

Good Friday – Jesus and the Cross

Some churches on Good Friday will solemnly focus on the sufferings of Christ, but nowhere are we encouraged to meditate morbidly upon his sufferings. The NT presents the cross in a very different way to this. The cross is never meant to make us sad or miserable but to fill us with joy so that we might go out into the world and tell everyone the amazing message of the cross that will change their lives, even if we are ridiculed or stoned or attacked or killed for doing it! In Hebrews 12:2 we read, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” That doesn’t sound in any way like an encouragement to melancholy reflection on the sufferings of Christ!

What do we in Britain call the day of Christ’s crucifixion? Sad Friday, Tragic Friday? No GOOD Friday. So what is so good about Jesus dying on a cross? Colossians 2:13-15 says “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ, having forgiven us all our sins, having wiped out the written certificate of charges against us that constantly accused us; he took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. And having stripped bare the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them through the cross.” What was so good about the cross? Paul tells us two things here that I want us to look at this morning.

1. The Writing nailed to the Cross.

Imagine that all through our lives some angelic being was writing a record of every debt that we owed to God, every sin that was never found out, every wrong deed we every got away with, every mercy God ever showed to us that we didn’t honour him for or give thanks to him for. Such a document is ‘a written record of all the decrees against us’ - of every single instance in our lives where we have broken God’s law. Such a certificate of charges has been filed against us in the courtroom of heaven and it would be pretty grim reading; and would run into pages and pages. But Paul says this has been nailed to the cross. What document was nailed to the cross? The inscription “The King of the Jews”. But this is not what Paul had in mind. Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree, he became sin for us. No, the writing nailed to the cross was Jesus himself his own body. It was as if he was the document; written on him was the the record of all the charges against every single person who would ever put their faith in Christ; all my sin, all your sin was written into his very being. Paul says he took it away, he took it upon himself, freely willingly, and as he was nailed to the cross, so it was nailed there with him, it has been taken out of the way for ever; now it can no longer ever be referred to. It has been removed out of existence and paid in full. Therefore there is no longer, and can never be, any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The writing has been nailed to the cross in Jesus, and has been removed for ever. “Martin Luther described how Satan once came to him boldly accusing and condemning him for all his sins. Luther told Satan to list them all, and even reminded him of

some he had forgotten. Then he told Satan to write across the whole list "paid in full by the blood of Jesus Christ." While Luther rejoiced in the complete payment that Jesus had made, Satan slunk away humiliated. Let us all have the same attitude as Luther and see our list nailed with Christ to the cross. We get ourselves into deep trouble when we make a copy of the list nailed to the cross and carry it around with us, and keep going over our list of sins, not realising that it was all settled once and for all on the cross."

2. The Victory Procession

The amazing thing about the cross is its effect on the powers of darkness. While Jesus was stripped bare and hung in agony on the cross, the devil and his demons no doubt mocked and laughed and jeered at his humiliation. We see Satan in those clamouring around his cross. But the last laugh was on Jesus, because as he gave up his life crying "It is finished" suddenly the tables were turned against the evil one. At that moment the spiritual powers and authorities found themselves stripped naked, just as Jesus was, and the ultimate humiliation was theirs as Jesus triumphed over them through his cross. Paul says he made a 'public spectacle of them'.

In the Roman empire people would have been quite familiar with the Roman generals returning in victory from war, in what was called 'a triumph'. First came the state officials and politicians with trumpeters and wagons loaded with the spoils and a white bull to be offered as a sacrifice to the gods, then came the defeated enemies, stripped naked and tied with ropes, as 'lictors' beat them with rods. Behind them musicians played triumphant music and pagan priests gave thanks to the gods for their victory. Behind them in a magnificent chariot with four horses came the conquering general with the crown of Jupiter on his head with all his family and servants and last of all came the victorious army in bright clean shining armour marching wearing all their military decorations, shouting, "Triumph, triumph, triumph!" while the crowds cheered and screamed. This was the sort of public spectacle that Paul has in mind here. So the seeming disgrace of the cross turned into humiliation and defeat for the powers of darkness. This was God's secret wisdom and power that Satan and his host had no idea about. Paul wrote 'None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.' But in the word of the song 'the shame of the cross is exchanged for a crown, and heaven applauds the King'. And so do we!

C H Spurgeon once preached "Jesus' cross was his triumph. Then he led captivity captive. What more do you want? Your enemy is vanquished, your sins blotted out, your death changed to life, your necessities all supplied... Oh, love the Lord, you his saints; cling to him, and make much of him; let him be all in all to you! The Lord Jesus Christ has done everything for his people, fought their battle, won their victory, and, on their behalf, celebrated the triumph in the streets of heaven, 'leading captivity captive.' What more, then, do we want? Surely Christ is enough for us." Amen?

(quotes taken from www.preceptaustin.com commentary on Colossians 2:14-15 altered)