

Three Crosses

Introduction. Many preachers tell of the terrors of hell and the joys of heaven. Many preachers saturate their congregations with teaching about the church. Many preachers voice their objections to indifference, but the cross of Christ is the only lever that has ever turned the world upside down and made men forsake their sins. And if this will not, nothing will.

Teaching concerning the cross is teaching that honors God. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the foundation of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Colossians 1:18-20; 2:14-15). In the story of the crucifixion of Jesus we find that this is actually a story of three crosses. The first was a cross of redemption. The second was a cross of rejection. The third was a cross of reception.

I. ***The Cross Of Redemption***

- A. This man died FOR sins. He was a dying Savior.
 - 1. He died bearing the guilt of our sins (Isaiah 53:12).
 - 2. He died even though He had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18).
- B. This cross is the wonder of all time.
 - 1. The sins Jesus bore on the cross were the sins of all men, even those all the way back to the judgment (Hebrews 9:15, 25-26).
 - 2. Marvel and wonder at the cross and the suffering on Christ! What a price God and Jesus paid on that cross (Galatians 6:14)!
 - 3. Christ suffered the agonies of death so His followers will be delivered from guilt and punishment of eternal damnation.
 - 4. This is such a fantastic demonstration of our Savior. His pathetic comrades, perhaps put there by Pilate to tempt and humiliate Him even more, could only give Him an opportunity to manifest His true majesty.
- C. What shall we do about it?
 - 1. Believe in Him (John 8:24).
 - 2. Turn from your sins in repentance (Acts 17:30; Luke 13:3).
 - 3. Confess that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 10:32; 16:16; Romans 10:8-11).
 - 4. Be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4).
 - 5. Fight the good fight of faith until death (1 Timothy 6:12; Revelation 2:10).

II. ***The Cross Of Rejection***

- A. This man died IN sin. He was a dying sinner.
 - 1. He died rejecting Jesus (Luke 23:39).

2. That man died rejecting the only one who could have saved his soul (John 3:36). He wanted to be saved, but not by Jesus.
 3. Think of the torment and anguish on the cross that this man suffered. He may have suffered more than Jesus because the soldiers had to break his legs (John 19:31-32).
 4. He suffered because of his own sins, but he suffered to no avail. He could not save himself nor anyone else.
- B. This is the cross of many today.
1. Many sneer at Christ and His cross and in essence say the same as those that day (Ephesians 2:1-3). God does not force forgiveness and mercy upon those who are rebellious.
 2. So many you talk to either want to be saved, or think they already are. They want to go to heaven, but not by accepting and obeying Jesus (John 12:37-41).
 - a) They do not wish to see their evil deeds so that they might turn from them.
 - b) They only want to be relieved of their present distress when it comes.
 - c) They will have an eternal place of unrest at their death.
 3. Because of unbelief they multiply their sins (John 8:21, 24).
- C. How do people reject Jesus?
1. They reject Him directly by rejecting the virgin birth, the deity of Christ or the saving power of the gospel.
 2. They reject Him indirectly by rejecting His plan for salvation, His church, His doctrines, His apostles and His ministers (John 8:47).

III. ***The Cross Of Reception***

- A. This man died TO sin. He was a dying saint.
1. He died forgiven of his sins (Luke 23:43).
 2. He became a believer under the Law of Moses during the time Jesus could say, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:47-50). Some saw Jesus raise the dead, and did not believe; the robber saw Jesus put to death and he believed (John 4:40-41).
 3. This was said to a man who believed, repented and was willing to confess Jesus before men (Luke 23:39-43; 1 Timothy 2:4).
 4. Some would dare to say that he was never baptized so we can use him as an example of conversion. But this man did not have to be baptized because he was not under our law (Hebrews 9:16). Jesus forgave sins before His death, such as the woman taken in adultery and the paralytic (John 8:1-11; Matthew 9:1-6).

B. A dangerous position.

1. This man became a last minute convert. This is a dangerous position to put ourselves in because we never know when death may overtake us (Job 8:9; Psalm 78:39; 89:47; James 4:14).
2. His sins were canceled in a moment's time. He had once been a thief and a sinner, but now he was a believer (Romans 6:6-11). What a change: morning in sin, noon in grace and night in glory!
3. His home in paradise will be shared by all who believe and obey Christ's will (John 14:1-4; Mark 16:16).

Conclusion. Here is the history of the whole world and the destiny of every man and woman. Jesus answers our questions about even the lowest levels of human life by showing that God does not work through culture but through grace. He does not ask us to be civilized, but to be penitent. The thieves on the cross demonstrated that the essence of sin is the same in all those who depart from God. When we see the "scum" of society, we need to remember that our Lord was in the midst of them and accepted the one who would have faith in Him.

What the first cross means to you determines whether you are hanging on the cross of reception or the cross of rejection. Are you willing to manifest your faith in Jesus as did the saved thief? Accept the message of the first cross today!