesus' death affects me in a couple of ways. The first thing it does is to make me think - yes! I'm in the right religion! I'm doing the right thing! Jesus' dying for me is the ultimate symbol and act of justice and of grace. I'm a sinner. And I need saving! And I get "in" only because of God's surprising and unexpected generosity toward me. It is an unexpected act of kindness! So my first response is to say...

"Yes! Wow! I can't believe it! You mean I get to be forgiven and made clean and included in what God's doing? Me? Are you sure?! This is fantastic news...are you absolutely sure?! Really?! You want me?...Absolutely sure? Man!



This is the kind of breathless wonder the cross generates in me whenever I really sit down to think about it, and leads almost seamlessly toward the desire to get involved somehow. Whatever this good and kind God is up to, I'd love to help and get "stuck in" if anyone will let me. I want in on this (I can still remember a funny, kind of intense frustration the first year after understanding this truth - when there was no formal opportunity to help anywhere).

I guess in one very important sense, the cross is what motivates me to serve God and to keep serving Him. Not out of some sense of owing him a debt, nor even primarily out of gratitude - even though those aren't in and of themselves bad reasons. But rather because this news, this truth, is the best thing I've ever heard.

And the person behind it, God, is the best person I've ever met.

I just want to be around Him and what He is into. Jesus died so a punk like me could be included in His family. He makes me (feel) clean, and good, and safe, and happy and found. Why wouldn't I want to worship Him? Why wouldn't I want to help others do the same? This historical fact keeps me at it. It helps me to persevere and endure. The bible calls it "repentance."

But there's another way that I guess I'd like the cross to affect the way I help/serve/lead others. It's not simply that Jesus says, "Look at what I've done for you, the life I lived and the death I died for you. Enjoy! I did it for you. Take and eat." He does say this! But He also says to me:

"Do you see the way I lived and died? Can you see how I did it? Well that's what it means to be human. That's what it looks like to live well. Now go and live like that. Go and serve like that. Go and help like that, and love like that, and teach like that. Follow me, Brenton.

Well, this is the hard part!

Just last night I was thinking about how Jesus lived - how sacrificial not just his death, but also his life was. It was selfless. His death was a picture of his whole life. He came to serve, not to be served. He prayed this kind of prayer,

"But please, not what I want. What do You want?" (Luke 22.42, The Message)

He showed us what it means to lose your life for God, to put God's plans for your life before your own, to put others first, to keep at it even when those you love have given up. I thought:

"Man, I love Jesus. But do I really want to follow Him? Do I really want to copy Him, to live that kind of selfless way? What about all the things I want to do! It's a big ask!"

And it really is only possible through His Holy Spirit. But if we let him lead us to live like this, we will lead people lovingly and joyfully, with patience and kindness and gentleness and self-control and serenity. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Galatians:

"Everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls the necessities of life is killed off for good – crucified." (Luke 5.24, The Message)

"...There is a lot left to learn.

And what happens as a result? We become nice people! We become witnesses! This is how the cross should affect the way we lead.

For better or for worse, there is something very public about the way we worship God as leaders. Our most important message is not the songs we sing but the people we are.

"People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly...in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed and mobbed (!); working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness and honest love; when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world but recognized by God; terrifically alive but rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with a deep joy; living on handouts yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all." (2 Cor. 6, The Message)

I haven't been beaten up, jailed or mobbed for leading worship or a creativity group yet - although I can think of moments when the sound guys might have wanted to do just that! But the principle is the same. People are watching us - not just listening.

These are the answers that sustain me. At the end of a year like this, lying sick in bed (I have glandular fever as I write), the moments that stand out aren't primarily the times of incredible visitation or manifestations of God's presence - though these were amazing. Mostly what stands out is how I was with people. How I related to others. How I spoke to the guys working the video projector or the sound desk, or the other people in the band. What my words were like when I wasn't singing. What my heart was like when I wasn't worshiping.

For me, the truth remains that the more I am able to let go of my agenda for my life, the more I am able to live aware of God and the people around me. The more I am able to embrace the cross, to lose my life and all the plans I have for it, the more I am able to follow and copy the kind of selfless life Jesus lived.

And there is a lot left to learn.



Brenton Brown is a Vineyard worship leader, songwriter and trainer from the UK. His songs are used by the Body of Christ worldwide, and his passion is to see the Church rise to its call to impact our generation.