

THE THREE CROSSES

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." Luke 23:33.

Jesus' trial was over and He had been condemned. He had been humiliated, spat upon, and scourged, and with two malefactors had been hurried away to Golgotha, just outside Jerusalem's wall. Three men were to die upon three crosses.

Upon that hill, lone and gray, outside the city wall, three crosses stood. Upon the central cross the King of love died; on the other crosses, two robbers were perishing because of their iniquities. As we look at those crosses, we see one man dying in sin, one dying for sin, and another dying to sin. The two robbers had sin in them; Christ had sin on Him. Thus we have a dying Saviour, a dying saint, and a dying sinner.

I. The Cross of Redemption.

The cross of the Lord Jesus is the central point in history. The three great focal events in time are the creation, the crucifixion, and the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. This cross forms the darkest blot upon the pages of human history, for it is not only the culmination of the revelation of the love of God for man, but the culmination of the hatred of man for God. This cross could not have any meaning for us unless we understand in what sense the One who hung thereon bore our sins. This cross speaks to us of four things which are quite fundamental.

1. A law fully satisfied.

Jesus, by His death, met and discharged the exacting demands of the law. The Mosaic law revealed sin, condemned the sinner for his sinning, and left him to die. The law demanded death. Having pronounced the curse upon the sinner, it could not impart any life whatsoever. But there on the cross Jesus removed the curse pronounced by the broken law. He fulfilled the claims of a broken law by dying in our stead.

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!"

By His death on the cross Christ removed the curse of the law, so that the cross becomes the charter of my pardon, and secures my acceptance with God and my heirship into the glories of the household of God. What else can I do but utterly abandon myself in Him Who in His condescension became my substitute, my sin bearer?

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

2. A love truly manifested.

This cross of redemption causes me to believe that God loved me without stint or reservation, that He cared for me enough to give His Son in order that I might be saved. "God is love," and nowhere else in the universe can you learn the truth of God's love. Nature is silent about the love of God toward a world of lost sinners. Calvary is the only school in which man can learn about divine love, and that is why the old theologians referred to the cross as the academy of love.

3. A liberty eternally secured.

There the power of Satan and of sin and of the world were forever broken by His death.

"There is power, power, wonder-working power,
In the precious blood of the Lamb."

John said, "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins in His blood." No matter how far you have wandered from God, no matter how much that life of yours has been stained by iniquity, the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you from all sin.

4. A life daily lived.

This cross speaks to us of a life that must be daily lived. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me." It is one thing to believe in a crucified Christ; it is a different thing altogether to live the crucified life. The Christian is told to reckon himself dead to sin, but alive unto God; and then to walk in newness of life. On his homeward journey the Christian can sing:

"Dying with Jesus, by death reckoned mine;
Living with Jesus, a new life divine;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine."

The Cross of Redemption speaks to us of a crucified life that must be daily lived.

II. The Cross of Reception.

This is the cross upon which one dying robber realized his need and grasped the opportunity to know the power of Christ to save. Christ was lifted up and a man was drawn to Him, and that man became the first trophy of the blood of Christ, the first one to enter Paradise through the sacrifice of the Redeemer. This man illustrates the saved sinner. In the morning he found himself in a state of nature, at noon he was in a state of grace, and at the midnight hour he was in a state of glory. As we look at the Cross of Reception we see two things: --

1. The triumph of faith.

That dying robber who "rejoiced to see that fountain in his day" was saved by faith apart from any ordinance. He cried, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and our Lord's loving reply was, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise."

2. The triumph of grace.

There is no limit to the mercy of God. "Whosoever will may come." The blood of Jesus obliterated every stain of sin from him. Because of the grace of God, as reflected in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, your past record can be blotted out and you can be saved from all condemnation. Accept Him now as your Saviour. Don't give the best of your life to the devil and then come with the tags of a wasted life at the end of your days and think that God will be satisfied.

III. The Cross of Rejection.

Oh, the tragedy of dying without Christ! Look at those three crosses again. One was saved, that none might despair; but only one, that none might presume. From one side of the Cross of Redemption, a man goes to Paradise; from the other side, a man goes to perdition. The cross divides the world. Think of it, the same cross, the same terms, the same day, the same opportunity, yet different responses. One man receives; the other rejects. The preaching of the cross is either "the power of God unto salvation," or it seals the doom of those who wilfully reject all that God offers in the person of His Son.

Does the cross divide your home? Are there some in your home on the side with those who have received Him and others on the side with those who have rejected Him? On which side are you? I cannot explain it, but it is a fact of nature that the same sunshine streaming down from the heavens has power to melt the wax and at the same time to harden the clay. Likewise, the same gospel preached to sinful men will lead some to repentance, while others will become hardened in sin because of their unbelief, and the Cross of Christ will be the dividing factor.

1. This man wanted Christ without the cross.

He said, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." He wanted Jesus to come down from the cross and thereby prove His authority as the Son of God, thus saving Himself and them from dying. But we have no Christ apart from the cross, because Christ and His cross are inseparable. Our world is becoming more pagan because people want Christ without the cross, but a bloodless gospel is a powerless one.

2. This man died with the remedy for his sin at hand.

He died as he lived -- unsaved. Think of it! It was impossible for Christ to be nearer to him than He was. Had his opportunity, but he would not avail himself of it. He had no excuse for rejecting Christ. Neither have you. No sin is so black as the rejection of Christ, Who alone can save you.