



BEDWEL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Expository Sermon

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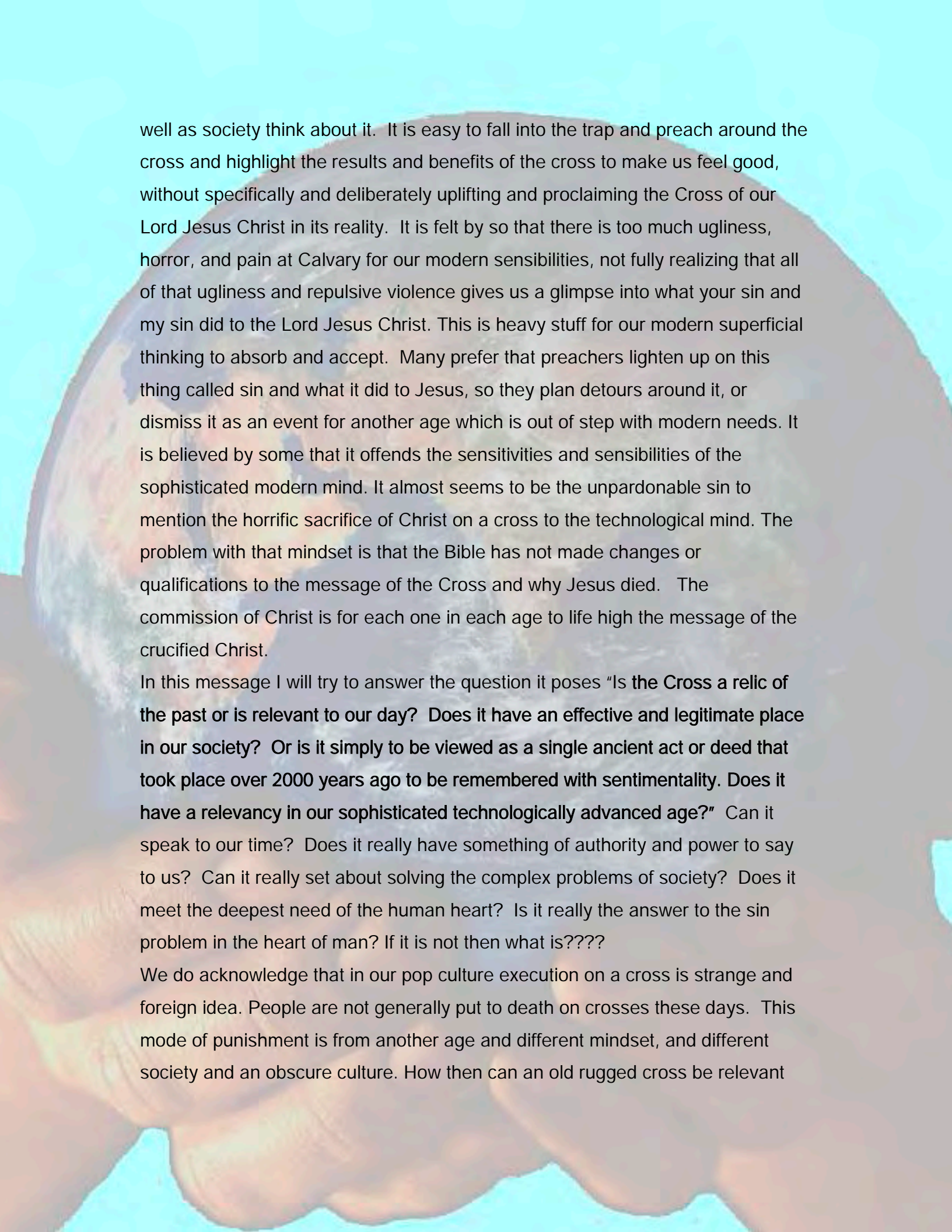
THE CROSS – RELIC OR RELEVANT?

Scripture Reading – Titus 2:11-15.

Introduction

At this time of Easter I want to revisit a great passage of scripture in Titus 2:11-15. Written by the Apostle Paul It is with thoughtful attention and reflection that we address the subject, which gives birth to the subject of the message and is the title of our message. **THE CROSS – Is it RELEVANT OR IS IT A RELIC.**

This topic serves as a reminder and pledge to myself and to God, not allow the topic of Cross slip away from this preacher's pulpit and his ministry no matter what segments of the contemporary church and even the evangelical church as



well as society think about it. It is easy to fall into the trap and preach around the cross and highlight the results and benefits of the cross to make us feel good, without specifically and deliberately uplifting and proclaiming the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in its reality. It is felt by so that there is too much ugliness, horror, and pain at Calvary for our modern sensibilities, not fully realizing that all of that ugliness and repulsive violence gives us a glimpse into what your sin and my sin did to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is heavy stuff for our modern superficial thinking to absorb and accept. Many prefer that preachers lighten up on this thing called sin and what it did to Jesus, so they plan detours around it, or dismiss it as an event for another age which is out of step with modern needs. It is believed by some that it offends the sensitivities and sensibilities of the sophisticated modern mind. It almost seems to be the unpardonable sin to mention the horrific sacrifice of Christ on a cross to the technological mind. The problem with that mindset is that the Bible has not made changes or qualifications to the message of the Cross and why Jesus died. The commission of Christ is for each one in each age to live high the message of the crucified Christ.

In this message I will try to answer the question it poses **“Is the Cross a relic of the past or is relevant to our day? Does it have an effective and legitimate place in our society? Or is it simply to be viewed as a single ancient act or deed that took place over 2000 years ago to be remembered with sentimentality. Does it have a relevancy in our sophisticated technologically advanced age?”** Can it speak to our time? Does it really have something of authority and power to say to us? Can it really set about solving the complex problems of society? Does it meet the deepest need of the human heart? Is it really the answer to the sin problem in the heart of man? If it is not then what is????

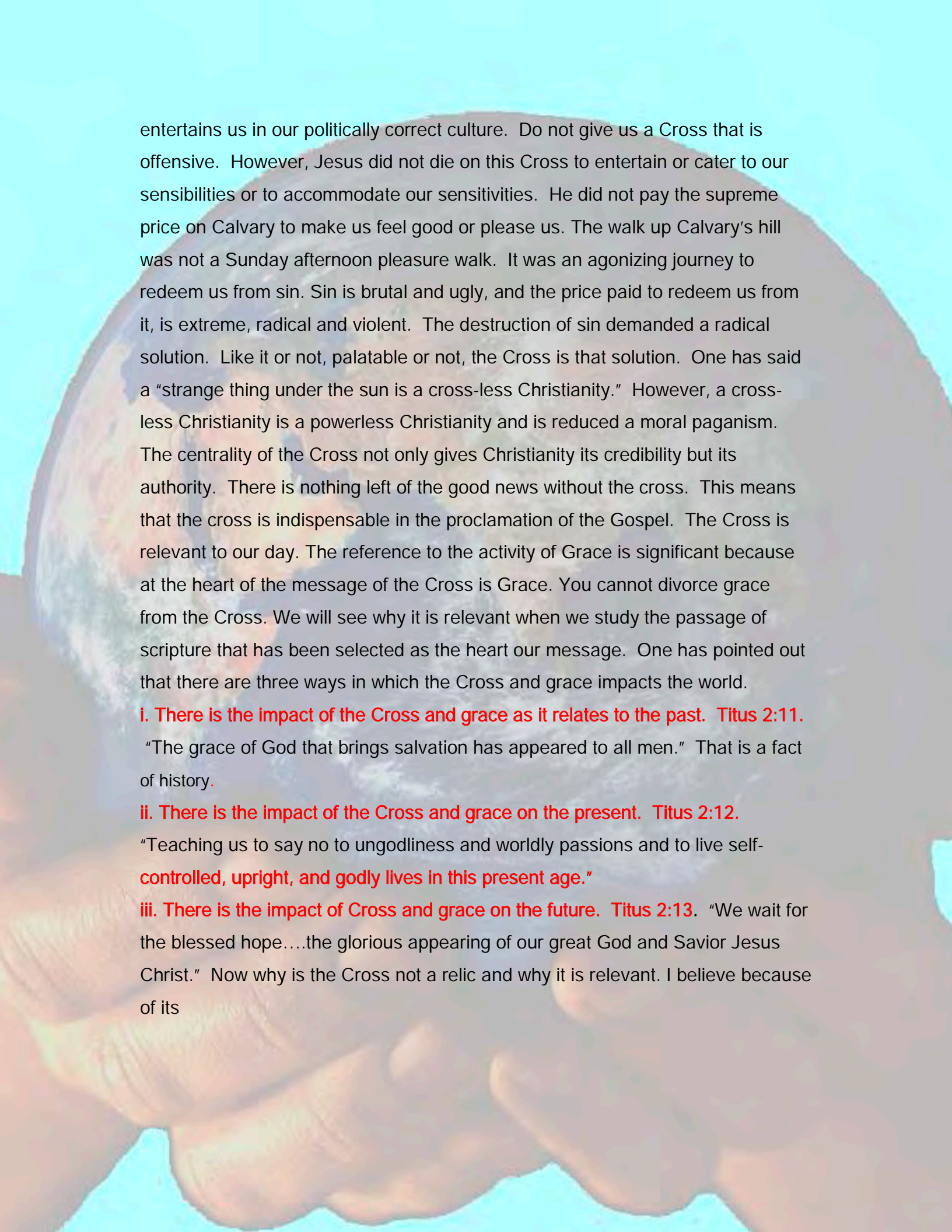
We do acknowledge that in our pop culture execution on a cross is strange and foreign idea. People are not generally put to death on crosses these days. This mode of punishment is from another age and different mindset, and different society and an obscure culture. How then can an old rugged cross be relevant

today? However, just because the Cross is over two thousand years old, does it not render it irrelevant or powerless? Age does not destroy the malignant sickness of sin, and God's antidote to sin was effective and powerful over two thousands years ago and that has not changed. Regardless of the brilliance of man revealed in the latest technology, he still has not found an answer to the sinful selfishness and sickness of the human heart. The Bible declares that the cross is the only solution to the sin problem because it is Gods' answer to it. There was a costly price paid to procure that provision.

I picked up an interesting book entitled "A Violent Grace." The title stopped me in my tracks. My first reaction was negative and defensive. How can the author, Michal Card, speak of the magnificent grace of God as violent grace? I soon discovered what his purpose was. It was to help the readers see the cross for what it is: on the one hand, the scene of the violent execution of the Son of God and, on the other, the source of limitless grace and abounding love.. The author, who is a pastor, observed that fewer and fewer churches that he had visited have crosses hanging behind or in front of the pulpit. Fewer songs sing of it and fewer sermons celebrate it." He confessed that in his ministry which began with a singular focus on the cross of Christ, had slowly shifted towards more palatable themes. His sermons were designed to becoming **easy listening**. He continues that he used to relish the criticism that "he was preaching and singing about the cross too much." In fact the key verse for the first ten years of his ministry was: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:2. However, lately, he wrote, "I've noticed that it seems to be easier to get things done by avoiding such criticism. My early critics were right: It is hard to sell songs about a crucified man. Better to sing and preach about the positives –peace, prosperity and easy grace. To a society obsessed with abundance and acceptance, and Good News minus the cross (Which is no good news at all) does seem to keep the coffers and the pews full." Then he made this statement: "If we are to maintain biblical Christianity in the new century, we must refocus our attention on the Cross, and not just an idle, passing

glance. We must live and celebrate it. He sees the cross not as a relic but as relevant. Some years ago it was the theme at the General Nazarene Missionary convention. It urged us to "Preach the Cross seize it and share it."

At a time when more Christians in the world are dying for Christ, we must be ready to die for it." Why it is that people across the world are dying for Christ, when so many in the western world hardly attend church to worship Him one hour a week. May I suggest it is because they have lost the vision of what the Cross is and what it means? They have forgotten what it took to purchase salvation for the world. When the film the "Passion of Christ," with Mel Gibson as the director, came out, some said it was too graphic.(I only saw film clips of the film) Some said there too many wounds and too much blood shed. Some of the film clips portrayed Jesus besmirched with blood and gaping wounds. His face twisted in agony and His body racked with pain. It was not a pretty picture. The prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before had written of this horror. This is what he writes, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men.....Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised and we esteemed Him not..." Isaiah 53:2-3. To many shrink back from the violence of the Cross. Tozer rightly said, "No one ever enjoyed the Cross just as no one ever enjoyed the gallows." Does society think that Calvary was a picnic? Certainly not! That was the way it was, many in our society do not want to see it that way and they certainly do not want to think about it. It is too uncomfortable. There are some in the Christian church who find it repulsive and are putting contemporary modifications to it. Let us remember that whatever is done to it does not change the fact that it still remains ugly and repulsive. Paul talked about the offence of the gospel. But isn't that the way it was? Sin is never attractive. Crucifixion is a violent act, but that is what your sin and my sin did to Him. Hiding from it does not change that. Camouflaging it does not make it more palatable or more acceptable. So many would rather that we relegate this kind of Cross to its own time. Just give us a modern Cross, they say, that makes us feel good and



entertains us in our politically correct culture. Do not give us a Cross that is offensive. However, Jesus did not die on this Cross to entertain or cater to our sensibilities or to accommodate our sensitivities. He did not pay the supreme price on Calvary to make us feel good or please us. The walk up Calvary's hill was not a Sunday afternoon pleasure walk. It was an agonizing journey to redeem us from sin. Sin is brutal and ugly, and the price paid to redeem us from it, is extreme, radical and violent. The destruction of sin demanded a radical solution. Like it or not, palatable or not, the Cross is that solution. One has said a "strange thing under the sun is a cross-less Christianity." However, a cross-less Christianity is a powerless Christianity and is reduced a moral paganism. The centrality of the Cross not only gives Christianity its credibility but its authority. There is nothing left of the good news without the cross. This means that the cross is indispensable in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Cross is relevant to our day. The reference to the activity of Grace is significant because at the heart of the message of the Cross is Grace. You cannot divorce grace from the Cross. We will see why it is relevant when we study the passage of scripture that has been selected as the heart our message. One has pointed out that there are three ways in which the Cross and grace impacts the world.

i. There is the impact of the Cross and grace as it relates to the past. Titus 2:11.

"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." That is a fact of history.

ii. There is the impact of the Cross and grace on the present. Titus 2:12.

"Teaching us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age."

iii. There is the impact of Cross and grace on the future. Titus 2:13. "We wait for the blessed hope....the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Now why is the Cross not a relic and why it is relevant. I believe because of its

1. PROCLAMATION AND ITS PROVISION. Titus 2:11, 15. In v.11, we have some amazing words of hope highlighted by the Apostle Paul, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." **The truth in this verse is the key proclamation of the ages.** It is an allusion to the first appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and pinpoints a historical event. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." At a specific moment in time, in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son. Paul writing to Timothy 1:10 confirms this when he underlined the

a. The Focus of God's grace. Titus 2:11. 'The grace of God appeared to all men.' This appearing covers His birth, His life, His ministry, His death and resurrection. **He appeared to all men.** Paul's words are specific here. They speak of a momentous event in time. "The grace of God.....had appeared to all men." Grace is personified in Jesus. He not only reveals grace and gives grace, He is grace. Just as He is love He is grace. John in his gospel chapter 1:14, writes, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH." And again in verse 16, "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." Is it surprising that Paul would latch onto this truth and proclaim "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men?" This statement describes the essential need in man and God's answer to it. Grace was given because man needed salvation, and it is the Grace of God that brought it to the human race. Salvation Officer John Allen said, "I deserved to be damned in hell, but God interfered." The grace of God revealed in the dying Lamb of God is that interference. But is more than interference, it is the intervention of God on our behalf. "The Grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." Look at the phrase, "The Grace of God." It reveals that this magnificent grace finds its source in God. This gives to grace a special significance. This is a special grace for three reasons.

i. It is from God. Titus 2:11.

ii. It brings salvation. Titus 2:11.

iii. **It has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11.** A.M Hunter wrote that grace means primarily "the free forgiving love of God Christ to sinners and the operation of that love in the lives of Christians." Someone else wrote, "Grace is getting what we don't deserve."

b. **The Purpose of God's Grace. Titus 2:11.** The purpose of God's grace is to bring salvation. Because this grace has brought salvation there came to the world. It is 'The joyful news of sins forgiven, of hell subdued and peace with heaven.' The word salvation implies that there is a state other than the state of being saved. Simply stated, people are lost and need to be saved if they are to escape the eternal torment of hell. The scriptures are clear on it. Paul knew it because he wrote that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." and again "we are dead in trespasses and sin." We are also "objects of the wrath of God." and therefore we are without hope in the world," so "we are in darkness. There is no doubt that God knew that men and women are lost and need to be saved. Sinful man deserves the justice of God but grace brings salvation to the hopeless. I read a message from one preacher who reminded us of a well-known nursery rhyme of Humpty Dumpty. "We have all heard Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall and that he had a great fall and that all the King's men and Kings horses couldn't put humpty Dumpty together again. They were faced with an unsolvable problem. A thousand shattered pieces of eggshell. No one could do anything about it. Man has a problem too in our world, our lives have been broken and shattered by sin, but for us there is a solution. Chuck Swindoll brought to my attention a scrap of verse that aptly describes this. Jesus Christ came to our wall, Jesus Christ died for our fall, So that regardless of death and in spite of sin through Grace He might put us together again." It is by grace that we are saved not of good works lest any should boast. All of this is from God. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature old things are passed away and all things are made new." "The grace of God which brings salvation has appeared to all men." The Cross is relevant because of its **proclamation and purpose. It is also relevant because of its,**

2. PATTERN AND ITS PRACTICALITY

"The Grace of God Titus 2:12. which brings salvation to all men, "teaches us to say "NO" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age, v.13 while we wait for the blessed hope....."

The Grace of God, says Paul, presents to us a style or a pattern of living that is practical and holy. It teaches us how to live this life in the present age as Christians. This present age refers to the period of time between the first coming of Christ and His second coming. Verses 11-15 are significant because they outline the basis of Godly conduct. Godly conduct is only possible in the power of the Cross and the operation of grace in our lives. This being so the Cross is exceedingly relevant. Paul presents two sides to this practical and Godly pattern of living. Firstly he tells us,

a. What to avoid. Titus 2:12. Paul is concerned about this way of life. For the church or the Christian to make a redemptive impact on an ungodly world there has to be a marked difference between how the world lives and how the children of God live. Paul says Grace teaches us to say "NO" to ungodliness and worldly passions. The K.J.V. uses the word to deny godliness and worldly passions. In the earliest gospel message was the clear and unmistakable call to repent. This meant "a change of mind." It meant to leave the old sinful godless was, and turn to follow God. One has pointed out that Paul uses a different word, "deny," or "No." The force of the meaning is the same. One maintains that the tense of the verb means renounce or forsake. (Ritchie Comm.) It is a decisive act and maybe rendered "having denied once and for all." The Greek in this verse makes clear that the pursuit of the new life is actually dependent upon the denial of the old life. Paul pursues the goal of godly living that is why he always instructs the church to put off the old life and put on the new man. Grace teaches us to say no to worldly passions, which refers to those desires centered in this present world system - hence the exhortation not to love the world. Grace also teaches us to say "NO" to ungodliness. Ungodliness "indicates a lack of reverence for God and disregard for His person.' The ungodly man is not necessarily an

openly outward wicked sinner, but the one, however morally upright in his conduct may be, has no place for God in his life. But Paul is also concerned that while there must be a moment when we renounce worldly passions and ungodliness in a decisive act of the will, we must also continue to say "NO" to the temptations that would seduce us to return to the old ways. Paul says that grace teaches us to say "NO" to worldly passions and ungodliness. This is what Paul is telling us to avoid. But he also counsels us on,

b. What to Affirm. Titus 2:12. "Grace teaches us to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in this present age." Because of the grace that has appeared to us, Paul assumes that we can live this kind of life in this present age. He

touches on three qualities of the Christian discipline we are to affirm. The first is **i. Self-Mastery. Titus 2:12. We are to live soberly exercising discipline over our inherent desires. We are urged to live self-controlled lives. The concern is that we exercise self-restraint in relation to our selves.** Unless there is self-control in all of our desires and passions, we will never bear the fruits of holiness. To say "NO" and deny worldly passion is to live the self-controlled life. Discipline or self-control is a decision of the will. God will never do for us what we must do for ourselves. WE must the run race, for while God will run the race with us, He will never run it for us. **Two important factors come into play in the disciplined life.**

They are factors indispensable to the Christian walk. The first is the, **operation and activity of the grace of God in our lives.** Paul in his writings talks about "grace reigning." In Romans 5:21 "...Grace reigns through righteousness." In addition, he talks about the strengthening power of grace. "...Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus..." and here in Titus we are told that grace educates.

It teaches us to say no the sin and self-centeredness. All of this speaks of the activity and power of grace working in the child of God. It is what I call the **"grace factor,"** but there is also the **"human factor."** These two factors working together will ensure holy living. The human factor reinforced, fortified, and empowered by the "grace factor," will enable us to live self-controlled and self-disciplined lives by saying no to worldly passions. We are to live self-controlled

lives in this present age. Paul in another of his writings exhorts us to keep our bodies under. The undisciplined life leads to all kinds of activity that defeats the Christian and destroys his witness. The lack of self-control negates or nullifies the effective working of grace in the life of the Child of God. Paul said live self-controlled lives in this present age. The second quality Paul touches on that we are to affirm is to live,

ii. Righteously. Titus 2:12. We are to live upright lives in this present age. This touches on conduct and emphasizes our relationship to others. It has to do with our relationship with our neighbor. Grace teaches us to live upright or righteous lives. It does mean that in the power of God's grace we are to live in obedience God and His requirements. Righteousness as it relates to our conduct has to do with fulfilling the demands of truth and justice. The fulfilling of these demands means that we conduct ourselves in righteousness as we relate to others. It is based on the principle that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to live righteously but we are also exhorted to live

iii. Godly lives. Titus 2:12. This exhortation has to do with our relationship to God. It means that our supreme focus is to be Godly or holy. It has the force of giving ourselves to the nurturing and cultivating of a relationship with God. A Godly person ever seeks to live in the presence of God. This is a commitment which should be the priority of every child of God. The Godly life does not come on beds of ease or a hit or miss relationship with God. The neglect of pursuing Godly living places attending the means of grace as time to develop and grow in spiritual stature on the back burner. It is amazing to me how so many evangelical Christians feel that they can do without the means of grace on a regular basis. Do they feel so confident that they can get by with so little spiritual nourishment and empowering? If we are to allow grace to teach us how to live godly lives, we must place ourselves under the tutorship of grace. We need to expose ourselves to the activity of grace in our souls. Must put ourselves under the sound of the gospel message and the expounding of the scriptures, and so allow the truth of God to make its redemptive impact on us. It is then that it can

work on our character and conduct in a transforming way. Our lives will be lived on a different level to that of the world when grace becomes our teacher. The Cross which is the expression of the Grace of God is relevant, because it lays down the pattern and imparts the power, energy and instruction of grace to live it practically. Finally, the relevance of the Cross has to do with,

3. PRICE AND ITS POWER. Titus 2: 11, 13-14.

God Himself provided for our redemption. Paul reminds us of his amazing truth in verses 13-14. "Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ gave Himself for us." Since the great God Savior, Jesus Christ gave Himself for us. He places the Great God of the universe at the center the author and the source of our salvation. He was in the person of His one and only Son the sacrificial provision for sins. He gave Himself for us. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Dr. E Stanley Jones wrote that "God wrapped his heart in flesh and blood and let it break upon a Cross. ," "He gave himself for us." This truth in itself makes the Cross relevant to our age. It provides for Godly living in this present age. To deny it or ignore it is to the present a gospel which loses its saving message and its cutting edge, and reduces it to another good yet powerless philosophy. In these crucial verses, Paul emphasizes Christ's,

a. Incalculable Sacrifice. Titus 2:13-14. Jesus "gave Himself." He "gave that which is beyond all price." Paul latched on to this phrase and he expresses in his writings. He, who, "gave Himself up for our sins." Galatians 1:4. He, who, "gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it. Ephesians 5:25. And again Jesus "gave Himself a ransom for all." 1 Timothy 2:6. It was not just anyone who made this sacrifice. The task was not given to anyone else; neither did He pass it on to anyone else. He gave Himself willingly to a Cross for us. The "great God and Savior, Jesus Christ gave Himself for us." This meant indescribable sacrifice. The human mind cannot conceive of the depth of this sacrifice. The reason was to redeem us. V. 14 "...He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself and a people who are His very own, eager to do what is good." Jesus gave Himself

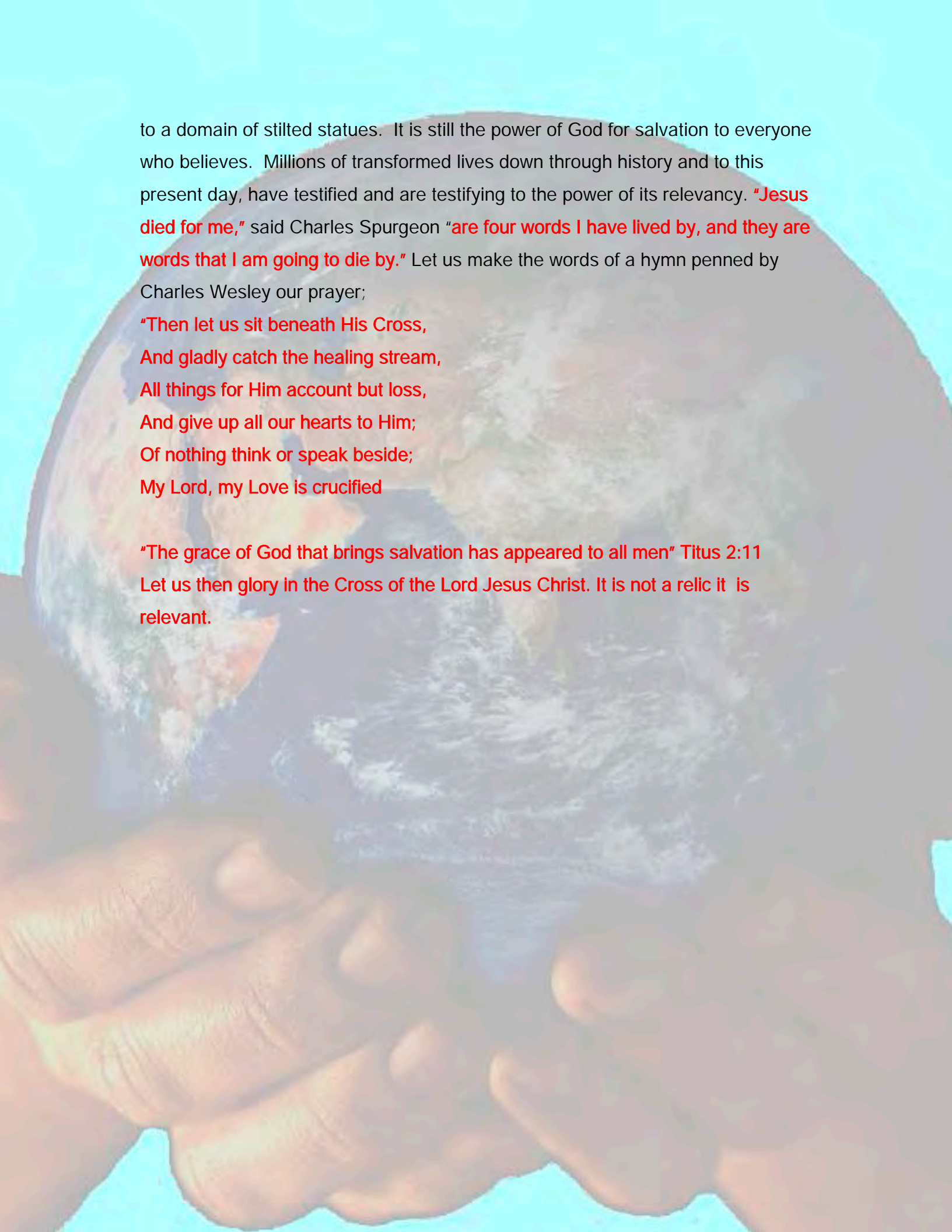
sacrificially, because He was only thinking of a lost humanity. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Stand at the foot of the Cross, and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed; see the thorn-crown mark in His scourged shoulders, still gushing with en-crimsoned rills...and if you do not lie prostrate on the ground before the Cross, you have never seen it." But the depth of the agony of His sacrifice will never be known by man. His was an incalculable sacrifice. Paul makes quite clear that Jesus paid that price to provide an,

b. An Incredible Salvation. Titus 2:12-14 He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own."

While the crucifixion is an event in history and the instrument by Jesus provided a great salvation, the sacrifice itself is eternal. He was the "lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world", and today He stands in the midst of the heavenly throne. He is the eternal "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And when they see Him in heaven, He is viewed not only as the Eternal King but as the sacrificial Lamb. The sacrifice is timeless. The Sacrifice of the Cross, embodied in the Lamb of God, is still able to "redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own." He can still do this for us because the Cross is always relevant and grace is always available and its power is timeless. The Cross is indispensable to personal salvation. Let me make clear that without the shedding of Blood there is no forgiveness of our sins and there is no cleansing from all unrighteousness. Jesus died to procure an incredible salvation. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all."

Conclusion

The power of the Cross has not been nullified by the march of the ages. It has not lost its authority because of the silly notions or arrogant pontifications of men, and their introduction or proclamation of anemic theologies. It has not lost its relevance because society and even segments of the Christian church have ignored and set it aside. Its relevance has not been adulterated nor has it been reduced because men have placed it on the stand of sentimentality or relegated

A pair of hands, one from the left and one from the right, are shown holding a globe of the Earth. The hands are positioned as if supporting the globe from underneath. The background is a solid, light blue color. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

to a domain of stilted statues. It is still the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Millions of transformed lives down through history and to this present day, have testified and are testifying to the power of its relevancy. **"Jesus died for me,"** said Charles Spurgeon **"are four words I have lived by, and they are words that I am going to die by."** Let us make the words of a hymn penned by Charles Wesley our prayer;

**"Then let us sit beneath His Cross,
And gladly catch the healing stream,
All things for Him account but loss,
And give up all our hearts to Him;
Of nothing think or speak beside;
My Lord, my Love is crucified**

**"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" Titus 2:11
Let us then glory in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a relic it is relevant.**