

Crucifixion, Part I

Matthew 27:31-43, Lent Evening V

March 29, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....The events which surround the death of Jesus Christ, God's own Son on the cross, are indeed sad, bring sorrow to the heart. Yet the Bible clearly lays it all out before us so that we might know the great love whereby our Savior conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil. Likewise, the Bible was "written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Rom. 15:4 Through His suffering and death we have the wonderful hope and gift of heaven. May we hear His Word this evening in faith, love, and hope. For the God of Hope gives us hope, through the suffering and death of His own Son.

I. The journey under the cross. Jesus, though innocent, had been condemned by Pontius Pilate. Pilate hypocritically washed his hands of the whole affair. The events which followed took place between 8 and 9AM Friday morning.

Jesus now became part of a procession which began at the Judgment Hall of Pilate, and ended at Calvary's Holy Mount. Through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, a Roman centurion led the procession. Following the centurion was a soldier who carried a white board, listing the invented crime of Jesus. After this were four soldiers carrying a mallet and spikes. In the middle of these soldiers Jesus carried his own cross. Behind Jesus were the two thieves with their crosses. It was a weary journey which Jesus endured under that cross, for He had been up all night, tried, mocked, scourged, beaten. He had had no sleep, and physically speaking He was too weary to even carry the cross. He fell beneath its weight. But even this was with purpose in God's good and gracious design. A foreigner named Simon, from northern Africa, the city of Cyrene, was forced by the Romans to carry the cross for Jesus. From later Scriptures we see this man and his two sons became disciple of Jesus.

After Jesus there was a great assortment of people. There was Caiaphas the high priest, scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees as well as the city mob. There was also a group of wailing women. To them Jesus said, " Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." It appears by Jesus' words, that these women mourned only at the dreadful sight of criminals who would shortly be put to death on the cross. Their tears did not flow from faith. Jesus calls them "daughter of Jerusalem", because they were daughters of the world. If they were to weep for anyone, they should weep for themselves and their children. For if they as a people did not receive Jesus during the green days of His pilgrimage on earth, what would happen during the "dry tree", namely when the presence of Jesus was withdrawn from them? Indeed God brought punishment upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D., with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This punishment reflected God's wrath against the city for putting to death the Son of Man. First the city was besieged, causing starvation among all the people within. Then the soldiers invaded the city, slaying everyone. So we are reminded that God's judgment can come upon any nation at any time for its wickedness.

After many bitter and excruciating steps, the procession of crosses reached Golgotha. The designated place of execution for criminals was outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Golgotha is Hebrew for "skull". Calvary, is the Latin word for Golgotha. From a distance this hill looks like a skull. It was a fitting place for a crucifixion. Here our blessed Savior would take our sins upon Himself, reconciling God and man. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Rom. 5:10

When we consider Jesus' journey under the cross, on this path to Calvary, let us consider ourselves. Though there is nothing we suffer that can compare to the sufferings our dear Lord endured for our sake, the Bible does teach that each believer bears his own cross. Jesus said,

"Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Mk 8:34 Your cross as a Christian then, is anything you suffer because you are a Christian. If you love Christ through faith, know without a doubt that this world will hate you. Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you." Jn 15:18 When we confess Christ, by word or deed, this world will persecute us. But there is another cost involved. To bear our cross is to deny ourselves. This means we must forsake or cut ourselves loose from anything which will interfere with our faith in Christ Jesus. We may need to forsake honor, friends, relatives, earthly possessions, or even our own life. The Christian cross sometimes makes such sacrifices necessary. But as we bear our cross in this world, we can be comforted knowing the Lord will never give us a cross too heavy to carry. Our heavenly Father knows just what size our cross needs to be. And He gives us our cross, for our own good.

II. For our sake, Jesus is nailed to the cross. God likewise gave Jesus His cross for the good of the whole world. At 9:00 A.M. Friday morning, Jesus was nailed to the cross by the soldiers and crucified. But our sins were nailed to the cross as well, in the body of Jesus. The Bible says, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Even the sins which we committed today, were there at the cross roughly 2000 years ago. And all this He did willingly, "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. 2:8

The two thieves were also at the cross, one to His right and one to His left. The prophecy of Isaiah (53:12) was fulfilled, Jesus being numbered with the criminals. And this is a fitting picture, for now before the judicial eyes of God, Jesus hung upon that cross as the greatest criminal of the world. All the crimes of man were laid upon Him, all the evil imagination of man's heart was there. All sins were paid for

there upon the cross by the holy, precious, innocent suffering and death of Jesus Christ. God's own blood paid our cost in full. Through Jesus God and man are reconciled, and our Lord is at peace with us.

We see the peace of the Lord upon us, when we hear the first words which Jesus said as He hung upon that cross. Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!" What an immense love Jesus had for His enemies! Even as the soldiers deliver to Him the most excruciating pain, Jesus prays to His heavenly Father, "Father forgive them!" It is true they did not know what they were doing. Neither the Jews nor the soldiers realized that this truly was the Son of God. Had they know this they would not have crucified the Son of Glory. But the greatest lesson here is the love of Christ for His enemies. The Bible says, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ died for His enemies, not His friends. This means that Christ died for you. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Jesus died and rose again the third day. His resurrection proves to us, that God is stronger than death, and that He gives life to our soul through faith and forgiveness. Therefore let us rejoice in Him this evening, and be comforted as we lay down our weary heads to sleep. The love of God for us has been proven in Jesus Christ, and God and man are now at peace. Therefore believe in Him by accepting His forgiveness through faith. "By grace ye are saved through faith....It is the gift of God." Amen.