

February 28, 2016

## THE CRUCIFIXION

Matthew 27:33-38

*"The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God!" (1 Corinthians 1:18)*

*"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human weakness!" (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)*

Nobody likes the Crucifixion, and yet is the center-point around which the Christian faith revolves. We may want to say that the Resurrection is the center-point, but the Resurrection is the proof that what happened at the Cross is true. The Resurrection may make us feel good, positive, hopeful, encouraged; but the Crucifixion is what saves us from sin. No other religion, no philosophy, no ideology in the whole world deals with sin in a more complete way than what happened to Christ on a Cross on that Friday so long ago. The Resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit affirm that Jesus is who He said He was – the Son of God!

That is the Son of God, the Incarnation of God...that was God who was flogged, mocked, spit on, made to wear a crown of thorns, forced to go to Golgotha, nailed to the Cross, bleeding, suffering and dying in order to save the world from sin. That's why the Word of the Cross seems like foolishness. A God who died??? The eternal Creator of the universe, the ultimate source of all reality... died on a Cross??? No logic, no rational dialectic, no moral deliberation can explain why God would suffer and die for me. But neither can you explain why someone would run into a burning building to save a stranger. Only grace can explain it all. Grace is goodness in the midst of evil, light in the midst of darkness, love in the midst of hate, courage in the midst of danger. Grace brings us God's Riches At Christ's Expense!

Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus get the Cross to *Golgotha*. "Calvary" is from the Latin. Both mean the same thing: "*The Place of The Skull.*" Some say there was a rock formation there that resembled a skull. But... it was a place where crucifixions occurred often, a place of death. To call it *the place of the skull* seems a fitting nickname, anyway. And it *was* there that Jesus was crucified.

First, before anything was done to Christ, they offered Him "*wine mixed with gall.*" This was a sort of pain relieving palliative that would often make the suffering last longer. Some say Jesus refused it in order to feel every pang of agony as He suffered. Their assumption is that the more aware God might be of the human suffering endured by Jesus, the more perfect God's redeeming grace might be. The cost of our ransom was truly paid in full! I don't feel the necessity of all that, but ... it *can* make sense. I just think the process didn't need prolonging any more than it already was. Our ransom, our redemption, was paid by Jesus Christ. By His death, by His suffering. Not by how much pain He suffered or how dead He became. The palliative is mentioned in the Gospels simply because it was done. It was not mentioned in Luke, in John, Jesus accepts it!

The act of crucifying Jesus is barely mentioned. It obviously took a central place in the scene, but all it says is, "*When they had crucified Him...*" Our minds picture the process passing in a sort of hushed silence, the nails, the hammer, the cruel indifference of the Roman soldiers. Occasional comments made by some who were watching. Crying women among the spectators. Cries of agony from both Christ and the robbers as the nails pierce their flesh... Sometimes, we feel like spectators witnessing something horrible. But we can't take the Crucifixion casually. It is the most powerful reality in history, along with the Resurrection. The Word of the Cross is the power of God! We preach Christ Crucified!

*“They divided His clothes by casting lots.”* (v. 35a) Whatever is meant by “casting lots,” dice, names or tokens in a hat..., the last few things that belonged to Jesus now became the belongings of others. Done directly within view of the victim, it’s another stab of mockery meant to reduce the victim to nothing. It was done. It was part of a crucifixion. And it fulfills a passage of Scripture from Psalm 22. The Psalm is like a nightmare being remembered, interlaced with hope and praise, encouragement and faith. But it is considered to be a vision of a crucifixion. And it expresses fairly vividly the agony experienced..... Psalm 22

Matthew then tells about the “titulus” that was posted near the top of the Cross over the head of Jesus. A titulus is a sign. At a crucifixion, a sign with the words of the victim’s crime written on it was added in order for passersby to witness the reason this person was being punished. Often, today, we see INRI. Latin didn’t have Js, so Jesus becomes Iesus, and, Jews is Iudaerum. INRI stands for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. The R is for Rex. Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaerum. It’s like an epitaph. And though an epitaph on a headstone is usually fairly positive, this was all Jesus got. His crime before the powers of Rome was His claim to be a King. That was an act of treason. As far as the Jews were concerned, Jesus’ crime was blasphemy because He claimed to be the Son of God. Roman authorities like Pilate wouldn’t have cared about local theological issues, so the Elders accused Jesus of claiming to be a king. Still, Pilate not only saw through them, he didn’t think Jesus was really guilty of anything other than annoying the Jewish Elders. But... Jesus had admitted that He *was* the King of the Jews. (27:11)

The final act of this scene is the crucifixion of two robbers on either side of Jesus. Why their punishment was added to the punishment of Jesus is not known. Perhaps it was just a matter of expedience: “Let’s deal with these two while we’re at it.” One crucifixion was horrible. Three would have magnified the agony, and shown the gathering crowds coming into Jerusalem an example of how they’d better not mess with the Roman powers. It was known that they would crucify practically any man for just looking at them the wrong way.

Power can be very oppressive.

But the power of the Cross can be very liberating. At the Cross the burden of our sin is taken away. At the Cross the power of sin is defeated. At the Cross the suffering we deserve is paid for. Jesus Christ is our savior, our redeemer, our ransom, our substitution, and our atoning sacrifice! Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He paid the price. He paid it all. And we receive God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense!

Galatians 2:19b - 20 -- *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And 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.*