

Three Views of the Cross

There was once a visitor who had gone to a home which was near the mountains. He remarked to the man of the house about the beautiful view. The man of the house who tells this story said, "Then I looked too, and it was beautiful." Living there for so many years he had taken the view for granted. Perhaps this is the same type of "take-for-granted-ism" which has crept upon many of us who have often heard about Jesus and the Cross.

In John 19:17-18 we read, "And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of the skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha; where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." These verses tell about earth's most tragic event. Little did the people of that eventful day realize the implication and history-making importance of the scene. We want to look at three views of the cross.

View 1: The Onlookers View

This is the view as a news reporter might see it. It is a terrible view (a "Bad Friday") for three reasons.

a. The Pain of it.

The cross was as painful for Jesus as it would have been for us. He did not look forward to it with joy. Jesus was troubled in spirit (John 13:21). He knew ahead of time, everything that was going to happen, and that made it all the worse. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed three times, "Let this cup pass from me." The way of the cross was not a pushover physically for Jesus. He did not say, "Well friends, here I go on my merry way; be seeing you all in three days."

The pain was not just physical, it was also spiritual. The burden of the sin of the whole world was upon Him. He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:31). There was also the pain of His trial. A trial should be a place to prove one innocent or guilty with no punishment until the one is judged guilty, but it was not so in the case of Jesus. They hit Him and plucked the hair from His beard (Isaiah 50:6). They put a crown of thorns on His head and the briars pricked His skull like needles. The soldiers took a rod and struck hard on the thorns, driving them farther into His already pierced brow.

Crucifixion on the cross was one of the cruelest ways to die. It is worse than hanging, beheading, the electric chair, the gas chamber or shooting. These are all quick ways to die, while crucifixion is a lingering death. If only we could have been there, then we would not forget the awfulness of the scene. We have become calloused because we have heard the account often. It is the same with accidents reported in the newspaper. We read about so

many, we say it is awful, and then we forget. But let us be the first on the scene of an accident, the one to see the last muscle spasm of a lifeless form in a puddle of blood, the one to see the jagged edge of the white protruding bone, the one to hear those pitiful cries for help from one pinned inside a burning vehicle, the one to see that body impaled on a splintered fence rail, and we will never forget. The death of Jesus with the accompanying pain was worse, for it was no accident, and had we been there we would never have forgotten. No wonder the women wept along the Calvary trail; it was no beautiful sight. Isaiah says, "His visage was marred more than any man."

b. The Loneliness of it.

The second reason why it was a "Bad Friday" is because Jesus felt the loneliness of the way of the cross. Loneliness is an awful feeling; it leads some people to suicide. Jesus had twelve disciples who had stuck by Him when others turned away, but He knew they would forsake Him at His arrest. He was troubled already in the upper room (John 13:21) knowing one of them would betray Him. How it must have hurt Jesus to know that Judas, for thirty pieces of silver, would give the kiss of betrayal. Then there was Peter who said he would never deny his Lord, but did just that within twelve hours. Even John who followed Jesus to His trial and crucifixion did nothing but stand by, perhaps too dazed and too frightened to try to help, but he did look after Jesus' mother and took her to his own home. Even on the Cross Jesus was alone, and cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Not only His earthly friends, but also His own Father in Heaven turned from Him. God the Father had to turn His face for He can't look on sin, and Jesus became sin for us, so Jesus had to bear the cross alone. There is no worse feeling than to feel that God has forsaken you. Thank God, Jesus could take it (and would take it) because of His love for us.

c. The Shame of it.

The third reason it was a "Bad Friday" was because Jesus could feel the shame of it. He was innocent, the perfect Son of God, yet He was treated as one of the ten-most-wanted-men of all times. There were no true witnesses to testify against Him and the false witnesses could not agree. The rulers of the Jews knew that He was innocent or they would not have needed to have His trial at night (which was against their own law). Judas knew that He was innocent, for later he said, "I have betrayed innocent blood." Pilate knew He was innocent, for three times he said, "I find no fault in Him." Pilate's wife knew He was innocent for she said, "Have nothing to do with this just man." The thief on the cross said, "This man has done nothing amiss." So we could ask why He had to die and be treated so shamefully? Talk about unfair punishment—Jesus had it. Once in a while we read of a person in prison twenty years and then he is found to be innocent. It's awful, we say! What about Jesus' sentence of death? Everybody **knew** He was

innocent. This did not happen in a heathen country; it happened in Jerusalem, in the city of David, and under a government which prided itself in justice.

Jesus was mocked at His trial. They blindfolded Him, then they hit Him and said, "Now tell us who did it." They spit on Him, an act that is one of the lowest forms of debasement. The soldiers put a purple robe on Him and a crown of thorns to make a mock of His claim as King. Jesus was hung side by side with thieves, with the worst of men as a common criminal. Oh, the shame of it! While on the cross passersby made fun of Him. Some said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." Others said, "If thou be the Son of God, come down and we will believe." He was shamed before the world. To the onlooker, it was a "Bad Friday."

View 2: The Cherished View

We look now at the inside story, the "Good Friday" view; the view as God sees it from Heaven.

Jesus said, John 12:27, "For this cause came I unto this hour." Isaiah says, "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." This tells the inside story, the underlying reason for it all. It was **love** (not weakness) that led to Calvary's brow. John 3:16 says, "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." Jesus died to redeem us. Through Adam, we fell without hope; a great chasm of sin separated man from God and no one **alone** has ever crossed that gap. It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to ascend to Heaven or to be right with God. We can't buy our way there, we can't build our way there, and we can't fly there by space ship. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." We can't explain how the blood of Jesus answered God's demand; we only accept in faith the Bible's explanation that it does. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without spot."

There was once a tourist, visiting in the Alps, who early one morning went for a walk. A sudden snowstorm caught him while in the mountains. The innkeeper, knowing of his danger, sent his trusty dog to aid the stranded tourist. The dog found the half-frozen man and tugged at his coat. The man in his semi-conscious condition, thinking it was a wolf, grabbed his ice axe and hit the dog with all his strength. The dog staggered backwards bleeding. Finally he got up and started for the inn. The innkeeper found the dog dead at his doorstep, but the trail of blood led a rescue team to the freezing man. The saved man then realized what happened and said, "He came to save me, but I killed him. He was my friend, but I treated him like an enemy." This, in a small way, pictures mankind and his treatment of Christ.

It should fill us with praise when we think what Jesus has gone through to save us.

Read Romans 5:7-8. It was no easy task to fulfill. It was love winning out over power. Just

imagine if you were five-feet-six-inches tall and a big brute started hurting you, you would have to take it or run away. But if you were six-feet five-inches and a little five-foot-six-inch person picked on you, what would you do? It would take effort not to hit back, wouldn't it? This is somewhat like it was with Jesus. He could have spoken the word and twelve legions of angels would have come to His rescue. He knew how one angel killed one hundred eighty-five thousand soldiers in the days of Hezekiah. Praise God the **love** of Jesus won the day, and not His **power**. He held His peace for our sake, He was reviled, But He reviled not again. He even did good; He healed the ear of the high priest's servant. He saved the thief on the cross. Surely He hath borne our griefs; He has redeemed us so that we could be sons and daughters of God instead of receiving the death penalty that we deserved. No wonder John says in 1 John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." It is marvelous that Jesus suffered all of this for us.

There were two young men who had been university friends and graduated together. Their ways parted as they went into the world to make a name for themselves. One became an outstanding judge while the other became a businessman who made a fortune. But a black day came when the second man lost his fortune, and to make matters worse, he embezzled a large sum of money to regain his former status, and was caught. The judge in the trial was the businessman's former friend. Many people wondered what would happen, when the time came for the judge to hand down the sentence to his friend who had pleaded guilty. The judge clearly summed up the case, making no effort to sugar-coat the seriousness of the crime. When he pronounced the sentence, the audience gasped, for he imposed the heaviest fine allowed by law. Then another unusual thing occurred. As the guilty man was about to be led away, the judge removed his robe, went to the guilty man's side, and said, "I'll pay the fine for you." Then the judge turned and walked away. The man was free because the judge, willing to help but not willing to destroy the law, suffered in his stead. This is what Jesus did. He bridged the gap of sin. Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow. This then is the inside story of the Cross.

View 3: Our Own View

The Old Rugged Cross is an emblem of suffering, cruelty, and love—but there it must stop. The Cross was only **the means** by which Jesus died. It was only a T-shaped structure which lifted and held Christ. Today, as in the past, Satan has been at work and very cunningly has shifted the view of some folks from Christ to the Cross, and they almost worship that. The devil wanted the body of Moses (Jude 9), possibly to make of it an idol. In the wilderness experience of the Israelites, Moses was one day told by God to make a brazen serpent to save the lives of those

who were bitten by the fiery serpents. Some years later (2 Kings 18:4), this same brazen serpent (which once saved lives), had to be destroyed because the people were worshipping it. I am afraid some people today have come to think more of the cross than they do of Christ and His shed blood. People want crosses to look at, but many times little is said about the Christ of the Cross. A cross is nothing without Christ. Christ never said we should use crosses to remind us of His death. Rather we are to observe the Communion service. Beware of any cross that is not the blood-stained Cross of Christ. Crosses can't save, or three would surely have been saved that day nearly two thousand years ago. The important thing is whether we accept or reject the Christ of the Cross. The three crosses are symbolic. Jesus divides; on one side are the saved sinners and on the other side are the lost sinners. On which side do you stand? How do you view Calvary?

It is so easy to criticize the guilty along the Calvary trail. We point a finger at Judas and say, "What a traitor." But how many traitors and hypocrites are there in the church? There are many two-faced people, fine moral Christians on the Lord's day, but who work for the devil the rest of the week. Then there was Peter, the one who denied, and we say, "What an off-and-on fellow." But many today are ashamed of their Savior too. Their very speech and appearance deny Him. They too, curse and swear and lie when in a jam, or when among the world's crowd. They too would rather stand at the world's warming-places and follow the world's standards than be mocked. Remember the words of Jesus, "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 10:33). Pilate too was a weakling, we say. He was swayed by the crowd, but he knew better. Yet many people today also know what is right and wrong, but the crowd-pressure (the "everybody's doing it" philosophy) breaks them down. Their children come home from school and want to go to the school dance. "Please may I go?" Then, "I want to go; everybody else is going." Then the parents, who didn't have the courage to refuse to let their children learn to dance in school, finally let them go, rather than let them become unpopular with the world. Really it comes down to the fact that the crowd which was before Pilate and cried for the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus is not to be ridiculed by us, until we see the fuller meaning, because we might be one of them. You see, Barabbas is symbolic of the world, sin and all unrighteousness; Jesus is symbolic of truth, uprightness, and holiness. We must crucify one or the other. Which will it be? Will you crucify the old nature of sin and self, or will you join the crowd and cry, "Crucify Jesus"?

It isn't so important on which side of the Cross the people were standing **in that day**, but on which side **are you**? Are you willing to confess your sins and come out for Jesus? Jesus says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Salvation is a free gift, but we don't just coast along afterwards. Each has his own cross to bear. What is our cross? It is the place at which our own self-will comes in conflict with the will of

God as stated in His Word. It is the place where we must say like Jesus did, “Not my will, but Thine be done”. “Must I bear a cross?” you ask. When we really see ourselves as that one thief did, and really see what Jesus did for us, we will want to follow Him all the way. Some day we shall be like Him, glorified, but our eternal destiny will all depend on our view of the Christ of the cross.

Three Crosses

Three crosses on a lonely hill,
A thief on either side,
And, in between, the Son of God—
How wide the gulf—how wide!
Yet one thief spanned it with the words,
“O Lord, remember me!”
The other scoffed and turned aside
To lost eternity.
Forsaken is the hilltop now
And all the crosses gone,
But in believing hearts of men
The center Cross lives on.
And still, as when those sentinels
First met earth’s wondering view,
The presence of the Lord divides—
upon which side are you?

~Helen Franzee Bower

-Samuel M. Cassel

BIBLE HELPS

Robert Lehigh, Editor

PO Box 391

Hanover, PA 17331

United States of America