

The Three Crosses

TEXT: “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.” (Lk. 23:33)

THESIS: We must continue to look down the middle of the narrow road toward Heaven instead of looking at the hindrances on the sides of the road.

INTRODUCTION:

1. If you are ever in the city of Los Angeles, California, you should not miss seeing the great painting of the crucifixion scene in the Forrest Lawn Cemetery.
 - a. As you sit in amazement and in reverence before this curve-shaped three dimensional masterpiece (Describe more than twice as long as auditorium 195 foot and more than twice as high as the ceilings 45 foot), you can imagine yourself on one of the hills just outside Jerusalem looking with sympathy upon the scene.
2. Just outside Jerusalem is the hill known as “Calvary” or “Golgotha” that is, “the place of the skull.”
 - a. It is here, that Christ was crucified on the cross.
 - i. Now a crucifixion was a shameful form of execution.
 - ii. It was reserved for slaves and criminals of the lowest sort.
 - b. Yet, Christ was staked onto the cross which the prophet Isaiah had prophesied.
 - i. He said, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isa. 53:12)
 - ii. Mark confirms this when he wrote, “And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.” (Mk. 15:27, 28)
 - c. “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.” (Lk. 23:33)
3. Three crosses were in a row and usually we fix our attention upon only one, but there were three.
4. So let us look at each of them.
 - a. Look at the one on the right.
 - b. Look at the one on the left
 - c. Look at the one in the middle

DISCUSSION:

- I. LOOK AT THE ONE ON THE RIGHT (The thief dying in sin; his was a cross of rebellion)
 - A. Now being driven onto the cross having long Roman spikes entering at the wrist

and again above the feet must have been excruciating pain.

1. But notice, this one victim to the right dies while scoffing at Jesus.
 - a. “And one of the malefactors (criminals or outlaws) which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” (Lk. 23:39)
 - b. Yet, More tremendous than his physical anguish is his scorn and hatred of him who is on the middle cross.
 - c. What had the One on the middle cross done to him to arouse him so?
 - (1) Absolutely nothing.
 2. Yet, this truly depicts the enmity of many toward Jesus.
 3. It typifies clearly the unbelief of the world at large toward Jesus.
- B. Notice again the statement of the malefactor (Lk. 23:39)
1. Though he was now in pain and agony, and in the shadow of death, he still refused to humble himself.
 - a. With such insulting language, he said, “If thou be Christ.”
 - b. Now, Has there ever been any “IF” about it?
 - (1) That little “IF” is a mighty little insect, but it has enough venom in its sting to cause the death of the soul.
 2. Now, while the man’s flesh hangs on the nails, he challenges Christ to save both “thyself and us.”
 - a. What impudence or gall this was to be in the presence of the Christ the Son of the Living God and to demand such a statement!
 - (1) What had this fellow ever done to merit salvation and to ask Jesus to save him?
 - b. How much more is he like people of our day who live in sin all their lives; then when adversity overtakes them, or they face the certainty of death, they rail at God almighty.
 - (1) They accuse him of dealing harshly with them.
- C. And on this right-handed cross thousands have since perished.
1. Now, Christianity was not then established in the world, and perhaps it was not until that day had that man ever heard Christ.
 2. But now after Christ, for more than 1900 years has worked the wonders of his grace, still there are those that reject him just as the man who hung on the right.
- D. There are those who rebel and say, “If there be a Christ” and then close their eyes and ears so they cannot see nor hear the answer.

II. LOOK AT THE ONE ON THE LEFT (The thief is dying to sin; his was a cross of repentance)

- A. This victim also twists himself upon the nails to look at the center cross, but not in scoff and unbelief, but in worship of him on that cross.
 1. He too, would like to get his hands loose; not to smite, but to deliver the

Sufferer on the middle cross.

- B. Notice his statement (Lk. 23:40-43)
1. Here we see unfailing evidences of genuine repentance. Let us note:
 - a. His reverence in the presence of Diety: “But the other answering rebuked him, saying, **Dost not thou fear God**, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” (Vs. 40)
 - (1) He was telling the other on the cross, “Why join in with these spectators below us?”
 - (2) Do you not realize in a few hours we shall stand before him?
 - b. Next, we read of the ready admission of his own guilt: “And we indeed justly; **for we receive the due reward of our deeds**: (vs. 41)
 - (1) This man was convinced that their punishment fitted the crime.
 - (2) Then, there was Jesus who was dying a death that he did not deserve, and the man knew this for he said, “But this man hath done nothing amiss.” (Vs. 41)
 - (a) The thief knew that Jesus was suffering wrongfully and that those that were doing this to him were being unreasonable and wicked feeling inconvenienced by Jesus’ teachings.
 - c. Now, the thief opens his mouth to Christ and confesses the Deity of Jesus by saying, “Lord.” (Vs. 42)
 - d. Notice how this cross hung man finally turned his back on the world with mockers looking on and reached down in himself to express his humility and sorrow and said, “Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” (Vs. 42)
- C. Jesus response to him was this, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Vs. 43)
1. Now, it is right to stop here for a minute and mention what Jesus had just said to him.
 - a. There are those today that pin all their hopes and salvation from the thief hanging on the left.
 - b. Some will say, “What about the thief on the cross. He was not baptized. Why should we?”
 - (1) However, this statement does not negate God’s plan of salvation.
 - (2) First of all, no one can prove that the thief was not baptized.
 - (3) Second of all, the man knew about the Lord’s Kingdom mentioned in vs. 42.
 - (4) Therefore, he had to know something about the kingdom

otherwise, he would have never mentioned it.

(5) Furthermore, this time was before the New Law, the law of grace and truth or the Gospel of Christ was effective.

2. “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” (Heb. 9:16, 17)

D. What a difference we can see between these two thieves.

1. The first saw Jesus as only a man, but the second saw him as Lord.

2. The first saw Jesus as a mock king, but the second saw him as the “King of kings.”

3. The first saw Jesus as a sinner, but the second saw him as a Savior.

III. LOOK NOW AT THE MIDDLE CROSS (the redeemer dying for sin; His was a cross of redemption)

A. It was a suffering cross.

1. We cannot imagine the torture of those nails driven through his flesh next to his hands and feet.

2. Added to this was the wound from the spear that pierced his side.

3. There is no doubt that the victim of a crucifixion by the Romans literally suffered a thousand deaths and with Jesus it was even more so because he carried the weight and sorrow of sin on the cross.

B. But second, it was a vicarious death.

1. Yet modernism denies this, which is the central theme of Christianity.

a. Modernism declares that Jesus died merely a martyr’s death.

b. Hence, his cross is to be placed in the same category as the hemlock that poisoned Socrates, or the bullet that cut short the life of Abraham Lincoln.

2. The thieves on either side of Jesus suffered for themselves, but Jesus suffered for you and me.

a. Paul said, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

b. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Pet. 2:21-24)

3. Christ was under no obligation to pay the debt for our sins, but someone had to suffer for sin.

a. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust,

that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:" (1 Pet. 3:18).

- b. The conscience decrees this truth, but we should also turn to the testimony of the Bible.
 - (1) Ezekiel said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (Ezek. 18:20)
 - (2) "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6)
 - (3) "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom. 3:23).
 - (4) "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:" (Acts 17:30).
 - c. How could God deal with sin?
 - (1) Out of stern justice only?
 - (a) The psalmists said, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psa. 130:3)
 - (2) Or should God deal with sin out of mercy without regard to justice?
 - d. The fact is that he dealt with it out of both justice and mercy at the same time.
 - (1) This he did in the death of Christ.
 - (2) "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:23-26)
4. Why did Christ die?
- a. For our sins.
 - (1) "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;" (1 Cor. 15:3)
 - b. Because of our utter helplessness to provide a remedy.
 - (1) "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23)
 - c. In order to show the redemptive love of God.
 - (1) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten

- Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Jn. 3:16)
- (2) Paul wrote, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6-8)
5. Why was Christ alone able to die for our sins?
- a. Because Christ was spotless and able to make the sacrifice.
- (1) “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).
- b. Because God, the eternal Father, appointed him for this work
- (1) “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,” (1 Pet. 1:20).
- c. Because Christ in his personality was both God and man.
- (1) “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” (Matt. 1:23)
- (2) “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (Jn. 1:14)

CONCLUSION:

1. We ought not to stare at the cross on the right and fall into the rebellion of the world again God.
2. Nor should we gaze our eyes upon the cross to the left that we need only to repeat his words.
3. It is to the middle cross that we must look to that we as sinners may see, hear and obey that our souls might be saved.