

Moments for YOU

Volume 54, Number 1

Theme: Christ Crucified



“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

1 Corinthians 1:18

FORGET THE CROSS?

“We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Since the time of Christ, there has never been an age when the cross was not refused. In the first century AD, Jew and Gentile were at variance with each other in most matters of importance, but they were united in this: that the cross was an abomination. Recently I spent at least an hour talking these things over with one who is well-read in the Scriptures, but he contended that the essential thing for cultured men and women of this age is to forget the cross and focus rather on the teachings of Christ.

Many modernistic “biblical scholars” say that Christ placed the emphasis of His own ministry upon His life and teaching. But the Lord Himself said to the two disciples going to Emmaus after His resurrection, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:25,26). Instead of the cross being that which had broken in to blast His work and destroy all hope, He pointed out to them that the cross was actually His greatest work and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

If we go to His teaching before He died, we find Him saying, “I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me.” “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:32; 3:14;

12:24). When on the mount of transfiguration, He spoke with Moses and Elijah about “His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). The transcendent subject was not His life, nor His miracles, nor His teachings—it was His death!

When our Lord asked us to remember Him throughout all the ages, He did not ask to be remembered by His miraculous works, nor by His wonderful incarnation—He asked us to remember Him by His death. When He gave His disciples the bread He said, “This is My body, which is broken for you,” and when He gave them the cup, “This is My blood which is shed for you.” A man does not seek to be remembered by what he considers of least value in his life, but by that which is his greatest triumph or grand purpose. Listen to Jesus’ own words: “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

May we never forget the cross!

—R. McCallum, adapted.

The cross occupies such a central place in the Bible’s story of redemption that about a third of the Gospels are given over to the last week of Jesus’ life. —A. Rogers

THE THREE CROSSES

“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).

What profound depths there are in the mystery of the cross! We can gaze on that One who hung there

MOMENTS FOR YOU Vol. 54, 1st Quarter, 2010. A quarterly publication sent free upon request as the Lord provides.

Publisher: Moments With The Book, PO Box 322, Bedford, PA 15522. A non-profit, tax-exempt corporation. Visit us online at www.mwtb.org **Senior Editor:** Tim Johnson **Editor:** T. Don Johnson



between two thieves, a spectacle to Heaven, earth and hell, and see the perfect measure of every person in the whole universe of God.

THE SAVIOUR

First of all, we must gaze at the center cross, or rather at Him who was nailed thereon—Jesus of Nazareth—that blessed One who had spent His life in labors of love, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, feeding the hungry, ever ready to drop the tear of true sympathy with every child of sorrow. When we come to inquire what it was that placed Him there, we learn two profound truths.

In the first place, we are taught what man's heart is toward God. When the people cried out "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" that voice was the utterance of the human heart, declaring—as nothing else could—its true condition in the sight of God. But now look at the cross as the ultimate expression of God's heart toward man: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Roman 5:8). Those who have accepted the judgment of God against themselves—who truly own that the cross is the measure of their guilt—can appreciate the cross as the expression of God's heart toward them.

THE PENITENT THIEF

We shall now turn to the other two crosses, and the men who hung on them. It is of the utmost importance to see that there was no essential difference between those two men. In nature, in recorded history, and in their circumstances, they were the same. In Matthew 27:44, we read that "The *thieves* also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth." So also in Mark 15:32, "They that were crucified with Him

reviled Him." Now this divinely proves that there was no difference between them until the moment in which the arrow of conviction entered the soul of him whom we call "the penitent thief." The more clearly this is seen, the more the sovereign grace of God shines out in all its brightness.

Note the change in this sinner's heart; listen to the words of the penitent thief: "Dost not thou fear God ... for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23:40,41). Here are the accents of genuine repentance—a sense of personal vileness, guilt, and danger. By the Spirit's work in his soul, he felt and owned that he was justly condemned. This change of mind and heart is repentance. Let the reader ponder it deeply; it is an essential element in salvation. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted" (Acts 3:19). "God ... commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

But we have further lessons to learn from the lips of the dying malefactor. "He said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Think of this! Think of one who had been railing on the dying Saviour, now owning Him as Lord and King! Truly this was a divine work. Surely this was real conversion—a true turning to God.

Note the divine response to the appeal of the penitent thief: "To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Consider how brightly grace shines in the salvation of the thief on the cross. Clearly he had no good works to trust in. The rites, ceremonies, and ordinances of religion could do nothing for him. He no longer had the use of his hands and his feet—so indispensable in man's religions of works. But his heart and his tongue were free; and these

are the very things that are called into exercise in God's path of faith: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

THE UNBELIEVING THIEF

Let us now fix the eye, for a brief moment, upon the third cross. What do we behold? A guilty sinner? Not merely that: we behold an *unbelieving* sinner. This is the solemn point. Who can fully estimate the contrast between those two men? They had been so similar, but now the grand and all-important difference lay in this fact: one believed in Jesus, and the other did not. One was enabled to say "Lord, remember me," and the other said, "If thou be the Christ."

On which side of this line are you standing at this moment? Are you, like the penitent thief, linked with Christ by a simple faith? Or do you speak of Christ and His saving power with an "if"? Do not put this question away. Take it up and look it solemnly in the face. Turn to Jesus now! Come just as you are to Jesus, who hung on that center cross for you and me.

—Condensed from "The Three Crosses," by C.H. Mackintosh.

"Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

In the Pentateuch we have the **FIGURES** of the sufferings of Christ. In the Psalms we have the **FEELINGS** of the sufferings of Christ. In the Prophets we have the **FORECASTS** of the sufferings of Christ. In the Gospels we have the **FACTS** of the sufferings of Christ. In the Epistles we have the **FRUITS** of the sufferings of Christ.

—H.G.G.

The cross is neither for wearing nor bearing; it is a thing to die upon.

—Samuel Chadwick

JESUS OUR SUBSTITUTE

"He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is beyond belief! An innocent man is about to be crushed by God. We have grown accustomed to seeing courtroom scenes on the news, but can you imagine seeing the lawyer on trial for the crime his client committed? Or even more incredible, can you imagine that the death penalty is handed out and it is the attorney who dies and not the defendant? That would be bizarre, but that's what we see when Jesus, our sinless Advocate, receives the punishment we—who are guilty—deserve.

Jesus is our High Priest, but what kind of priest is this who becomes the sacrifice? Priests *offer* sacrifices—but this priest is the sacrifice. This priest lays Himself on the altar. You see, Jesus died for sin—but not for His own sin. He had no sin. He was in every sense made sin for us. He became all of our rebellion, all of our lying, all of our cheating, all of our adultery, all of our filth, all of our ugliness. He became all of that on the cross. Otherwise, how could God crucify His Son?

Here's the gospel in a phrase. Because Christ died for us, those who trust in Him may know that their guilt has been pardoned once and for all. What will we have to say before the bar of God's judgment? Only one thing. Christ died in my place. That's the gospel.

—Condensed from "Jesus Our Substitute" by Alistair Begg.

THE CUP

“He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matthew 26:39).

As Jesus lies prostrate on the ground, we overhear Him making this plea repeatedly. He lifts His head, and His expression reveals an agony so intense that His sweat is like “great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). His words tell us why: “Let this cup pass from Me.”

What is this cup? It is clearly a reference to the wrath of God for your sins and mine. Isaiah 51:17 shows us this cup in God’s extended hand—it’s “the cup of His fury,” and for those who drink from it, it’s “the cup of trembling.” This cup contains the full vehemence and fierceness of God’s holy wrath poured out against all sin, and we discover in Scripture that it’s your cup ... and mine.

What Jesus recoils from here is not an anticipation of the physical pain associated with crucifixion. Rather it’s a pain infinitely greater—the utter distress of soul as He confronts total abandonment and absolute wrath from His Father on the cross. As we watch Jesus pray in Gethsemane, He has every right to turn His tearful eyes toward you and me and shout, “This is *your* cup. You’re responsible for this. It’s *your* sin! You drink it!” This cup should rightfully be thrust into my hand and yours.

Instead, Jesus freely takes it Himself ... so that from the cross He can look down at you and me, whisper our names and say, “I drain this cup for you.”

—Condensed from *Christ Our Mediator: Finding Passion at the Cross* by C.J. Mahaney. Copyright © 2004 by Sovereign Grace Ministries.

SILENCE OF THE LAMB

Over and over again the Bible records the silence of God’s Lamb in the presence of His accusers (Matthew 26:62,63; Mark 14:60,61, etc.). This is amazing, especially since the witnesses that were hurling charges against Jesus were giving false testimony (Matthew 26:59-61). When we read these Scriptures, we wonder why Jesus did not say something to vindicate Himself. After all, our natural tendency is to justify ourselves even when we are guilty—and how much more so when we are innocent and are being falsely accused.

Why was the dear Saviour so silent? I believe we find at least part of the answer in the great prophecy of Isaiah 53: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. 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. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:5-7). He was not a sinner, but He fully took the sinner’s place.

And here’s another thought to consider. If Jesus had risen up in His own defense during His trials, I believe that He would have been so powerful and irrefutable in making His defense that no governor, high priest, or other legal authority on earth could have stood against Him! In other words, if Jesus had taken up His own defense with the intention of refuting His accusers and proving His innocence, He would have won! But

we would have lost, and we would be lost for all eternity.

—Adapted from *The Passion of Christ and the Purpose of Life* by Adrian Rogers. Copyright © 2005 by Adrian Rogers.

FORSAKEN BY GOD

“About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me” (Matthew 27:46).

If you want to know what God really thinks about sin and what He intends to do about it, look at Jesus rejected on the cross and listen to Jesus forsaken on the cross. That is what sin deserves: the wrath and curse of God. That is what sinners deserve: to be put to death and judged for their sins. That strikes fear into the hearts of those of us who are sinners. At least it ought to. If God was willing to forsake His own Son for the sins of others, should He not also forsake you for your sins?

The forsaking of the Son of God on the cross is a fearful thing, but it is good news for sinners who repent. It is good news because it means that God’s children will never be forsaken. God will forsake sinners, but He will not forsake you if you will come and meet Jesus Christ at the cross. God will not forsake you if you accept Christ’s sacrifice for your sins, taking your sins and placing them on Jesus’ shoulders by faith.

—Condensed from *The Heart of the Cross* by Philip Graham Ryken. Copyright © 1999 by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken.

Dear believer, have you been tempted by Satan to believe that God has forgotten you? Oh, look up! His eyes never lose sight of you. “He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” —H.A. Ironside

CHRIST ON THE CROSS

“He began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

A MULTITUDE OF SUFFERINGS

Jesus’ physical stresses began in Gethsemane the night before He was crucified, when He literally was sweating blood (*hematidrosis*). There, He was manhandled by a large band of armed soldiers and led to the trials before the Sanhedrin and high priest where He was punched, spat upon, and pushed down. He had no sleep during this period and was not fed or provided adequate liquids. Jesus was then taken to Pilate, then to Herod, and back again to Pilate where He was finally sentenced. This ordeal went on all night through the early morning hours. Finally, Jesus was handed the death penalty and scourged until He was critically ill. In fact, He was too weak to carry the *patibulum* (cross beam) to Golgotha.

Upon arrival at Calvary, Jesus was likely pale, covered with large, seeping, painful bloody wounds upon His back and legs, and had a swollen face from the thorny crown and other abuse from the soldiers. His eyes were probably almost swollen shut. If He were admitted to an emergency room today, He would be swarmed by medical personnel for urgent and dire diagnostic testing and treatment. But He had yet to finish and fulfill His ultimate purpose: to voluntarily suffer and die by crucifixion as the sacrifice for sin.

DYING IN OUR PLACE

In Palestine, time was stated by hours, with six in the morning representing the first hour of the day.

We are told in Scripture that from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (three in the afternoon), the sun ceased to give light (Mark 15:33). During this time God sent a phenomenon of darkness in the middle of the day, which signified the darkness of sin that Christ was bearing at His time of death. When, in God's providential timing, Jesus knew the weight of His Father's wrath had reached its climax and been satisfied, He said, "It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." (John 19:30).

Jesus died only six hours after being nailed to the cross, a rather rapid death for crucifixion. Victims of crucifixion often survived longer on the cross, even several days. However, this was not in God's will for Jesus, since the bodies of those crucified that Sabbath eve needed to be removed before sundown, in keeping with Jewish law. If Jesus were alive at sundown, His legs would have been broken in order to cause rapid death, just as the criminals' were. But this would have violated Old Testament prophecy in Psalm 34:20. Jesus was indeed the ultimate Passover lamb (Exodus 12).

WAS JESUS REALLY DEAD?

Over the years, critics and skeptics of Christianity have put forth the idea that Jesus did not really die, but was only unconscious when removed from the cross. This is at odds with both Scripture and medical science. John records in his Gospel that the soldiers were certain Jesus was dead (John 19:33). Remember, these soldiers were professional executioners who knew their job and knew it well. In addition, the thrust of a spear into Jesus' chest would inflict mortal injuries that would be incompatible with life (John 19:34).

Other evidence that Jesus was

unquestionably dead is revealed in passages about His burial. The tomb had a large stone placed in front to seal the opening (Matthew 27:59,60). If He were alive, it would have been impossible for Jesus in such a weakened state to move a stone that weighed at least several hundred pounds. In addition, Jesus' face was wrapped in burial cloth (John 19:39,40) which, in conjunction with a sealed-up tomb, would have caused rapid suffocation—even if Jesus were alive (which is impossible). The only plausible explanation is that Christ was dead and nothing but a supernatural, miraculous event—the Resurrection (John 20)—could bring Him back to life!

—Condensed from *Died He For Me: A Physician's View of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*. Copyright © 2008 by Mark A. Marinella, MD, FACP.

KNOWING CHRIST

Paul's desire was "That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10). Note that he did *not* say, "That I may know *about* Him." Many people will sympathize with you and possibly follow along in pursuit of knowledge *about* Jesus Christ. But say, like Paul did, that your goal is to know Him *experientially* in "the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death," and see how many others follow you. Yet this was the high ambition of the great apostle.

We cannot stress too emphatically that the word translated "know" means "to come to know by experience." Paul's goal was to come to know the Lord Jesus in a fullness of experiential knowledge that can only come through being identified with Christ and being like Him. A knowledge about Christ received

from reading a book or listening to a sermon is too shallow and superficial to satisfy one like Paul. Conformity to Christ is his goal and he refuses to stop short of it.

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

At first we might think that Paul has things out of order: “Resurrection ... suffering ... death.” But remember that he is speaking about our experience, and the Christian experience begins with the believing sinner tasting of Christ’s resurrection power in being born again. Throughout the New Testament, conversion is described as passing out of death into life (John 5:24; 11:25; Ephesians 2:1).

But the Christian life not only begins with receiving the life of the risen Christ; it also continues in exactly the same way. To live in the power of Christ’s resurrection is to become more and more dead to the ways of the world and the lusts of the flesh, and to be more like Christ. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). The same power that raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead, works in the believer to provide victory in his daily life. It was the experiential knowledge of that power, and its influence on his own inner life, that Paul desired and pursued.

PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS

The sufferings of Christ which Paul had in mind are not the atoning sufferings of the cross in which Christ bore the penalty for sins. That burden He bore alone; no person could possibly share in those sufferings. Rather, Paul was thinking of that great spiritual process carried on in the soul of a man or woman who shares the Saviour’s burden for a lost world. Our Lord suffered in His soul as He wept

over Jerusalem. His heart was broken as He saw the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd. Such anguish made up a substantial portion of His suffering. It was such suffering that Paul longed to know in experience.

Believers are united with Christ not only that they may share His life themselves, but also that they may share His life of labor on behalf of others. One who does not know Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings is not properly prepared to serve Him. He took upon Himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2), and paid whatever price was necessary to be the Servant of all.

THE PURSUIT ENDED

Paul concludes with the expressed desire to be made “conformable unto His death.” Elsewhere Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20) and “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). This is something we naturally shrink from. But it was an attitude of self-crucifixion that conditioned our Lord’s entire earthly life and made it so fragrant and beautiful in the blessing of others.

If we have read the full account of Paul’s life in the Bible, then we have some idea of the reward awaiting him at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And since each of us has a full account of his own life, we know what awaits us in that day, too. Dear Christian, there is still time to daily pursue and experience this blessed and intimate knowledge of Christ in His resurrection, sufferings, and death!

—Adapted from *Studies in Philippians* by Lehman Strauss.

The sentence of death must be written on the flesh. The power of the cross must be entered into before we can steadily and happily walk with God. —C.H.M.