

THE BEAUTY OF THE CROSS

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1. THE BEAUTY OF THE CROSS Based on John 12:20-33

Luther Burbank took an interest in the common field daisy that was an outcast weed despised by the farmers in the East. He crossed it with the Japanese daisy and an English daisy and produced the Shasta daisy, a flower whose beautiful bloom has grown as much as two feet in diameter, and which will last up to six weeks when cut. Burbank went on to transform other despised and worthless plants into plants of beauty and usefulness. He said, "It is my theory that there are no outcasts in nature; everything has a use, and everything in nature is beautiful if we are eager to ennoble it. Every weed is a possible beautiful flower."

His theory has been demonstrated as fact in many cases. A group of women in Pasadena years ago inaugurated the first weed show in history. It was an instant hit. People were astonished at the beauty in weeds. The word weed implies ugliness and uselessness, but as someone said, "Beauty is where you find it." Queen Anne's lace, for example, is a common weed in New England, but in California it is raised as a choice flower. The Kansas Gay

Feather, which is a mere weed in the Midwest, is a garden flower in New England. The same thing is both ugly and beautiful depending upon the perspective from which it is seen.

This is also the paradox of the cross. We could as easily consider the ugliness of the cross as the beauty of it. One is as real as the other. At one time in history the cross was the most gruesome object of horror that could be imagined. Cicero the Roman said, "The cross speaks of that which is so shameful, so horrible, that it should not be mentioned in polite society." It was so horrible to die on the cross that no Roman citizen was allowed to be crucified no matter how guilty they were. This fate was reserved for only the worst kinds of killers, renegades, and robbers. Even Scripture says, "Cursed is every man who is hanged on a tree."

No one could have ever dreamed that the cross would someday become a universal decoration and design for jewelry. You can buy a cross made of every precious metal and with diamonds or any other precious stone. This would have sounded as incredible to the ancients as the idea would sound to us of wearing a hangman's noose as a silver pin, or hanging a picture in your living room of a gas chamber. It would be ugly and morbid. Weeds being transformed into flowers is amazing, but nothing can compare with the wonder of the cross being transformed from a symbol of horror and death to a symbol of beauty and life. Jesus converted everything He touched, and one of the most radical conversions of all was the conversion of the cross.

From Calvary on the cross became a symbol treasured and loved, and Paul could say, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ." You have heard the phrase ugly as sin. If sin is the ugliest thing in the world, then that which forgives it and cleanses it has to be the most beautiful thing in the world, and that is the blood of the cross. Jesus so transformed the cross that it became the central theme of Christian preaching and song. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is even the theme of the saints as they sing in heaven.

Be the cross our theme and story
All through time and into glory.

In our text Jesus says some things that explain why the cross became a symbol of beauty. First of all we see in the cross-

I. THE BEAUTY OF ITS PURPOSE.

When Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar. The Pharisees were so amazed they said to one another in verse 19, "Look the whole world has gone after Him." Then to illustrate the truth of their impression John tells of some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. They were Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism, and to the one true God, for verse 20 says that they came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. This is the last public event in the life of Christ that John records before the cross. When Philip and Andrew told Jesus some Greeks wanted to see Him, He answered and said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

All through His ministry He had been saying that the hour has not yet come. He said to His

mother at the wedding of Cana, "Mine hour has not yet come." He said to His brethren, "My time is not yet come." And again we read, "No man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come." And once more, "No man took Him, because His hour was not yet come." Now all of the sudden when some Greeks want to see Him Jesus announces that the hour has come. The countdown in God's timetable of salvation is about to be completed, and zero hour has arrived. The central hour of all history was approaching, and when it was over the most crucial act for time and eternity would be completed, and God's purpose fulfilled. The beauty of the cross is the beauty of a finished project, plan, and purpose.

Marie Zwiller painted the picture, "The First Night Outside Paradise." Adam and Eve have been driven from Eden, and they are looking back at it. An angel with a flaming sword guards the gate. They are not looking at the angel, however, for above him illuminating the sky is the bright outline of a cross. Their eyes are lifted, and they are gazing wonderingly at that. The cross was in God's plan from the beginning. There was only one bridge that could span the gulf between paradise lost and paradise regained, and that was the cross. No one could get past the angel's flaming sword until God solved the sin problem through an atonement for all men. When the Greeks came to Jesus they were ready to receive Him as their Lord, and Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that His hour had come to fulfill the purpose of God for all men, both Jews and Gentiles. No longer would He be limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He says in verse 32, when I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself."

From the perspective of the divine plan and purpose the cross was the beautiful fulfillment. Jesus demonstrated the reality of the completed work by saying to the thief, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." The hour had come for opening the gate of paradise where man could again enter the presence of God. On the cross Jesus reconciled God and man, and made it possible for man to be forgiven and cleansed of all sin. What could be more beautiful than the gate to paradise? The cross was that gate.

This was the hour of glorification for Jesus. Others were horrified at the cross, but Jesus was glorified. It was for this purpose that He came into the world, and in fulfilling that purpose in deep humiliation God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. The cross was the hour of man's redemption and Christ's coronation. The life of Christ is beautiful, but the death of Christ is even more beautiful when we see it's purpose.

**Christ does not save men by His life,
Though that was holy, sinless, pure,
Not even by His tender love,
Though that forever shall endure;
He does not save them by His words,
Though they shall never pass away;
Nor by His vast creative power
That holds the elements in sway;
He does not save them by His works,
Though He was ever doing good-
The awful need was greater still,**

It took His death, His cross, His blood!

Author unknown

Napoleon once took a map, and pointing to the British Isles, remarked, "Were it not for that red spot I would have conquered the world." The devil can take the chart of history and point to the hour of the cross, and say the same: "Were it not for that red spot I would have conquered the world." Jesus came to satisfy His Father, to redeem man, and to defeat the devil, and He did it all on the cross. That is why it is a symbol of beauty. In verse 24 Jesus gives us another basis for the beauty of the cross, for there we see-

II. THE BEAUTY OF ITS PRODUCTIVENESS.

Jesus says that a grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die or it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit. Death is a means to productiveness in nature. Jesus uses an illustration from nature, for the Greeks would understand this. Proof from the Old Testament would not be as valuable with them as with the Jews. The Greek mystery religions made much of the reproductive cycle of nature, and so Jesus was using a very contemporary and relevant illustration.

Jesus is saying that abundance in nature requires death. A seed must be mortified to be multiplied. You can preserve a seed by putting it in a box and not planting it, but it will abide alone and produce nothing. It must be buried and perish as an individual seed if it is to grow into a beautiful fruit bearing plant. Jesus, the Creator of all nature, built right into creation the law of self-sacrifice and death as a means to glorification.

In nature He made it clear that death and abundant life are not incompatible, but in fact, death is a necessary means to life. To plant a seed is to glorify it by opening up to it all the potential God implanted in it. The same principle applied to Christ and the cross. Had He not died His potential as a Savior of all men could never have been realized. He could have been a great Jewish leader, prophet, and teacher, but not a universal Redeemer, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. St. Augustine said, "The death of Christ was the death of the most fertile grain of wheat." The great Sower sowed the most productive seed when He sowed Himself, and laid down His life. This was the seed that brought forth again the beauty of Eden. The cross was not the termination of His life, but the germination of His life.

**Faithful cross! Above all others,
One and only noble tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peers may be.**

Author unknown

The cross became the most productive tree ever. It is the very tree of life, and all of the fruits of the Spirit, and all of the fruits of Christianity in history are offshoots from the cross. The beauty of the cross is the beauty of its productiveness. Plato, the Greek philosopher, said, "The beautiful consists in utility and the power to produce some good." Who can think of anything that has produced more good than the cross of Christ? It is the basis for the

salvation of every human being who has ever lived, or who ever will. On the basis of the philosophy of the Greeks; on the basis of the principle of nature, and on the basis of the historical effects of Calvary, we can say that nothing has ever been more beautiful than the cross of Christ.

If a grain of wheat insists on remaining what it is, it will be a grain of wheat and nothing more. If Jesus had insisted on remaining the Jewish Messiah, He would have been that and nothing more. But He chose to follow the principle of the sacrifice of the lower for the production of the higher, and the fruit of this sacrifice we read about in Rev. 7:9-10, "...behold, a great multitude which no man can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb." Jesus saw these Greeks as the beginning of that innumerable multitude, and He knew the hour for His planting had come. Jesus saw the beauty of the productiveness of the cross, and so He approached it with joy. Jesus does not stop with reference to His own cross, however, for He spoke of the beauty in its purpose; in its productiveness, and then goes on to speak of-

III. THE BEAUTY OF ITS PRINCIPLE.

Just as the principle of life through self-sacrifice applies to all seeds in nature, so the principle of bearing the cross as a means to abundant life applies to all men. In verse 25 Jesus says, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." The world says that self-preservation is the law of life, but Jesus says we must go beyond this law into the higher law where self-sacrifice is the way to life. People who seek only to preserve their life and refuse to risk it, or invest it in the lives of others, abide alone like a seed in a box. They reason, "The wider one's sympathies the bigger target does one offer to the arrows of fate." If you fall in love, your chances of being hurt are greater. If you have children they are greater yet. The more you get involved with people, the more you open yourself up to wounds and heartache. The way to escape all of this is to live for self alone. Love your life only, and no other, and then your problems will be few, and your burdens light. This is the logic that leads to loss of life is what Jesus is saying. The way to abundant life is in following the principle of the cross, which is self-sacrifice.

Many people feel it is such a waste for missionaries to bury themselves in pagan lands, and give up so many of the good things of life, but from the perspective of Christ it is beautiful. The world says survival at any cost, but Jesus says sacrifice at any cost. He said, "Take up the cross and follow Me." It is the way to life. Walter C. Smith wrote,

But all through life I see a cross,
Where sons of God yield up their breath;
There is no gain except by loss,
There is no life except by death.

This principle is one that Jesus repeats more than any other: Twice in Matthew, twice in Luke, and once in Mark, and here. The beauty of this principle of the cross is that it will lead to our lives being purposeful and productive, as was that of Christ. On a lesser scale each of

us, like Christ, can fulfill God's purpose in history, and be productive of fruit that will last for eternity. To become a part of the beauty of the cross we must abandon the principle of self and safety first, and follow Christ in sacrificing ourselves for others.

H. R. Mackintosh rebukes the modern Christian with words we know are true. He writes, "I feel that the great reason why we fail to understand Calvary is not merely that we are not profound enough, it is that we are not good enough. It is because we are such strangers to sacrifice that God's sacrifice leaves us bewildered. It is because we love so little that His love is mysterious. We have never forgiven anybody at such a cost as His. We have never taken the initiative in putting a quarrel right with His kind of unreserved willingness to suffer. It is our unlikeness to God that hangs as an obscuring screen impeding our view, and we see the atonement so often through the frosted glass of our own lovelessness."

If we expect to see the beauty of the cross and be a part of that beauty, we must obey the principle of the cross, and be willing to bear the burden of the cross, and be buried for the glory of Christ. In verse 26 Jesus says we must follow Him in obedience to the principle of the cross if we hope to reign with Him in the beauty of His kingdom. By a life of self-sacrificing service each of us can magnify the beauty of the cross by continuing to fulfill its purpose, by extending its productiveness, and by demonstrating the truth of its principle.

If you have never come to the cross, and asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, I urge you to do so. Stop being a seed in a box-dead and unproductive. Die to self; yield to Christ, and blossom into life abundant. For those of us who have come to the cross, but who are still holding back and are stunted in our growth and fruitfulness, let us also come again to the cross and see it in all its beauty and potential, and commit ourselves anew to the way of the cross.

Out of my shameful failure and loss
Jesus I come.
Into the glorious gain of thy cross
Jesus I come to thee.

A little girl once spoke to her mother and asked, "Why are you so ugly mother?" The mother said, "Come here my darling and I will tell you." It was time for the secret to be told, and so she explained why her face had terribly disfiguring scars. She told her that a fire had broken out in the home when the girl was only a baby. The mother was at a neighbor's house, and when she rushed home she plunged into the flames to get to the child. She saved the child, but not without great cost to her own body. The scars she bore were the result. After the child heard this story she was overwhelmed with love, and in tears she cried out, "Mother, you are the most beautiful person in the world." Ugliness can become beautiful when you can see it from the right perspective. When we see the sacrifice of the cross and what it did for us as sinners, then we see the beauty of the cross.

2. THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS Based on John 12:23-36

Over fifteen hundred years ago, on Good Friday, Ambrose the Bishop of Milan ascended to his pulpit in the Cathedral of Milan and said to his congregation, "I find it impossible to speak to you today. The events of Good Friday are too great for human words." Centuries later the great English poet John Milton sat down to write a poem on the cross and the atonement. After 8 introductory lines he stopped, and he wrote this note which is included in his collected works: "This subject the author finding to be above the years when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished."

Here was a great preacher and a great poet who could not finish their works on the cross. Fortunately, for us and all mankind, sermons and poems and the works of men on the cross are not a necessity. What was a necessity was for Jesus to finish His work on the cross. Infinite and eternal loss would be ours if Jesus had stopped short of the cross. No words were ever more essential than the words Jesus spoke from the cross when He said, "It is finished." The cross is the greatest of all necessities. The worst that can happen if we are deprived of all other necessities is death, but because of the cross we still have eternal life. But deprive us of the cross and all is lost. The cross is no luxury. It is the greatest of necessities.

It you buy a cross at the jewelry counter, you pay a luxury tax on it. Such a cross is not The Cross. Crosses you can buy are luxuries, and they are irrelevant to life, death, sin, and salvation. The symbol of the cross often has no relationship to the cross of Christ. Some years ago controversy broke out in Russia over the new fashion of wearing a cross on a chain around the neck. Provda said that an investigation discovered that the fashion had been started by two 20 year old girls who were clerks in a store in Moscow. Neither was a religious believer, and both were members of the Young Communist League. They just found that people were eager to follow a fad, and that there was profit in it. The cross was nothing to them but a luxury completely unrelated to the necessary cross of Christ.

In the little village of Chabham near London an accountant erected a 270 dollar cross in the local pet cemetery for his Great Dane. Here again the cross was totally a luxury, and of no necessity. A man asked another why his church had a cross on it, and he replied, "Well, I don't know of a better way to decorate the top of a church. Do you?" When it costs so little to be a Christian there is a tendency to think of the cross only as a luxury and a ornament. People let the necessity of it fade from their minds, and they do not realize that they could better do without air and food than without the cross.

Whoever heard of listing the necessities of life and putting the cross at the top of the list? Yet, that is where it belongs. Without the cross there is no salvation, and without salvation life is worse than meaningless. There would be no hope, but only the guarantee that no matter how bad things are, they will be worse. We would have to face a holy God with nothing but the filthy rags of our own righteousness, and be cast into eternal darkness where

there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Unfinished sermons and unfinished poems on the cross need not disturb us, but we desperately need a finished plan of salvation. We need an atonement for our sin, and so we need the cross. That is why it is such a joy to see Jesus committing Himself to finishing His work on the cross. He tells us in this passage that the cross is a necessity for 3 reasons, each of which is vital to our salvation. We want to look at these reasons. First of all the cross is a necessity for-

I. THE MAGNIFYING OF THE FATHER.

The work of Christ was to glorify the Father, and there was no way to do this but by means of the cross. No one wants to die, however, and no one wants to die at 33, and still less does anyone want to die at 33 on a cross. Jesus was no exception. If there was any way to accomplish God's will and save man without the cross, Jesus wanted to take it. John does not tell us of Jesus in Gethsemane where He prayed, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me." John, however, shows us that the agony and struggle of Gethsemane was not just momentary, but that Jesus had wrestled with this issue for days as He approached the cross.

Verse 27 says that Jesus was troubled, and the thought entered His mind of escaping the cross. Jesus was not forced to go to the cross. It was His free and voluntary decision. He was free to ask God to save Him at any time. Even on the cross 12 legions of angels were prepared to rescue Him if He requested it. If Jesus had no alternative but to go to the cross He was not free. But He did have an alternative, and He could have avoided the cross. He could have prayed for His Father to save Him from that hour, and His prayer would have been heard.

We tend to think that the cross was automatic, and that Jesus was carried by a stream of fate to the cross. This is not so. The cross was not a necessity in the sense that it could not be avoided, but rather in the sense that there was no other way for God to triumph over sin and Satan, and thereby be glorified. It was not easy for Jesus to go to the cross, and His soul was deeply troubled. He held the destiny of every human being in His decision. His Father was counting on Him, but He was repulsed by the cross and the bearing of the sin of the world. Let no one say it is a sign of a lack of faith to be troubled in a crisis. Jesus knew of the fruit of the cross, and yet He could not avoid being troubled. No one ever faced such a decision before. He could be the saved or the Savior. He could have avoided the cross and been the only man to be saved, or He could go to the cross and be the Savior of all men. Jesus had to give up His salvation or ours. Our salvation depended upon Him not being saved from the cross. It is thrilling, therefore, to read verse 28 where Jesus yields to the Father's will and says, "Father, glorify thy name."

And then for the third time in the life of Christ God speaks from heaven and says that He has glorified it and will glorify it again. God had already glorified His name in the miracles and works of Jesus, and in His victory over Satan in temptation. He did it also in the casting out of demons, and now He is about to glorify it again in the victory of the cross. God only spoke three times directly in the life of Christ. It was at His baptism, which symbolized His humanity and death; then at His transfiguration symbolic of His deity and resurrection, and now here as He came to the point where death and resurrection are no longer to be in realm of the symbolic, but are to become historical facts. No event in history could match the

cross in bringing glory to God.

John Milton said, "The cross is the key that unlocks the gate of glory." The heavens still declare the glory of God as they did to the Old Testament saints, but the cross speaks louder than the heavens. The heavens in all their wonder glorify God by telling us of His power, wisdom, and love of order and beauty, but only the cross tells of us His love for us as sinners. The cross was as necessary as God's love. Let us never get confused and think that the cross is a basis for God's love. God does not love us because Jesus died for us, but Jesus died for us because God loves us. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The cross did not purchase God's love, but it was an expression of His love. Had God not loved us before the cross there would never have been a cross.

'Twas not to make Jehovah's love toward His people flame,
That Jesus from the throne above a suffering man became.
'Twas not the death which He endured nor all the pangs he bore,
That God's eternal love procured for God was love before. Author Unknown.

The cross magnified the Father and glorified Him in revealing His great love for man. A Mohammedan tradition pictures God at creation taking a piece of clay from which He intended to create man. He broke it in two and tossed one piece upward and said, "These to heaven and I care not." Then throwing the other piece downward He added, "These to hell, and I care not." Such is not the God of Scripture, for the cross glorifies God and exalts Him as a God who cares for all men. He had provided a way to heaven for all men. To glory in the cross with the Apostle Paul is to glorify God and magnify His love, for the glory of God is the glory of the cross. Studdert-Kennedy wrote,

God, the God I love and worship, reigns in sorrow on the Tree,
Broken, bleeding, but unconquered, very God of God to me.
All that showy pomp of splendor, all that sheen of angel wings,
Was not borrowed from the baubles that surround our earthly kings-
For thy glory is the glory of Love's loss,
And thou hast no other splendor but the splendor of the Cross.

The cross was a necessity for the magnifying of the Father, and secondly it was a necessity for-

II. THE MASTERING OF THE DEVIL.

In verse 31 Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world, and now shall the prince of this world be cast out." The greatest revolution in history was about to take place. The most powerful person to ever rule over man was about to be overthrown, and His rule of oppression was about to give way to freedom. His process of decay and death was to be reversed, and a process of life and growth was to be restored. Men were to be called back from their revolt against God to fellowship with God. Such a revolution and change of power could only be accomplished by the ultimate weapon, and that weapon was the cross.

The cross was the only battering ram that could smash through the gates of hell and

liberate those in bondage. The cross was the only weapon that could sweep the devil from his throne. The cross was Satan's Waterloo. It meant the end of his universal sway over men. The cross penetrated the kingdom of darkness and left a gaping hole through which men could escape into the kingdom of life. It was not Jesus who was the outcast on the cross. Jesus was the out-caster, and on the cross He gained the mastery over the prince of this world. In Heb. 2:14-15 we read of Jesus, "...he likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life long bondage."

Note that it was through death that Jesus conquered death and liberated those in bondage. Paul also says that the cross was the means whereby Jesus gained the mastery over the whole of the armies of evil. In Col. 2:14-15 he writes of Christ: "Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it." The greatest advantage the devil and his forces had over men was man's bondage to sin. Man was under an un-payable debt to God. It was un-payable by sinful men, for the wages of sin is death, and so all men faced the judgment of death. We tend to think that judgment is always in the future. But Jesus said the hour of the cross was the hour of the world's judgment. There will be future judgment, but when it comes it will only be a completion of the judgment begun at the cross.

The whole world was judged at the cross, for Jesus died for the sin of the whole world. All men have been judged guilty as sinners and condemned to death. This sentence was carried out at the cross where Jesus bore the condemnation of all men, and so the whole world was judged at the cross. In so doing Jesus destroyed the devil's greatest weapon against man and disarmed the devil. Now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. We are free from the bondage of sin and the fear of death. God will not demand double payment for sin from those who accept Jesus as their substitute on the cross. We have already been judged, and Jesus paid the penalty, and we are now free. None can be tried twice for the same crime.

All men can be free in Christ. They can now renounce the devil and trample them under their feet in the name of Christ, for his power was broken at the cross. Satan got man cast out of paradise and into bondage to his authority. Jesus reversed that at the cross. He cast Satan out and opened the gate to paradise again. Without the cross man would still be under bondage to the devil and death. The cross alone sets us free. The cross was a necessity for the magnifying of the Father, and for the mastering of the devil. The third reason for the necessity of the cross is that it was needed for-

III. THE MAGNETIZING OF THE SON.

Death terminates the work of all others. Death is a period for them, but for Jesus it was only a comma after which the most important part of the sentence continued. Jesus had a following before the cross, but it was nothing compared to the following He gained after He was lifted up. Jesus knew that the cross was to be His drawing power. He knew it would make Him the most powerful and unique magnet in history. He would not draw metal but men unto Himself. He said if He was lifted up He would draw all men to Himself. Verse 33

says that He said this to show by what death He was to die. In other words, the cross was an absolute necessity if Jesus was to become magnetized, and become one who could attract all men to Himself.

Bishop Simpson never understood the prophecy which pictures the church of Christ established on a mountain with all the nations flowing into it. How can the flowing be uphill? Then one day he went to the workshop of a friend where he saw him picking up steel filings with a magnet. As his friend passed the magnet over the top of the dust the filings were attracted upward and kissed the magnet. Then he understood how the cross on Mt. Calvary was the magnet drawing all the nations to it.

Alexander Maclaren said, "You demagnetize Christianity, as all history shows, if you strike out the death on the cross for a world's sin." Exalt Christ and Him crucified, however, and you attract men with a power that is unmatched. Let us be wise and learn where the drawing power is. We cannot bring men into the kingdom by pushing and pulling. Debate and argument will not budge most men. The magnetic and attractive power of the cross is the key power of Christianity. Point to the cross if you will see men drawn to Christ. His teachings may leave men cold, and His miracles may not persuade, but His cross will draw all men.

Listen to the testimony of Goethe in his Confessions Of A Beautiful Soul: "I leaned on a little table beside me, and I hid my tear stained face in my hands, and who could ever express even in the dimmest way the experience that came to me then? A secret influence drew my soul to the cross where Jesus once expired. It was an inward leaning-I cannot give it any other name-and inward leaning like that which draws the heart to its beloved in its absence. As my soul drew near to Him who became mine and died upon the Cross, in that moment I knew what Faith meant; and in that moment my spirit received a wholly new power of uplifting."

Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord. Silently and inwardly the cross draws men upward to God. The Holy Spirit can use the cross to convict and convince when nothing else will be effective. Jesus knew that the cross was necessary if He were to become the magnetic pole of history. He knew that only the cross could make him the center of attraction and thereby draw men to receive the benefits which He purchased for them by His death. Way back in John 3:14-15 Jesus said to Nicodemus "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

The serpent in the Old Testament was lifted up on a pole so that all who looked at it lives who were bitten by the serpents attacking the people of Israel. If the sting of death was to be overcome, a look at the serpent on the pole was a necessity. Jesus says he also must be lifted up like that serpent so that all who are under the attack of that old serpent the devil may also look and live. The cross is the antidote for all the poison of sin. It is on the cross that Jesus is most attractive, for there He becomes the great physician capable of healing all diseases and forgiving all sin.

High on the Cross the Savior hung,

**High in the heavens he reigns;
Here sinners, by the old serpent stung
Look and forget your pains.**

**Come then to this Physician,
His help he'll freely give;
He makes no hard condition,
Tis only-look and live.
Author unknown**

Look to the cross and you will be attracted to Christ, for the Cross magnetized Him, and gave Him unsurpassed drawing power. As the beauty of the flower attracts all who have the capacity to appreciate beauty, so the cross attracts all who, by God's grace, have the capacity to appreciate the beauty of sacrificial love, and the beauty of victory over all that is evil.

Let us keep ever near the cross, for a magnet can pass on the power of attraction. If you touch a needle with a magnet it can take on the power of attraction. Christ is the master magnet, but if we keep near the cross and the Christ of the cross we too can have drawing power to bring others to Christ. May God keep us, by His Spirit, even near the cross, for it is a necessity for the magnifying of the Father; the mastering of the devil, and the magnetizing of the Son.

3. THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS Based on I Cor. 1:18-31

The mayor and other dignitaries were looking into the vast pit dug for the new hospital to be built. The town half-wit came up and gazed into the pit, and asked the mayor what he was going to do with this big hole. The mayor decided to humor him and said, "We are going to round up all the fools in town and pile them in there." The half-wit thought a moment and then said, "Whose gonna be left to cover um up?"

Even a half-wit knows that in some sense all men are fools, but I have to confess I never really realized to what degree this is true until I studied what the Bible says about fools and foolishness. The subject is so vast, and the evidence is so overwhelming that only a fool

would deny that all men are fools. This does not sound very nice, however, and so it is wise for us to see there is a positive side to being a fool. So much so, that Paul in I Cor. 3:18 urges Christians to be fools, and in 4:10 he says, "We are fools for Christ."

To add to the paradox of being a Christian fool, Paul in this passage of I Cor. 1:18-31 glories in Christian folly, and links almost everything of Christian nobility to foolishness. He writes of the foolishness of the cross; the foolishness of wisdom, and the foolishness of preaching, and most shocking of all, for it seems to border on blasphemy, Paul even writes in verse 25 of the foolishness of God. Then he says in verse 27 that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And the foolish things are the Christians.

So what it comes down to is this: All men are in some sense fools, but since all are not fools in the same way, we have to make a distinction between worldly fools and wise fools. The worldly fools are those who feel so wise they have no need of light from God. These fools say in their hearts that there is no God. Man is the measure of all things, and He determines His own destiny. They say science and human philosophy is all we need to produce a utopia. We do not need the Bible or God to create our own heaven.

The wise fool, in contrast, recognizes that human wisdom is so limited, and so there is a need for wisdom from above. They are seen as fools from the point of view of the worldly fool. God, however, sees them as wise, and so the two perspectives make them wise fools—that is people who seem to choose foolishness and trust in foolishness, but because it is the foolishness of God, they are wise. So what we have here is a study in relativity. The worldly wise who reject God's revelation are, in relation to eternal truth, fools. Those, however, who choose the way of God are seen as fools, in relation to the way of the world, but in fact, they are the truly wise. Type one fools seem wise to men, but are fools to God. Type 2 fools seems fools to men, but are wise to God. So wisdom and folly are relative to whose perspective you are seeing them from.

Paul's whole battle with the Corinthians was to get them to stop being wise before the world and fools before God, and to reverse that to being fools before the world, and wise before God. The goal of the Christian is to become a wise fool. The Corinthians were missing this mark because they came from a long tradition of philosophers who had all the answers. As Greeks they were considered a wise people. The result was, the church was in chaos because of all the pride of worldly wisdom. Some thought Paul was the best. Others that it was Peter, and still others that Apollos was number one. Some said they were all wrong, and we follow Jesus only. The church was divided because, in their pride, they were deciding what was best. They were also picking and choosing the gifts they felt were best. In pride Christians can set themselves up as the judge of what is wise and what is foolish, and in so doing they make their human judgment, rather than God's revelation, the basis for their value system, and this is folly.

If human reason is going to be the standard of judgment, then the whole plan of God is nothing but foolishness, and nothing is more foolish than the foolishness of the cross. Just look at the evidence of its folly.

1. The innocent dying for the guilty.
2. The folly of having a way out and not taking it.

3. The folly of having power to destroy your enemy, but letting them destroy you.
4. The folly of surrender to a foe you could easily conquer.
5. The folly of suffering when comfort and pleasure is at your command.
6. The folly of having the power to do miracles, and yet do nothing.
7. The folly of having an eloquent defense and yet not opening your mouth.
8. The folly of going to hell when you never had to leave heaven.
9. The folly of volunteering for a job that is certain death.
10. The folly of being God and yet letting mere men push you around.
11. The folly of forgiving those most worthy of judgment.

We could go on, but I am sure you get the point. The cross is pure foolishness from a rational point of view. It is nonsense, and a ridiculous way for God to go about saving man from the perspective of the worldly wise. An intelligent lost man is scandalized by the cross. He feels that only fools can be Christians if they buy into the foolishness of the cross. When Paul gave his testimony and told of the death and resurrection of Christ, the procurator Festes interrupted him in Acts 26:24 and said to him, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane." Paul responds in verse 25, "I am not insane...What I am saying is true and reasonable. So what we have here is the worldly fool meeting the wise fool, and each fool feels the other is a fool indeed. And the point is, both are right from their point of view.

The village screwball met a friend coming down the sidewalk, and he said, "Tell me which is the other side of the street." The friend said, "The other side is over there" pointing to the other side. "That's funny," said the screwball, "That's what I thought too, but I was just over there and the lady there said it was over here." Such a paradox of both sides being the other side can drive a screwball batty, but this is the paradox of life. Both sides of the argument of what is wise are fools from the perspective of the other side, and Paul's advice then is to be a fool for Christ. Be willing to seem like a fool for the sake of Christ. We are so concerned about being accepted that we do not like to be seen as a fool. But the more concerned we are about being respectable to the world, the less we are concerned about being faithful to the wisdom of God.

We are so easily conformed to the world, and we lose our sense of mission which is to confront the world with the foolishness of God.

In the eyes of the wise
Don't be cool, be a fool.
It may be a loss,
And you'll suffer pain,
But this is the cross
That leads to gain.
Gain that goes beyond the worldly clever,
For it is gain that lasts forever.

We are called, not just to be April fools, but perpetual fools. If we never identify with the foolishness of the cross, and always conform to the wisdom of the world, we will still be fools, but not the kind we are called to be. Christians are not beyond the risk of being

worldly fools. A pastor was leaving town, and he told the church secretary he did not have his sermon titles yet for the bulletin, so she could just put in something like, the pastor speaks. What about the evening service she asked? He said he was speaking from Psa. 14 which begins with the words, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." The pastor told her to just make up a title. So she did, and when the bulletin came out it said-

**Morning-The Pastor Speaks.
Evening-What The Fool Said.**

In the light of our study, however, it does not need to be seen as embarrassing, for Paul calls himself a fool for Christ, and his ministry for Christ he calls, the foolishness of preaching.

Someone said, "You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but most of the time they will make fools of themselves." Warren Hammer said, "No woman really makes a fool of a man-she merely gives him the opportunity to develop his natural capacities." A young preacher traveling with a Gospel team preached to a Wisconsin congregation, and after the service a Scandinavian saint grabbed his hand and said, "That was a wonderful message." Trying to be humble he responded, "It was just Jesus." "No" said the saint, "It wasn't that good." It can be foolish to attribute all we do to the Lord, for if it was the Lord it would be a whole lot better.

Pastor Wally Klandrud of Phoenix tells of his first hospital call. He wanted it to be perfect, and so he studied all the do's and don'ts of hospital visitation. Nervously he entered the patients room. There was a woman in her eighty's, and the nurse had told him she was senile. He was just about to share some words of comfort when she leaped up on the bed without a stitch of clothing. He tried to keep his composure, and asked her if he could help. "Gotta go to the bathroom," she responded. The pastor ran into the hall way to look for a nurse, but none was in sight. He was in a panic, and ran back to his impatient patient and said, "Mam, there is nobody out there, but I'll be back next week." As he fled out the door he heard her scream, "Young man I can't wait till next week!"

True stories like this are endless that reveal the fallibility that can happen even when we desire sincerely to be tools of God. Instead of tools, God gets fools. Unfortunately, not every foolish thing Christians do is funny. We have studied Peter and his many mistakes, and one of them was that he felt it was foolish for Jesus to talk about dying. The Christian can see the foolishness of the cross just like the world sees it, and that is what Peter was seeing. God's ways are so different than man's, that if we get caught up in the wisdom of the world, even as Christians, the ways of God will seem foolish and impractical.

Pastor Vajda of St. Louis tells of his organist who would always slip down the back stairs to the basement just before the sermon began, and then return just before it ended. During one of his Lenten services as the organ ceased, he stepped to the pulpit and began with a gripping illustration. At the height of a battle in the Civil War a young soldier thought the command was to charge. He leaped out of the trench with the regimental flag and started running across no mans land toward enemy fire. When the captain saw that other soldiers were following the flag bearer, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Come back here you

fool!" As he paused, everyone could hear the clatter of footsteps as the organist came flying back up the steps to take her place at the organ. That was not his intention at all, but he notes that she never again left the organ during a sermon.

This is in essence what Paul is saying to the Corinthians-"Get back here you fools. You are following the way of worldly wisdom which to God is foolishness. Come back to the foolishness of God which is true wisdom. It is wiser to let the world think of you as fools, than to let God think of you as fools." Somebody is always going to have you on their fools list, but only a fool would choose to be on God's list. Be a fool for Christ, and be on God's list of those who are truly wise. The truly wise are those who are fools for Christ, and care about people who don't care about anyone but themselves. Paul poured his life out for people who were self-centered and worldly wise, and they only rejected him and sought to kill him. Paul still cared and did all he could to win them to Christ by the foolishness of preaching.

Billy Graham tells of the first time he ever preached. It was in a little Baptist church in Florida. 32 people were there, and he thought he had plenty to say. He had four sermons he thought were 40 to 50 minutes each. But he was so nervous he preached all four sermons in 8 minutes. That was the foolishness of preaching. But one little boy in the congregation received Christ, and he realized God can use even our foolishness to accomplish the wisest things that can happen on earth. He tells of one of his evangelists who spoke at a university in Costa Rica. A student came up after and said she was a Marxist, and she laughed and scorned the message he was preaching. The evangelist said, "Before you leave do you mind if I pray for you?"

What folly, to ask if you can pray for one who is mocking you. She was shocked and said, "I guess it couldn't do any harm." So he began to pray, and as he did tears of compassion began to trickle down his cheeks. When he finished, the Marxist was in tears also. She said, "No one ever cared enough for me to shed a tear. I'll listen to what you have to say." She heard the Gospel and received Christ as her Savior.

This is the kind of fool Jesus wants. He wants those who will be fool enough to care about people who don't deserve to be cared about. It is foolishness to waste your life caring about lost people. It is foolishness to leave the 99 and risk injury, and who knows what abuse, to go after that one stupid sheep who has gone astray. Worldly wisdom would say stay with the odds; don't risk yourself for the stray. But those who are fools for Christ, who understand the foolishness of the cross, will go, for it is this kind of foolishness that saved them. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. God had the power to condemn the world, and let His Son go free. Instead He let Him die so the guilty might go free. This is the foolishness of God, and the foolishness of the cross. William Stidger wrote,

I saw God bear His soul one day
Where all the earth might see
The stark and naked heart of Him
On lonely Calvary.

There was a crimson sky of blood

**And over head a storm;
When lightening slit the clouds
And light engulfed His form.**

**Beyond the storm a rainbow lent
A light to every clod,
For on that cross mine eyes beheld
The naked soul of God.**

No man would be such a God for they consider it foolishness to suffer for the folly of others. If God was not foolish from man's perspective there would be no cross, and no way for man to be forgiven and reconciled to God. Thank God for such foolishness. All Christian celebrations are really celebrations of the foolishness of God. He had the freedom to just forget fallen man, but He chose to send His Son that they might be redeemed. To magnify the folly of God's plan, it is all based on grace. He pays a high price, and then instead of reaping a huge profit, he gives away the salvation he purchased for free. Jesus could have been the richest king that ever lived. He could have made a mile high palace with streets of gold and walls filled with jewels. He could have had heaven on earth had he charged as little as a thousand dollars each. Every living soul would slave in order to save that much to get into the kingdom.

There is no such plan, however, for salvation is free, and whosoever will may come and drink freely from the fountain of life. Jesus had the greatest money maker of all time at His fingertips, and He gave it away. From the worldly perspective this was nothing but sheer folly. But without the foolishness of the cross there is no answer to the folly of this fallen world. A Polish Jew who had been converted to Christ was asked how he could see his people killed and still believe in the love of God. He saw the blood of his dearest friends stain the streets of his town, but this was his response, "As I looked at that man upon the cross I knew I must make up my mind once and for all, and either take my stand beside him, and share in his undefeated faith in God, or else fall finally into a bottomless pit of bitterness, hatred, and unutterable despair." He was saying, unless there is a God willing to suffer for this lost world, there is no hope, and life has no meaning. But if there is such a God, as we see in Jesus on the cross, then nothing evil can do can rob us of hope.

This is why men like Jim Elliot risk their lives and die to get the message of the cross to the pagan world. He said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." May God help us to be fools for Christ and share with this lost world the foolishness of the cross.

4. THE CRUELTY OF THE CROSS Based on John 19:1-16

Pierre VanPaasen once had an interview with Marshal Lyauty, but the former procounsel of the French Republic in Morocco. VanPaasen asked him what he would have done had he been in Pilate's place. Lyauty, after describing what a trouble maker Jesus had been, endorsed Pilate's action. "You mean your excellency is of the opinion that Pilate was justified in putting Jesus to death?" he asked. "Positively," was his reply. In fact, he said he would not have waited until Jesus had infected the crowds in the capital, but would have had him put before a firing squad in his home province up North in Galilee.

This may sound like a cruel attitude, and it is, but it would have been far less cruel than what Jesus actually did have to endure. Marshal Lyauty's plan would have been swift and merciful, but the way Pilate bungled things Jesus had to go through intense torture that was totally unnecessary. A close look at what Jesus went through is so horrible, revolting, and pathetic, that many feel that this aspect of the cross should be skipped over. After all, if we are opposed to violence on TV, why promote it from the pulpit?

Nothing could be more violent than the scenes of Christ's suffering. The cruelty of what He endured if shown in its stark reality would horrify people, and give them nightmares. People are not interested in being disturbed, and so the cruelty of the cross is played down. People want things more pleasant when they come to worship. The beauty of the cross is fine, but the cruelty of the cross is taboo. It forces people to face up to the undesirable fact of their own sin and depravity. It gets rather distasteful for the sophisticated person when he confronted by the truth that it was his sin that helped produce the cruelty of the cross. Every person is partly responsible for the cruelest crime that ever took place on this planet. We are all accomplices.

People like to cover up the pit of their evil nature and be entertained with trivial pleasantries, and not be made to look at the awful cost God had to pay to save them. There is truth in this little limerick:

There was a clergyman out in Dumont
Who kept tropical fish in his font.
Although it surprises
The babes he baptizes,
It seems to be just what they want.

If we get just what we want, we will certainly not be looking at the cruelty of the cross. If we get what we want, we will take all the benefits of Calvary, and leave the burdens to Christ. C. T. Studd put this attitude in poetry.

Mine be the pomp and glory
And Thine be Calvary!
Give me the ease of living-

The scourge, the thorns for Thee!

**Ah, how we prate of threading
The path the Master trod-
Laurel and gold our portion;
Thorns were the crown of God!**

**Mine the respectful gester;
Thine be the bloody thong!
Mine be the titled leisure-
And Thine the jeering throng!**

**Here, and we call Him "Master"!
Our hands are pale and fine,
Too good for blood and wounding-
His blood ran down like wine!**

**Mine be the chant and candle;
Thine be the pain and loss;
I am too good for trial!-
Thine, judgment and a cross!**

Subconsciously all of feel this way to some degree. We hate to face up to the fact that our sin is partly responsible for what Jesus endured. We hate to look at the price we made Him pay. We feel guilty because we not only have not resisted unto blood, but we have hardly entered the battle at all. We enjoy being at ease in Zion, and this may be disturbed if we look too closely at the suffering Jesus endured. Taking up the cross and following Him will no longer be an invitation to a pleasant afternoon hike in the beauties of God's creation. It will be a command to face the fury of the forces of hell, and if need be, die for righteousness. It is easy to understand why people get squeamish when you approach the horrors of Christ's sufferings, but God certainly expected us to face this scene squarely. The Gospels devote more space to the suffering and crucifixion of Christ than to any other event of His life.

The picture is gruesome, and the language is brutal, but there is no way to be faithful to the Scripture and bypass the cruelty of the cross. When we say the cross we are including all that Jesus went through in his trial that led to the cross. Jesus was half dead before he ever reached Calvary. In Luke 23:27-28 we read that he was followed by women who wailed and lamented. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." He went on to tell of the judgment that would fall on the Jews because of their rejection of him.

It is of interest to note that nowhere in the Gospels is a woman ever an enemy of Christ. Nowhere does a woman ever add to the cruelty Jesus suffered. Women are always in a positive relation to Jesus. Even Pilate's wife warned him about condemning Jesus. Masculine brutality is responsible for the suffering of Jesus, while the feminine heart is always sympathetic to him. Nevertheless, Jesus was not pleased or helped by their tears, and he told them so. He told them to direct their tears to their own judgment, and not his.

We need to keep this in mind lest as we examine the cruelty of the cross we think we are accomplishing anything if we become emotional and shed tears over the suffering of Christ. Studdart Kennedy said in his own stinging way, "The last thing in the world that Christ was or wanted to be was pathetic. The last thing He wanted to do was set souls sailing on a sea of tears to no where in particular. Emotions are like shadows passing over corn fields; they come and go, and come again, and leave no trace behind. Christ wants more than our tears. He wants our very selves, and the very fibre of our beings yielded up to Him."

If we feel anything as we look at the cruelty of the cross it ought to be the feeling of repentance for our sin, and a feeling that we are unworthy servants unfit to untie His shoelace let alone be a joint-heir with Him of the unsearchable riches of God. We cannot look at every detail of the sufferings of Christ, but we want to look at some major causes of His pain under two categories. We want to look first at-

I. THE CRUELTY OF HIS PRIVATE TORTURE.

In verse 1 Pilate had Jesus scourged in private. This was a whipping with what the Romans called the "horrible flagellum," or the horrible whip. It was made of long leather thongs studded with pellets of lead and sharp pieces of bone. It literally tore a man's back to strips. Roman law prescribed no maximum number of strokes as Jewish law did, and the result was that many died from this torture alone.

Josephus tells of how he had some of his opponents scourged until their insides was visible. How bad Jesus looked we do not know for sure, but we know it was no mere matter of red welts. Pilate's motive for having Jesus whipped was to appeal to the pity of the crowd. He brought Jesus out and said, "Behold the man." He was saying that they should behold this poor bleeding, bruised, and wretched man. "Can you look at such a pathetic sight and still persist in demanding His crucifixion?" If Jesus had not been severely beaten, this appeal would have no weight. Luke 23:16, 22 clearly reveal Pilate's plan. He said, twice with determination, "I will chastise Him and let Him go." But the Jewish leaders, like blood thirsty hyenas ruined his plan, and refused to moved by pity. They cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

This meant that the beating of Jesus was for nothing. His back was torn to shreds as a part of Pilate's plot to outwit the Jews, and it failed. Jesus would have been better off if Pilate would have yielded to the Jews without a fight. His persistent efforts to resist their will only led to more suffering for Christ. So terrible was the sight of a man who had been scourged that for the first five centuries Christian artists refused to paint this scene in the life of Christ.

In verse 2 we read that the soldiers put a crown of thorns on His head. This was not primarily for torture, but for mockery, but the pain of it would be intense. It was mere sport for the soldiers. They mocked Him as King of the Jews. They would not have dared to do so in front of the angry crowd of waiting Jews, but in privacy they released their anti-Semitic hatred upon Jesus. The private torture of Jesus was mostly all the doing of Gentiles. The Jews were not interested in beatings and thorns. They just wanted Jesus to be dead. The Gentiles were not anxious to see Him die, but they enjoyed the sport of sadistic torture. So

we see that the Gentiles were responsible for His torture, and the Jews were responsible for His death.

The crown of thorns was the work of Gentiles. Even if they were gentle, which is highly unlikely, the thorns would pierce His skin. One thorn in the finger could be painful, and so you can imagine the pain of dozens of them pressed into your head. The only thing beautiful that could come out of such a scene as this is the beauty of the legend concerning the robin. The robin seeing the agony of Christ sought to ease His pain by plucking a thorn from His head. In so doing, she died her breast red in the blood of Christ. An unknown poet records the legend in poetry.

**Bearing His cross while Christ passed forlorn,
His God-like forehead by the mock crown torn,
A little bird took from that crown one thorn
To soothe the dear Redeemer's throbbing head;
The bird did what she could; His blood it's said,
Down-dropping, dyed her tender bosom red,
Since then no wanton boy disturbs her nest,
Weasel, nor wild cat, will her young molest,
All sacred deem that bird of ruddy breast.**

Such legends as this develop, no doubt, to try and offset the cruelty of the biblical scene. They can be of value, for example, if every time you see a robin you think of the crown of thorns and what Jesus suffered, and then give thanks. There is a painting in Milan which represents a little cherub trying to feel one of the thorns with his finger. There is a look of wonder in his face, for he has been told it means agony, but he cannot feel it. He belongs to a different world, and sin and suffering are incomprehensible to him. Even for us who experience pain it is difficult to imagine what Jesus suffered. For all eternity He had been adored by all the hosts of heaven, and now He stands bleeding and bruised, and being mocked by brutal man. This was the coronation of the King of sorrows. The crown of thorns symbolized His bearing the curse of sin, for thorns were the result of man's fall, and all through the Old Testament they symbolized the curse of sin. Verse 3 says they also struck Jesus with their hands as they mocked them, and the other Gospels indicate other strikes against Him also. But now we move into the second category which is-

II. THE CRUELTY OF HIS PUBLIC TORTURE.

We are familiar with the nail pierced hands, and the spear wound in the side, but these physical pains may not have been as cruel as the psychological pains Jesus had to bear. The mockery would be more bitter to one who loved as Jesus did, and who knew the value of every eternal soul. That is why he told the women to weep for themselves and their children. The really sad thing as Jesus saw it was the folly and cruelty of men. They cried out "Let his blood be upon us and our children." They demanded his crucifixion with passionate hatred and mockery, and certainly this was a bitterness for Jesus beyond our comprehension.

**How bitter that cup
No heart can conceive,**

**Which Jesus drank up
That sinners might live.**

If we put all the mockery together we see Jesus was constantly abused. The Scripture says that the chief priests mocked him, with the scribes and elders. The soldiers mocked him, and those who passed by reviled him, and even the thieves crucified with him railed on him, and cast the same abuse in his teeth. The cruelty of the tongue was at its worst at the cross. We say that sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me, but the fact is, it is easier to bear the pain of sticks and stones than it is the deep cuts of the mocking tongue. All the pain of the human tongue was poured into the cup Jesus had to drink.

Then in verse 23 we read of another cruelty that we seldom think of, but which was the depth of disgrace and humiliation. The soldiers took his garments and divided them. All of the Roman writers on the method of crucifixion agree that the victims were stripped naked.

**All rights denied,
Naked, Christ died.**

The Gentiles at his cradle brought him gifts, but now at his cross they take away the last of his possessions. Jesus was stripped of the last shred of dignity he had left, and he was exposed that he might bear the full shame of our sin.

**His scared limbs they stretch, they tear
With nails they fasten to the wood;
His sacred limbs exposed and bare,
Or only covered with His blood.**

The shame of nakedness was one of the first results of sin when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. All men must face the judgment of God naked with all their shame exposed, and, therefore, when Jesus died for all men He took upon himself their nakedness and shame also. He did so that we might be clothed in the garments of his righteousness, and be able to stand before God clothed and unashamed. Clothing was the first gift of God to sinful man. Clothing represents grace, and all grace was removed from Christ in the cruelty of the cross. K. Schilder in his famous book Christ Crucified writes, "He was made a public spectacle in His nakedness on the accursed cross. He could not forget that He had fewer rights than Adam. Adam's was still the right to conceal himself, and Christ's awareness of His own shame in part prompted the plaint: My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

There are other cruelties He suffered also, such as the contempt shown in those spitting on Him, but we do not have the time to look at everything. What we have seen is sufficient to demonstrate that the cross Jesus bore for us was the most cruel and painful experience ever endured. Others have been tortured as much, and more, but none ever suffered as much for no one else ever suffered so innocently, and with such love and sensitivity, and for the sins of all mankind.

Richard Jefferies tells of a boy who stood before a painting of the crucifixion. His feelings were hurt as he looked at the cruel nails and the unfeeling spear. He looked at the picture for

a long time and then turned and said, "If God had been there, He would not have let them do it." But the paradox of it all is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. God was not only there and letting it happen, but He was suffering with the Son for our benefit. Isa. 53:4-5 says, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows....But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."

God took all that physical pain, mental misery, and soul suffering, and turned it into a blessing for every person who accepts Jesus as Savior. This great paradox of Jesus using the world's worst act of cruelty for the world's greatest blessing assures us that no matter how much we suffer in life that which is unjust, senseless, and meaningless, God will turn it into ultimate blessing. If God turned the cruelty of the cross into a universal blessing, we need never doubt that verse of Paul in Rom. 8:28 that says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Even the cruelty of the cross was made to lead to the ultimate beauty of redemption of the lost out of every tribe, tongue and nation who will praise Jesus for ever as King of Kings. God always has the last word, and no evil of men can prevent His final victory. Therefore, do not add to the cruelty of the cross by refusing the salvation Jesus purchased there for us. Receive Him as your Savior and enjoy His victor forever.

5. THE PEACE OF THE CROSS Based on Matt. 5:9

A traveler in the South found himself stranded in a small town on Saturday night. Wondering around, he noticed there were two Baptist churches. He couldn't understand it, so he asked someone why it was that such a small town would have two Baptist churches? The local man said, "They just couldn't agree. One of the churches believed that Pharaoh's daughter found Moses in the bull-rushes. The church claims, that's what she says. Man has always been a creature of strife, even there is nothing really to fight about. Horace, the ancient writer, refers to a controversy in his day as to whether goats hair should be called lana or wool, and he says of the contender, "He wrangles about goats wool, and donning his armor, fights for trifles." Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet writes of one, "Thou! Why thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a hair more, or a hair less, in his beard than thou hast? Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes."

Thomas Jefferson, who associated with a great many men, spoke out of experience when he said, "An association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which never yet existed." Even the 12 Apostles argued and disputed about who was going to be the greatest. It ought not to be surprising then that professor Quincy Wright in his book, A Study Of War, shows that in the 461 years from 1480 to 1941 various nations had this record: Great Britain 78 wars, France 71, Spain 64, Russia 61, Austria 52, Germany 23, China 11, Japan 9, and the U. S. 13, plus 110 wars with the Indians within the U. S. Certainly

it is not necessary to labor the point that peacemakers are desperately needed. They are the rarest creatures ever to see the light of day on this planet of strife.

Nevertheless, peacemakers have had far more power than warmakers. Practically all the peace treaties ever signed have been broken. They have been ineffective, but there is one peace that was established that is still in effect, and has been more powerful than all the wars of history combined. It is the peace of the Prince of Peace-the peace of the cross. The greatest conflict in history was and is the conflict between God and man. The consequences of this conflict were far more dreadful than all the horrors of human warfare. In fact, this was the source of human strife. Jesus became the peacemaker of all peacemakers by reconciling God and man. In Col 1:20-22 Paul writes of this reconciliation. "...Making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him..."

The peace of the cross is the only universal and everlasting peace ever established, and all through the centuries in every part of the world men have been able to say with the Apostle Paul, "Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The peace of the cross not only reconciled men of faith with God, but it became the basis for peace on earth among men of good will which the angels sang of at the birth of the Prince of Peace. The cross has ended so much hostility that there is no way to measure its influence in history. It has broken down walls that all the bombs and bullets of all the wars ever fought could not dent, let alone demolish.

Paul writes of the great power in the peace of the cross in Eph. 2:13-14. "But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility." Jesus demolished every wall that separates men, and made peace possible for all men with God and each other, if they will come to the cross. Billy Graham wrote, "In regard to racial peace let me say that for true Christians there is no race problem! The ground is level at the cross and there are no second-rate citizens with God."

This is true in every other area of conflict also. The peace of the cross is powerful enough to solve any conflict if men will come to the cross. The peace of the cross is also proof that both sides in a conflict can be satisfied, and both can win if one is willing to pay the price of being a peacemaker. It doesn't cost anything to be a peace lover or a peace talker, but to be a peace maker calls for sacrifice. Jesus had to humble himself to the degrading level of dying like a criminal, but He did so, to be a peace maker. No conflict can ever end in a satisfying peace unless one of the contenders humbles himself. If Jesus had not done so, as the innocent party in the conflict between God and man, there would be eternal enmity with no solution. Jesus had to lose for us to win. The same principle operates in our society, and in our homes. A man wrote,

Because my wife and I are loathe
To let a quarrel last too long,
It's over just as soon as both
Of us admit that I am wrong.

This may be funny, but it is true. It may even be that the least guilty in a conflict has to pay the cost of peace, and humble himself. This is what the peace of the cross is all about. The innocent have a greater responsibility to be peace makers than the aggressors. With God and man there was no choice. It was up to God, or nothing could bring peace. It is true among men also. The aggressor and the man of strife is far less capable of bringing about peace than the meek and poor in spirit, for he is a victim of sin and is in bondage. The more free a man is because of victory over sin, the more responsible he is for being a peace maker.

John Chrysostom said, "If the peace makers are they who do not contend one with another, but reconcile those that are at strife, they are rightly called sons of God, seeing that this was the chief employment of the Only Begotten Son, to reconcile things separated, to give peace to things at war." We can hardly claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace if we are not striving to become peace makers. Therefore, we want to look at some things that will characterize us if we are fulfilling this most important role in a world of strife. The first thing will take an entire message it is so important, and it is-

I. DIPLOMACY

We have diplomats all over the world whose job it is to promote our country and prevent hostility. They have to be men or women who can foresee conflict and head it off. Abraham had this quality, and saw that his men and Lot's men were headed for a clash, so he said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between me and thee," and he very diplomatically suggested he move elsewhere, and he gave him the best choice. A man less wise would have said, if you can't keep your men in line Lot, my men will run you off the land. Then the battle would begin.

Diplomacy has been defined as the art of saying, "nice doggie," until you find a rock. There is truth to this, but it is also true that one may want to say, "nice doggie until the dog likes you, and becomes, in fact, a nice and friendly dog. That is being a peace maker. The peace maker uses all of the other attitudes of the beatitudes to gain peace. Because he is poor in spirit and humble he does not fight in pride, but is willing to sacrifice and even suffer if the advancement of others extends the kingdom of God. Because they are comforted in their mourning, they seek to be a comfort to others who mourn, and strive to bring peace into strife-filled lives. In meekness they do not feel the need to dominate or destroy opposition, but rather, to build up and unite. They hunger and thirst for what is right, and not for their brothers blood, and in mercy they even forgive the injustice and folly of others to bring about the peace of reconciliation.

The peace maker will not always succeed in making peace, but he will always be a success, for in being a peace maker he is being what God wants him to be. Paul says in Rom. 12:18, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Many times we ignore the clear teaching of the Bible, and feel obligated to be God's protector; so we stir up strife over all kinds of issues. We need to pray with Alexander Pope:

Let not this weak, unknowing hand

**Presume thy bolts to throw,
And deal damnation around the land
On each I judge thy foe.**

Your response to pressure can deeply influence another. A wife in Michigan came to Christ before her husband. He resisted the Gospel, but one day he dropped his tool box in the living room and tools spilled out. Before her conversion he knew his wife would have raised the roof. Now she was undisturbed, and she helped him pick up the tools. That did it; it was the turning point. Her peace made him want to know the Lord of peace, and he too opened his life to Christ. She became a peace maker by receiving into her own life the peace of Christ.

Many are the records of history that show Christians trying to serve the Lord with a zeal without knowledge. Diplomacy is the art of making peace before the war even begins. It is preventative rather than curative, if possible. A peace maker is quick to confess his own faults and blunders before someone else does. He is one who is aware of the power of humility. Even non-believers have proven the peace making power of humility. Voltaire visited England in 1727 when feelings ran high against the French. Angry crowds gathered around him and shouted, "Kill him, hang the Frenchman!" Voltaire aware that his skin was at stake stood on the curb stone and cried out, "Englishmen! You want to kill me because I am a Frenchman. Am I not already punished enough in not being an Englishman?" The crowd applauded and escorted him home in safety. An angry word meant possible death, and a certain beating. Diplomacy, or tact, we might call it, disarmed them, and he became the victor through peace.

Diplomacy can be clever tricks and deceit, but it can also be just honest humble kindness. Jesus employed it constantly in His patient teaching of His quarreling disciples. Paul used it over and over again to keep peace in the churches. We live in a day when men have lost patience with the methods of diplomacy. The claim is that no one is listening, and everybody is indifferent, and so you just have to smash everything to pieces to get attention. George Bernard Shaw said, "The only way to say anything effectively now a days is to say it in an irritating way." The peace maker is out, for he is weak and ineffective. The man of the hour is the man who gets attention at any price, but this is old stuff, and when he goes out of style again it will be the peace maker who will still be called the son of God. He will be laboring to undo the damage done by the warmaker. Wherever there is any form of conflict the peace maker is the most relevant person on the scene.

To say that the church has no place in the race conflict, war, politics, and strife of all kinds, is to fly in the face of Christ who says the Christian who is in these spheres of life with the right attitude with the peace maker is among the happiest persons on earth. You cannot be a peace maker if you are not in the middle of strife, and happiness is being part of the answer instead of part of the problem. Every conflict is an opportunity for the peace maker to serve the cause of God in human history. All who labor to increase the positive relationship of men to God, and to each other, are peace makers. The effective peace maker, however, is diplomatic and tactful.

For example, he listens to both sides of an issue. No one can be an effective peace maker

who does not understand the positions of both parties in conflict. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man because He is the only person in existence who understands both God and man, for He is both God and man. In the incarnation He infiltrated our ranks and lived our life, and learned of all our needs and weaknesses first hand. You have to try and see from an opponents view point if you are to seek peace.

Augustine, the great Christian leader of the 4th century, said of his mother Monica, "She showed herself such a peace maker, that hearing on both sides most bitter things,she would disclose ought of the one with the other, but what might tend to their reconciliation." Pascal, the great French philosopher and theologian said, "When we wish to correct with advantage, and to show another that he errs, we must notice from what side he views the matter, for on that side it is usually true, and admit that truth to him, but reveal the side on which it is false. He is satisfied with that, for he sees that he was not mistaken, and that he only failed to see all sides." That gem of wisdom will help you be a peace maker in many situation, but it takes effort and much work, for being a peace maker is at least as hard as being a war maker.

Alexander Maclaren, the famous Baptist expositor said, "Any fool can stick a lucifer match into a hay stack and make a blaze. It is easy to promote strife. There is a malicious love of it in us all, and ill-natured gossip has a great deal to do in bringing it about. But it takes something more to put the fire out than it did to light it, and there is no nobler office for Christians than to seek to damp down all these devil's flames of envy and jealousy and mutual animosity."

Because peace is harder to come by than war, the peace maker needs the wisdom to be constantly open to new ideas. James put it this way in James 3:17-18. "But the wisdom from above is first pure and then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." He had incorporated most all of the beatitudes into a single portrait of the peace maker. One of the things stressed that fits our subject of diplomacy is the fact that he is open to reason. He does not shut off new ideas. Lincoln was a great leader because he was open. He said, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew." A person who thinks what was effective once will always be effective will find himself failing to be effective. Effective men are those most aware of their own ineffectiveness, and need for constant openness to new truth.

Benjamin Franklin on Monday Sept. 17, 1787, at the Convention in which the Constitution was to be adopted, rose and said, "Mr. President, I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them: For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise." It is attitude like this that make men great peace makers. We can thank God for the peace makers of the past who have given us the foundation we have as a nation. Without their openness and diplomacy we could have the same kind of chaos in government that exists in many parts of the world.

To maintain this foundation, and to build on it, however, there is great need for every Christian in America to recognize their obligation to be a peace maker in all the areas of strife that threaten to erode that foundation. The secret diplomatic weapon of those who follow the Prince of Peace, and who seek to extend His kingdom and the peace of the cross, is the weapon of loving your enemy. Only those who are aware that it was while they were enemies of God that Christ died for them can use this weapon effectively. They alone know that no one can be as offensive to them as they were to God, and so they can, by the grace of God, forgive even their enemy, and like Christ sacrifice for the sake of their enemy.

The result of this diplomatic maneuver of loving your enemy leads to stories like the one told by Bishop Leslie Newbiggin in South India. In one of the villages the Christians were led by an extraordinary man carrying a stainless steel baton. At his sign with the baton they knelt, and at another sign they rose. His name was Sundaram. At the start of the II World War he was preaching the Gospel in Burma and was captured by the Japanese army. He was taken to a guard-post where he was thrown in a corner. A Japanese officer came in; went to the table where his belongings lay, and picked up his Tamil Bible. He recognized what it was and held up his hand and traced on his palm the sign of the cross, and looked questioningly at Sundaram. He knew no Japanese, but he knew the officer was asking if he was a Christian and he nodded that he was. The officer walked across the room and stood in front of him and stretched his arms out in the form of the cross; then cut his bands, gave his things back, and pointed to the door. As he went out the officer handed him as a token his officer's staff. That was the stainless steel baton with which Sundaram directed his congregation.

Here were two men who knew not a word of each others language; two men from nations which were at war; two men between which their stretched a golf which was humanly speaking beyond bridging, but Jesus bridged that golf, and he stands ready to work through all of us to bridge any and every golf that divides men through the peace of the cross. The only basis for harmony among nations is the peace of the cross. It is the only basis for peace between races. It is the only basis on which all strife and hate can be eliminated and replaced by love. If you have come to the cross and have found peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, then you are the most responsible people in the world for being peace makers. It is the happiest and most fruitful work in the world. Pray that the Holy Spirit will keep you constantly conscious that it is your duty and privilege in this world of strife to promote the peace of the cross.

6. THE BURDEN OF THE CROSS Based on Matt. 5:10-12

Florence Chadwick was the first woman ever to swim the difficult and cold 21 mile stretch of water between Catalina Island and the California coast. She failed on her first attempt because of poor vision. After 15 hours and 55 minutes of numbing cold she asked to be taken out of the water. A heavy fog blanketed the area and obscured her vision of the land only one mile away. She said, "If I could have seen the shore, I could have made it." She was defeated because she lost sight of her goal. The fog did not hinder her physically, but psychologically it sapped her of her strength and courage to go on by robbing her of the vision of her goal.

Jesus, the creator of the mind, is naturally the master psychologist. He knows how important vision is to strength, courage, and happiness. He knew that the fog of persecution that would settle down around His disciples would lead to doubt, confusion, and discouragement. He knew that these things blind Christians and rob them of the vision of their goal, and can defeat them, and cause them to lose the happiness of all the other beatitudes. Therefore, in this last beatitude Jesus provides His disciples with a defensive weapon to penetrate the fog of persecution. He promises great reward in heaven to those who will press on in the dark, knowing the light is still shining beyond.

Joseph Conrad in Typhoon has the captain shout to Jakes the mate as great waves pound the ship, "Don't you be put out by anything! Keep her facing it! Facing it, always facing it-that's the way to get through-face it! That's enough for any man. Keep a cool head and face it." This is what Jesus is saying to His disciples. The storm of persecution is coming. If they try and turn back to escape it, they lose all. Their victory and happiness depends on their keeping a cool head and facing it. It is hard to keep cool in the fires of affliction, however. How many of us could face the cruelty of Nero, who put Christian men and women in sacks, covered them with oil, and set them up on poles in his garden; then lit them as living torches to light up his garden at night. Yet this is what Jesus calls His disciples to face. This is the burden of the cross.

Lowell wrote, "By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track. Toiling up new Calvary's ever, with the cross that turns not back." Happiness is pressing on whatever the cost with your eyes upon Him who bore the cross for you. Jesus says, happy are those who take following me seriously enough to bear the burden of the cross. Take up the cross and follow me Jesus said, and His demand is still the same today, and the promise is still the same, that those who suffer with Christ shall also reign with Him.

This beatitude must have been shocking to those who first heard it. They were expecting honor and Jesus offers them hostility. You would naturally think that the person who developed all the qualities of character in these beatitudes would be loved by all. He would be so pleasant and helpful in society that his friendship and presence would be treasured, you would think. One of the unfortunate paradoxes of life, however, is the fact that the best people are often the most despised. Jesus, who alone embodied all of these beatitudes perfectly, was crucified. Excessive goodness provokes opposition because it makes the conscience of evil men burn with shame and guilt. Too much light clashes with darkness, and holiness clashes with evil, and so the Christian is under constant pressure to conform to the world so as not to rock the boat, and stir up opposition. There is a tendency to abuse the former beatitude and be a peacemaker at any price, even the price of compromise and

silence. Everyone one of these beatitudes can be perverted.

Some of the other beatitudes have been difficult to grasp, but this last one is the crowning paradox of them all. It is equivalent to Jesus saying His burden is light. How can a burden be light? If it is light it is not a burden is it? Yet Jesus calls us to take up the burden of the cross which is a very costly act, yet one which leads to much joy and happiness. What could be more paradoxical-a crushing burden that lifts you to the skies. Being exceedingly glad when you are hated and despised. Jesus knew this was a hard statement to believe and understand. That is why He states it twice. It is so incredible. All other beatitudes are in one verse each, but this one takes three verses to state. It is both the hardest to grasp, and the one offering the fullest reward for time and eternity.

It is hard to grasp because it contradicts our feelings and thinking. We feel that as Christians in America we are more blessed than any Christians ever, because we live in a tolerant society where we are free to worship as we please without penalty or interference. We feel so sorry for those Christians in Russia and China who have to suffer so severely for their faith, and we pray for them to be able to have the blessings we have. Yet, this beatitude would lead to us to believe they are the blessed ones. They are the gloriously happy Christians, and it is we who have the crumbs of blessedness. This is very hard to believe, and certainly there must be some mistake we feel.

Yet if we look at the other side of the coin that Luke gives us, it points to the same conclusion. In Luke 6:26 Jesus says, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." If everyone like us and praises us as such wonderful people, it may be because we never disturbed them, but only tickle their ears and make them feel comfortable in their sins, like the false prophets. But if we are attacked and slandered, we show ourselves loyal to Christ. Yet, Paul says we are to live peaceably with all men as much as lies within us.

Let's be honest and admit that this is confusing. Sometimes I think we feel we would be better off if Jesus had never explained to us how to be happy. We feel like the students who teacher said she was going to give them an epitome of the life of Paul. She said, "You may not know what an epitome is. It is in its signification synonymous with synopsis." The explanation is harder to grasp than the original difficulty. So happiness is hard to understand, and how to gain it is a problem, but after Jesus explains how to do it, it seems harder to grasp than ever. This is because some truths are not a matter of logic, but of life. You cannot analyze this beatitude and demonstrate the truth of it on paper. It can only be proven in life and experience. It calls for the courage to step out and take a risk for Christ. As long as we play it safe and sit in silence so we don't rock the boat, we can never know the joy of bearing the burden of the cross. We must speak out against the sin and injustice in our society. We need to renounce sin in ourselves, and denounce it in others, and take the consequences.

A football referee was once asked about a certain player in the game he had refereed. "I can only say this, I never have to pull him out from the bottom of a scrimmage. I often have found him on top of a pile of players, where he had jumped after the man with the ball had been stopped by another player. He never was the first to make the tackle." So many of us

are like this in the game of life. We jump on the band wagon if someone else takes a stand and bears the burden of the impact, but we are never the first to make the tackle. The result is we miss much of the joy, excitement, and adventure of bearing the cross. Lest we jump to the false conclusion that we are to find happiness in going out and starting trouble, let us look at two important points of this beatitude. First-

I. THE REQUIREMENT.

In both verse 9 and 10 Jesus qualifies His statement by saying that persecution must be for righteousness sake, and for His sake, and the evil slander must be false. In other words, any suffering that you must endure because you are a trouble maker, or because you rub people the wrong way by your obnoxious attitude and actions, does not increase your happiness. The people of God through the centuries suffered much opposition and persecution, not because of their righteousness, but because of their lack of it. Sometimes persecution is the judgment of God on His people for their sin and indifference.

It is false to assume that persecution is a blessing in itself, or proof of one's righteousness. Many of the false cults faced the same persecution in Rome, as did the Christians. Jesus is saying that only those who meet the requirement can reap the benefits of this beatitude. The suffering must be because the persecutor hates the righteousness of the persecuted, and is opposed to Jesus Christ. The accusation must be false. For example, in the early church Christians were charged with cannibalism because of the words said at communion about eating of the body and drinking the blood of Christ. They were charged with immorality because they called their meal together a love feast. This was interpreted to mean a sex orgy, and Christians were linked with the immoral cults. Their practice of giving a kiss of peace did not help clarify things at all, and so all manner of evil was spoken against them, but falsely in ignorance, or malicious hatred, and, therefore, they were blessed.

Peter warns Christians not to suffer as busybodies or thieves etc. The Christian has to be very narrow in what he calls persecution for the sake of Christ. So much of the opposition Christians face is because of their zeal for some non-essential idea, or man made system of theology. They often have to endure much pain and abuse from other Christians, as well as from the world. The tragedy of it is that it is all in vain, and does not qualify them for the reward that Jesus speaks of here. One is not suffering for Christ because he stands for a position which many others in the body of Christ oppose. Much suffering and persecution is for the sake of self and pride, not for the sake of Christ. Someone said,

He who crowns himself is not the more
Royal, or he who mars himself with stripes
The more partaker of the cross of Christ.

The blessedness that comes to the persecuted is a very specialized suffering. We need to examine ourselves if we do suffer, and make sure it is because of righteousness; that is-because we are Christlike. Because the requirement is so narrow, there are few who reach the heights of happiness connected with this beatitude. Narrow is the way and few there be who find it. Next we see-

II. THE RESPONSE.

Jesus does not say if you are persecuted, reviled, and slandered, you should grin and bear it. That is what we call common sense, but Jesus does not give us any of the common sense, but he gives us the very uncommon advice to rejoice and be glad. Certainly Jesus did not expect Christians to respond to persecution like mad men. But then, who but a mad man can rejoice and be glad when he is hated and opposed.

This is contrary to our very nature. We love to be loved, approved, and accepted. Nothing hurts worse than to be falsely slandered, and to be rejected for our very goodness. Yet Jesus says this is to be our response. Is it possible? We don't have to speculate. History is full of testimonies concerning the joy of bearing the burden of the cross.

In Acts 5:41 we read that after Peter and John were beaten: "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." Paul and Silas sang songs at midnight while in prison. Thousands of Christians have gone to their death singing praises to God. The records are full of men and women experiencing the paradox of joy in suffering. John Chrysostom, the great preacher in the early church, said, "Were any to ask whether he should place me on high with the angels, or with St. Paul in his bonds? I would choose the prison....I count not St. Paul so happy because he was caught up into paradise, as because he was cast into the dungeon."

Listen to the testimony of a 20th century Paul of India-Sadhu Sundar Singh. He was a man who suffered constantly for Christ, and yet had the happiest life conceivable. He lived in a miracle world, because the Christ of miracles was ever present with him in power. He writes of his going into forbidden territory to preach.

"I often remember that day when, for preaching the Gospel in Tibet, I was thrown into a deep well. For three days I was in that well, without food or water. The door was locked and it was quite dark. There was nothing but dead bodies and bones in that well. It was like hell. There I was tempted, 'Is your Christ going to save you, now you have been put in this prison?' But I remember a wonderful peace and joy came to me in those hours of persecution, when my arm was broken, and there was such a bad smell. That hell seemed heaven. I felt the presence of the Living Christ." He goes on to say his arm was healed by a touch, and the door was opened and he escaped. He spent his life bearing the cross and said, "I can say this much from my personal experience, that the cross lifts those who lift it."

To grasp the happiness that can be ours in bearing the cross, we must see Jesus as a double Savior. He saved us from our sins on the cross, but He will also save us from the consequences of sin in the future, and often in the present as well. We need to look back to the cross and His salvation there to gain the courage we need to bear the cross, but we need to look ahead to the victory and reward of the future to sustain us when the going gets tough. There have been some great cases of double salvation in history. Let me share with you one of the most amazing.

A wealthy family in England went for a holiday in the country, and went for a swim in a pool. One of the boys stayed behind when the others left. He got into serious trouble and began to drown. Fortunately the son of the gardener heard the cries for help and came to the rescue. He jumped in and pulled the boy to safety. The parents were so grateful they

asked the gardener what they could do for the youthful hero. He explained that his son wanted to go to college to become a doctor. The wealthy family gladly paid his way, and that boy went on to become the famous Dr. Fleming who developed penicillin. When Winston Churchill was stricken with pneumonia, Dr. Fleming was called to treat him, and by means of penicillin was able to save his life again. What do I mean by again? Churchill was the boy that Fleming pulled from the water. He saved him as a boy, and he saved him again as a man.

Jesus is also a dual-Savior. The salvation He purchased for us on the cross does not save us from life's trials and persecution. Often Christians must suffer just because they trust in the cross and the Christ of the cross. This is the burden of the cross, but Jesus will save us from this also, and the reward will be so great for those who are faithful under the burden of the cross. Happiness is not found in what you have, but in what you hope for. It is the expectation of receiving God's best that gives life meaning when circumstances are far from happy. Being loyal to Christ when it does not pay is the real test. Many of us have never yet been put to this test. We need to ask ourselves honestly: Is Christ so precious to me I would stand loyal against an opposing society?

Samuel Shoemaker, touring Westminster Abbey years ago, heard another tourist say to the guide, "This place thrills me." The old guard said, "Yes madam, but you can't thrill for 30 years." We can sympathize with the guard, for we know it is true that the thrill of life's wonders do wear thin. However, Dr. Shoemaker met another guide on his trip in one of the great Cathedrals. He stood in awe at the splendor of the sun's rays coming through the marvelous stained glass windows, and he knew it was possible to keep the thrills of life alive. You must keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and your mind filled with the promise of his reward, however, to do so. Take your eyes off Him, and, like Peter, you begin to sink in the stormy seas of life's troubles. If you expect to stay on top and be happy you must keep your eye on Him in all circumstances.

William H. Sheldon said, "Happiness is essentially a state of going somewhere, wholeheartedly, one-directionally, without regret or reservation." How many times have you said, "I'll be happy if only I had more of this, or lived there, or had that job, or better health, etc." All of us can think of changes for the better that would make us happy, but who would ever think of saying, "I would be happier if I could suffer this, be hated for that, reviled and despised for my faith." Anyone talking that way would be quickly labeled sick, and they would be shunned rather than persecuted. Obviously Jesus is not picturing the ideal life here. He is simply facing the reality He knows will be a part of history, and He is offering His followers a special bonus if they will bear the burden of the cross, no matter how heavy it gets. We are not to look for persecution, or promote it, but rather, avoid it, but if it comes we are to be ready to pay the price.

We can't look at the many testimonies of others, but the ones we have looked at are sufficient to show that this paradoxical beatitude can be realized in life, and the cross can be borne in joy. It is a burden that is light, as Jesus said. As we remember again the cross Jesus bore for our sin, let us renew our commitment to Him, and pray for the courage to stand and speak out for Him whatever the cost. Let us pray for the courage to take up the burden of the cross.

7. CHRISTMAS AND THE CROSS based on Hebrews 12:1-2

Dr. Samuel Upham, a theological professor and a man of great learning, was dying. The family was gathered around his bed and someone said I believe he is already dead. Someone else said his feet are still warm and nobody ever dies with warm feet. Dr. Upham opened one eye and said, "Joan of Arc did." These were his last words and he died with a smile on his face.

Some may feel it is not appropriate to crack a joke on your death bed, but there are others who consider it a great virtue to be merry in the midst of misery. When the Israeli bombs were landing in Arab territory, a man and his wife were fleeing their home. The wife said in frustration, "I can't find my dentures." The husband replied, "What do you think they are dropping-sandwiches?"

It is possible to have a sense of humor and a glad spirit even in the worst of times. Those who do, tend to be healthier than those who do not. Being Merry is a potent medicine that drives off diseases of both body and mind. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones."

Since medicine is something you only take when you have a problem, being joyful and merry goes hand in hand with the fact that life is filled with trials and troubles. In other words, being joyful is not the same as being blind to the reality of evil and sorrow. It is possible to look forward to a merry Christmas in full awareness that we live in a world of misery. Just as there is nothing inconsistent with taking medicine to feel better in a world of sickness, so there is nothing inconsistent with a merry spirit in a world of misery.

Laughter is a good lubrication that keeps the body, mind, and spirit going for many more miles. In laughter there is life. The Jews had a saying, "The gladness of the heart is the life of man, and the joyfulness of a man lonongeth his life." It is this philosophy that has caused the suffering Jews to produce the greatest comedians. No race can match the Jews for great comics and producers of laughter. For the Jews, it is a religious duty to be cheerful.

In spite of the severity of the Old Testament law, and the punishments it demanded, the fact is, Judaism is a religion of joy. The Jewish year was full of great feasts and festivals, and times of national rejoicing. God wanted His people to be joyful people. God's idea of a good time is not a group of people who sit with sour faces dwelling on the sin, folly, and tragic evils of life. We sometimes get the idea that God delights in the sober, somber, and solemn fast more than in the festivities, food, and fun of the feasts. There is a time for both, but when it is time for the joy of feasting, God wants no wet blankets on the flame. In Neh. 8:9-10, Nehemiah says to the people of Israel, "This day is holy to the Lord your God: do not mourn or weep....Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him to whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy to the Lord, and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." If God wanted His people to be joyful under the law, how much more is this the case for those under the new covenant, who have received His best, the gift

of His Son?

The Christmas message is a message about light in darkness. In Christ's coming the light invades the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it, even though it tried. The Christmas story is one of joyful angels with a message of joyful news to the shepherds, who joyfully responded by going to Bethlehem to see the Christ-child, and to go away rejoicing. But we cannot forget, it is also the story of the hatred of Herod, the lying, the deception, and finally the slaying of babies of Bethlehem that left many in tears. The first Christmas represents all Christmases-it was merry and it was misery combined.

Jesus experienced this paradox of the merry and the misery in all the major phases of His life from the crib to the cross. We have seen the merry and the misery in His birth. In Heb. 12:2 we see them both again in His death. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Joy was motivating Jesus even as He died on the cross. You would think the paradox would be over when He ascended to the right hand of God, but Hebrews says the conflict continues. Jesus even now is touched with our weaknesses and feels the suffering of His body-the church.

What this means for us in practical everyday living, and especially in these days before Christmas, is that we need to learn to accept both the merry and the misery in such a way that the misery does not eliminate the merry. In other words, even though life and circumstances are far from what they ought to be, every Christian should have a merry Christmas.

Christmas does not stop sin, war, crime, famine, murder, accidents, and sickness, but the joy of Christmas is a joy that rises above all these things. There is no tragedy so dark it can blot out the light that came into the world at Christmas. Christmas joy is joy in spite of all evil because one greater than all evil has come into the world to save us from all evil.

Jesus could have joy even as He endured the cross because He could see beyond the cross to His victory over death. Jesus abolished death, yet it is still around to cloud our joy. Modern technology has abolished distance. This does not mean the distance is no longer there. It is still just as far from here to Washington D. C. as it was in the days of Lincoln. But now distance does not mean what it meant then. Distance can no longer function as it did to keep information and events isolated and very slowly communicated. Now it does not make any difference if you live one mile from the White House or 2000 miles. You can have the same information at the same time by means of television. Television has abolished distance even though it is still there.

So Jesus abolished death even though it is still there. It no longer means what it used to mean. It no longer means an entrance into darkness and a state of unconsciousness, but now it means an entrance into light and the conscious presence of God. Jesus brought life and immortality to light, and the result is none of life's miseries mean what they used to mean. None of them can rob us of a merry Christmas if we keep our thinking balanced.

Beware lest you become a chronic Christmas complainer about the hustle and bustle, the rush and the crush, the hurry and the scurry of Christmas preparation. You can get so fed

up with the materialism and commercialism of it all that you lose your appetite for the things of God. The fact is, a Christian has no business expecting the world to act like Christians. But God does expect Christians to act like Christians. It is folly to get so upset by the folly of the world that you do not enjoy the things of Christ. If you find yourself more concerned about griping at the abuses, than about anticipating the uses of this season of joy, it is time to get your priorities straightened out. There is no better place for this than at the cross.

The cross is our perpetual reminder of the high cost of a merry Christmas. Without the cross the birth of Jesus would never be celebrated. His birth is only famous because of what He did on the cross. The cross, therefore, is to provide for us some perpetual guidelines for the celebrating of Christmas. It reminds us that joy is costly. Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was before Him. The joy was worth the price of what He suffered. It was worth the misery for the sake of the merry. Applying this to our lives in these days before Christmas, it means there is a price to be paid for a merry Christmas. Have you ever been to an enjoyable party that did not cost in terms of time, effort, and resources. It is a lot of work and a labor of love to put forth the effort to prepare for others to have an enjoyable time. Jesus paid the price for our merry forever, but we need to pay a price also to have a merry Christmas. There is always some of the cross involved in the positive and blessed things of life.

There are two ways of being merry and entering into a season of parties and festivities. The Prodigal Son experienced both. The first was the kind of parties he experienced when he spent all his money on wine, women, and song. There is no doubt that he had a great time, and his life was full of fun and laughter. But it was all on the surface, and it did not last, because it was the joy of pleasures and possessions only, and not the joy of relationships. He ended up with nobody but the pigs.

The second kind of party he experienced was when he returned home and his father called for new clothes, a feast, music, and dancing to celebrate his homecoming. This joy lasted and was a deeper joy because it was based on a relationship of love.

The merriest Christmas will be experienced by those who are motivated to build their joy on relationships. That was the source of the joy of Jesus on the cross. His body, the church, could only exist by His going to the cross. All the redeemed enjoying an everlasting love relationship to Him, and each other, was only possible because of the cross.

Let it be said of us when this Christmas is over, who for the joy that was set before us, endured the costly gifts, the hectic schedule, the time consuming preparation, and are now seated with Christ in heavenly places enjoying the relationship to Him and His body.

In the novel, Bread and Wine, by Ignazio Silone Pietro, a revolutionary has lost his best friend. Many are gathered at the home of the friend to mourn his loss. The father stood at the head of the table and gave out food and drink to all who came. He said, "It was my son who helped sow the seed from which this bread was made. It was my son who helped harvest the grapes that were used to make the wine." What he was saying was, the food they enjoyed was a gift from their friend. It was his labor that led to their joy.

The bread and wine of the communion service are reminders that it was the labor of Christ on the cross that led to our having the right to enjoy the pleasures of time and eternity, and to enjoy a merry Christmas. A merry Christmas is Christ's gift to us from both the crib and the cross.

8. CHRISTMAS AND THE CROSS Based on Gal. 4:1f

One of the great turning point days in the history of the Western world was June 18, 1815. Napoleon and Wellington faced each other on the battlefield for the first and last time. The history of Europe, and possibility the whole world, hung in the balance. The weight began to shift in Napoleon's favor as many of Wellington's European troops deserted before the hardest fighting began. Toward the close of the day Wellington was seriously outnumbered. He looked at his watch and muttered, "Would to God that night or Bleucher would come." To his delight Bleucher did arrive with his troops, and his coming through the balance in Wellington's favor, and Napoleon was defeated. Historians ever since have speculated on what would have happened if Bleucher had not come.

This same speculation surrounds the coming of Jesus into the battlefield of history. What if He had never come? It would mean that we would live in a world with no Christmas, no cross, and no resurrection. It would be a world with no Savior. It would still be a pre-Christmas world if Jesus had not come. That was not a hopeless world, for people still had God's promise, but it was a dark world with no symbol of ultimate victory. We have this symbol and assurance of victory because we live in a post-Christmas world. We live in a world with a cross and a Savior. Without Christmas there would be no cross, for Jesus had to be born before He could die. It is because of Christmas that we have the cross and all that it means.

As birth precedes death, so Christmas must precede the cross and be the basis for it. One of the greatest gifts that comes to us from Christmas is the cross, and all of its benefits for time and eternity. Christmas marks His coming, and the cross marks His conquering. The two are so linked together that I will not be surprised if we learn in heaven that the timbers for the cross came from the very barn or cave where Jesus was born. The two timbers that formed the cross are themselves symbolic of these two great events in God's plan. The long timber plunged into the earth, yet pointing to heaven, represents the incarnation of the Son of God plunging from heaven's glory into earth's gloom to dwell with man. The cross bar pointing in both directions represents the death of Jesus for the sins for the whole world. The birth and death; Christmas and the cross are as linked together as the two timbers that formed the cross. Both of these eternal events that transpired in time are needed to fulfill each other.

Christmas without the cross would not exist, for the birth of Jesus would not likely ever be thought of had He not died for the sin of the world. The cross, on the other hand, would just be another case of capital punishment had the one who died there not been the virgin born Son of God. Christmas and the cross need each other. The cross is the final proof of the reality of the incarnation. God really did become a man, and not just a fake or phantom man. He came all the way into manhood, even to the point where He could die. Only the creature dies and not the Creator, but the cross reveals that the Creator really did become a creature and experience death. The cross confirms the message of Christmas that God really did become a man. In doing so He became the hero that arrived on the battlefield just in time to save man and establish a kingdom of liberty that will have no end. Paul in Gal. 4 reveals some of the basic strategy that links Christmas and the cross in His plan of redemption, and makes them both days of victory. The first thing we see is-

I. THE TIMING OF HIS COMING. v. 4

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son. When the time was ripe and just right God started the first Christmas. Jesus learned well from His father, for His strategy was the same with the cross. He could have let Himself be crucified at any time, but He kept saying His time was not yet come. Only when He could say that His time had come did He permit the crucifixion to take place. Christmas and the cross have this in common: They both took place at just the right time because timing is the key to victory. Almost everything you see to convey the joy of victory over evil follows this pattern of right timing.

- 1. The cavalry comes just in time to save the wagon train or besieged fort.**
- 2. The hero arrived just in time to save the damsel in distress.**
- 3. Reinforcements come just in time to drive back and defeat the enemy.**
- 4. It is always just in time that the good guy foils the bad guys fool proof plan.**

Almost all of the victories of good over evil have to do with timing. God's providence in history is a matter of timing. Mrs. Willard Lovell of Berkeley, California accidentally locked herself out of her house, and she was very frustrated wondering how she could get in without breaking a window. Just then the mailman came with a letter for her. It was from her brother in Seattle who had stayed with her the previous week. In the letter he was returning the spare key she had let him use while staying there. In the fullness of time God sent what she needed.

Corrie Ten Boom in The Hiding Place tells of the night she was awakened by the German bombers. She heard her sister Betsie down in the kitchen. She got up and went down to have a cup of tea with her. They visited as they heard explosions near by, and when it finally became quiet they returned back to their bedroom. Corrie went to pat her pillow and let out a scream. Something sharp had cut her hand. Betsie came running and they took her back to the kitchen to bandage her hand. They also took the large ten-inch piece of jagged shrapnel from her pillow. Had Corrie not been awakened when she was, and had she not heard her sister and gone downstairs, the world would never have heard of her, and it would have lost one of its greatest female saints. At just the right time God came into her life.

Christmas and the cross represent the precise planning of God. He never jumps the gun, or goes off half-cocked as we do. We so often wish we could speed God up and get Him to do things according to our schedule, but God has the patience to wait and go into action just at the right time. Martin Luther once said what many of us have often felt: "If I were God, and the world had treated me as it has treated Him, I would have kicked the wretched thing to pieces long ago." Instead, after centuries of abuse and rejection, in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son and gave us Christmas. After a life of abuse and rejection Jesus at the right time laid down His life and gave us the cross. Christmas and the cross were both planned in eternity, but happened just when they did in time for the best impact on all of history. The world into which Jesus came was a world united as never before. The world had one language, which was Greek, and that is why the New Testament is written in Greek to reach the whole world. The world was under one government, which was Rome. The result was a world where travel was easier and safer than ever before. The Gospel could be carried to all nations where the Jews were scattered, and where they had established synagogues. It was just the right and best time for Christmas and the cross.

II. THE TAILORING OF HIS CAMPAIGN. v. 4

Jesus not only came at the right time, but He came with a tailor made campaign; one that just fit the situation. He came born of a woman under the law. Christmas was custom made to fit man's situation in bondage to the law. The cross was also custom made to fit man's situation as a lost sinner with no sacrifice able to atone for his sin. Christmas and the cross are tailor made to meet the specific needs of man. In both cases God uses the element of surprise. He gives us Christmas through a helpless baby, and He gives us the cross through a helpless condemned man. These are the two roles Jesus plays in these two major events of history. Nobody could ever dream that God would accomplish His plan of salvation for man with such unconventional weapons. Earthquakes, tornados, fire and brimstone we would expect, but never a baby and a cross.

It is a good thing God does not have to get His plan confirmed by the Pentagon or any other body, for nobody would have considered it a wise strategy. It is alright to send spies out to infiltrate the ranks of the enemy, but it is too radical a risk to send the commander of the army to do so. But that was the strategy of God's campaign to infiltrate the ranks of man. He sent His Son to be reduced to the level of the weakness of a baby and actually become a man. To win the battle with the forces that held man in bondage God had to provide a sacrifice to atone for man's sin. It was the only way man could be set free and restored to the family of God. Only a man could offer the needed sacrifice, and so the only hope for man was a perfect man.

Had Jesus just dropped out of heaven as a full-grown man, He would not have been a real man. To be an authentic man in the same condition as the men He came to save He had to be born of a woman under the law. He had to come all the way into manhood. He could not just get His feet wet and take on the form of a man as He did in the Old Testament, and as angels have done in both Testaments. He had to be a real man so that He could experience the two universals of birth and death. Christmas and the cross are linked together because Jesus was born to die. Christmas is tailor made to produce a man fit to accomplish what was needed on the cross. At just the right time-Christmas; just the right

person-the Christ child; just the right purpose-the cross. John R. Rice put it,

**Jesus, baby Jesus, there's a cross along the way,
Born to die for sinners, born for crucifixion day.**

Christmas was the launching of His campaign that would march Him to the cross with the assurance that He would be an adequate sacrifice for man's redemption.

Christmas and the cross identify Jesus with the masses of mankind who sense their need of a Savior. He could have been born in a palace and died in a golden bed, but such a plan would be tailor made only for royalty, and this was not God's plan, for a whole world of common lost sinners needed a redeemer. The campaign of Jesus is designed to motivate the masses of the oppressed to join His army and live in liberty and love. Christmas and the cross both carry the message of freedom from bondage, darkness and sin. Christmas and the cross are what they are because they are tailored made to fit the needs of mankind as a whole.

III. THE TRANSFERRING OF HIS CONQUEST v. 5

Not everything in the movies is consistent with biblical principles, but quit often we see the battle of good against evil. Those with contempt for man are confronted by those with respect for man. In the vast majority of cases the good guys win, and it is for the benefit, not just of themselves, but for many others. What Jesus accomplished was not just for Him self. He is already the eternal Son of God and the commander of the host of heaven. He cannot get a promotion and rise any higher. His whole campaign has nothing to do with self-glory. He came to conquer evil in order to transfer the blessings of His conquest to those who were victims of evil.

Scripture says, "To as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God." Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, but He transfers to us the right to be God's sons. Females are included as God's sons just as males are included in the bride of Christ. To be a son means that you are no longer a slave in God's house, but you are part of the family of God. This is the great gift God gives to us through the combined conquest of Christmas and the cross. They both convey the common message that God cared enough to give the very best. May God grant us the wisdom to get in on God's very best by receiving the Son and the salvation which He gave us on Christmas and at the cross.

9. REMEMBER THE CROSS Based on I Cor. 11:23-26

A couple of bank robbers hit a small country bank one lazy afternoon when the staff was small. They herded everyone into the vault at gunpoint. Then they gagged the teller and bound him hand and foot. They began to stuff the money into bags when they noticed the teller squirming and trying to talk to them. After finishing their task one of the robbers leaned over and pulled the gag off to the side. "Give me a break," he pleaded, "And take these books along with you. I am about three thousand dollars short." Here was a guy who saw a chance to solve a major problem and get some good out of evil. The good in this case would be so that crime would pay for him.

The leaders of Israel were not in that same boat, but one that was quite similar in their dealings with Jesus. They did not like the idea of killing anyone, but Jesus was a thorny problem, and the best solution they could come up with was the cross. Eliminate the problem by getting rid of Jesus. The teller wanted to get rid of the books, and the leaders wanted to get rid of Jesus. In both cases these radical removals would solve their problems and set them free.

The marvel of it all is that these evil schemes actually worked better than they could ever have imagined, for the crucifixion of Jesus not only solved a problem for them, it solved the major problem of all men for all time. It was the problem of sin, and of how a fallen sinful creature can be reconciled to a holy and righteous God. The cross is the greatest example in history of how God in His wisdom can use even the evil plots of men to accomplish His glorious plan for men.

Jesus said, "Remember me," and we are to remember the cross for the same reason. The battle cries of our national history have been, "Remember the Alamo," and "Remember Pearl Harbor." Why in the world should we remember great defeats? It is because, like the cross, they become great defeats out of which came greater victories. Paul says here in verse 26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." Partaking of communion is a form of preaching. It is our action sermon. It is visible rather than verbal. It is directed to the eye rather than the ear. Augustine and Calvin, and many others have called the communion service the Word made visible.

We portray the Gospel in action rather than by words. Paul says it is by eating and drinking that we proclaim the Lord's death. The very acts of taking the bread and the cup and consuming these elements is a presentation of the good news of salvation. By so doing we illustrate how the death of Jesus makes a difference in our lives. What He did two thousand years ago has an impact on our lives now because we take the living Christ into our lives. Eating and drinking illustrate this, for by eating and drinking we take into our bodies that which becomes a part of us. So when we open our hearts and receive Jesus into our lives, He comes in and becomes a part of us.

What we do in communion corresponds to what happens in the realm of the Spirit, and it is a parallel with baptism. In baptism we also portray in a visible drama what is invisible to the eye. By going under the water we show the death and burial of Christ, and by coming back up we show forth the resurrection. Both of the ordinances that Jesus left to the church

are visible presentations of the Gospel, which every Christian is to act out, and by their action bear witness to Christ and His power.

These symbolic acts only have power because they point to the living Christ who is present in power, and who can and does forgive sin, cleanse us and guide us to victory over evil. A symbol is only as powerful as what it symbolizes. Once when William MacKinley was running for President of the United States he was traveling by train through the Midwest. A small town in Illinois wanted him to stop there. Word was sent that the schedule was too tight, and the train could not stop. The people of the town were not to be denied, however. They knew the power of symbols, and so they stretched a large American flag across the track and dared the train to run over it. It would have been easy to do so, but the flag represented the nation, and so out of respect for that symbol the train was stopped and MacKinley gave a speech.

The symbols of communion are nothing in themselves, and they have no power anymore than a piece of cloth has power to stop a train. But because they represent the body and the blood of Jesus they have power in the lives of those who trust in the body and blood of Jesus for their salvation. The power of these symbolic elements is able to bring good out of evil in at least two ways. First of all by preaching the Lord's death by these acts we remember that the cause of His death was our own sin. But we also remember that the cure for our sin was His death. The forces of good and evil meet at the cross, and good comes forth victorious, and the result were those who partake of these elements with faith is -

I. THE JOY OF RENEWAL.

We only need to be baptized once, for that is symbolic of our once for all trust in the death and resurrection of Christ for our salvation. But we partake of communion over and over for a lifetime. We do not need to be saved over and over, but because we are still in the flesh and still sinners we need renewal over and over again. When Jesus said to do this in remembrance of Him He did not mean to imply that Christians could forget Him. The problem is that we forget Him in the sense of failing to practice His presence and allow His spirit to dominate us. Christians can get so far removed from Jesus that nobody would ever guess they are Christians. They forget what a Christian is to be and do, and they live on the level of the world. We all do this to some degree, and that is why all of us need to keep coming back to the communion table where we get our focus on the Lord again as the center of our lives.

We proclaim the death of Christ and its victory over sin by confessing our own sin and receiving His forgiveness. By this we demonstrate the power of the Gospel to change lives. We submit to the Christ of the cross and let Him change our lives as we partake of the elements. It is the Gospel in action, for we are to be experiencing the joy of renewal, and the joy of seeing our sin forgiven. Communion is an illustration of how action can determine feelings. If you want to feel right, you must act right. Often people wait until they feel to act. It should be the other way around, for feelings follow actions.

The great minds in human psychology, such as William James, have long established this truth. If you feel depressed, act cheerful and your actions can change how you feel. If

you are one who never does anything because you don't feel like it, go ahead and do it anyway, for your doing will change your feeling. We have all had the experience where we didn't feel like going somewhere, but we finally got dragged into it. Before the evening is over we are delighted that we went because it was so enjoyable. It was the doing that made the feelings change. Had you stayed home with your feelings your lack of action would have let your feelings run your life, and they would have stayed negative. Do you want to feel good? Do you want to feel brave? Do you want to feel well liked? The way to achieve all of these feelings is to act good, act brave, and act friendly. When you partake of communion you need to act as if your sins are being forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ. And this can lead you to feel forgiven.

Jesus died that we might live a life of overcoming evil. The poet George Elliot went beyond the plan of Christ when he wrote,

The saints were cowards who stood by to see
Christ crucified. They should have thrown themselves
Upon the Roman spears and died in vain
The greatest death, to die in vain for love.

That is not the ideal of Jesus, and that is why He stopped Peter in the garden. Peter would have said amen to the poet's view as he whipped out his sword and chopped off the ear of Malchus. He was ready to die in vain, but Jesus commanded him to put his sword away, and He healed the ear. Jesus wanted His followers to live and build their lives on His death.

Jesus does not want us to die for Him, but to live for Him. He wants us to find in His death the source of life for restoration from sin to fellowship with God. He wants us to find renewal from coldness and indifference to zeal in His service. Communion is designed to be a time where we seek renewal by confusion. We are to talk to Jesus and tell Him where we are, and why it is so far from we ought to be. Confess your sin and claim His promise of cleansing. He gives His word that if we confess He will forgive.

Jesus declares me clean,
Then clean indeed I am,
However guilty I have been,
I'm cleansed through the Lamb.

His lips can never lie,
His eye is never blind,
If He acquit, I can defy
All hell a fault to find.

II. THE JOY OF REFRESHMENT.

There are two things that are most refreshing in life, and they are getting clean when you are dirty and grimy, and having a feast when you are famished. Baptism is symbolic of the refreshment of cleaning and communion is symbolic of the refreshment of feasting. Both are only symbolic, for baptism does not really get you clean, and the Lord's Supper does not

really satisfy your hunger and thirst. The power is not in the symbols, but in the one they symbolize. Jesus can and does cleanse, and He does fill the empty soul that hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Communion is a reminder that the spirit of man needs to be fed to keep strong, and to stay alert and keep growing. If there is no refreshment taken through food and drink, the result will be decay and death. By this ordinance Jesus made it clear that the only way we can sustain the spiritual life is by constant communion with Him. Without food you can do nothing physically, and without Christ you can do nothing spiritually. The whole of the spiritual life depends upon our partaking of the bread and wine of life, which is, as we have already said, a taking into our very being the life of Jesus.

Hell is characterized by emptiness and a lack of refreshment. The rich man in hell longed for only a drop of water on his tongue. In contrast, heaven is characterized by abundance of refreshment with the marriage feast of the Lamb and the fruitful trees by the river of life. If life is to be abundant there must be resources to give refreshment and growth, and Jesus says these are available to the believer in Him. He is the bread of heaven and the water of life that satisfies that hunger and thirst that drives the empty into all of life's follies. That is why we need to partake of communion over and over. We cannot eat enough to stay fed anymore than we can stuff our body with food and then never be hungry again. Christians who do not feed on the heavenly manna will experience hunger and thirst and emptiness, and then they are open to the temptation to satisfy that need with the fruits of the world. The more a Christian keeps filled with the refreshment of Christ, the less chance he will want to taste what the world offers. Bonar wrote,

Here would I feed upon the bread of God.
Here drink with thee the wine of heaven.
Here would I lay aside each earthly load.
Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.

This supper is only a foretaste of the great marriage supper of the Lamb, when all of the redeemed will sit at the table with Jesus and enjoy His presence and a feast beyond our wildest dreams. In Windsor Castle outside of London is the royal dining room where the Knights of the British Order of the Garter gather to dine with the Queen. There is no higher honor in Great Britain. But those who love Christ will have an honor that far surpasses the splendor of all earthly royalty as they dine with the King of Kings. Dr. Watts wrote-

Yes, and before we rise
To that immortal state,
The thought of such amazing bliss
Should constant joys create.

We show forth His death until He comes, and when He does come He will show forth all the results of His death in their fullness. This glorious and precious hope should fill us with the joy of refreshment. It should kindle in us renewed faith that sends us forth into the world to do battle with its evil, and our own evil, with determination to be winners for Christ.

10. A TERRIFYING VICTORY Based on Matt. 27:39-51

I remember learning a poem when I was a boy, which you will no doubt recognize. The first lines were, "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are." I have been told that this poem is out of date, for the scientifically educated modern child can say, "Twinkle, twinkle little star, I know precisely what you are." Then they can go on and describe how much oxygen, hydrogen and other elements compose the star. Because of the rapid advance in knowledge, that which was mysterious and awe-inspiring to one generation may be understood common knowledge to the next generation.

Good Friday, however, brings us to a subject where men of all ages stand in awe, for it brings us to the cross. Ever since that awesome event on Golgotha's hill men have looked at the cross and thought, "Wonder of wonders that Jesus so loved me." Certainly any believer has experienced something of the feeling of the poet who wrote,

I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die,
For poor on'ry people like you and like I.
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

Martin Luther one day determined to understand the cry of Christ from the cross. He sat down to meditate, and for a long time without food or drink and little movement he concentrated on the cross. Finally, he broke his silence with a cry of amazement: "God forsaken of God, who can understand that?" No one since has ever claimed to fully understand, and we shall not begin to grasp it all, but if we cannot exhaust it, we can at least examine it, and I trust go away with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the cross.

I. THE TEMPORARY TRAGEDY AROUND THE CROSS. v. 39-44

I use the word temporary because even the hate and evil of those who crucified Jesus was forgiven, and they too were free to accept the pardon, which He purchased on that cross. We first see those who passed by. The cross was on a hill near a main road going into Jerusalem, and so many going to and from could see the cross. Many were passing by on the way to the city, possibly even to worship in the temple. They would see Him who said, "Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up." Seeing Him they cried out, "Where is your boasting now? Come on and let us see some of that power of yours. Come down and show us." There was not a sign of sympathy as they went on their way totally unconcerned about His suffering. It would have made no difference if they had seen Him in a ditch having been beaten by robbers. They did not care, for how could His suffering affect them. There was not a Good Samaritan among them.

People have not changed, for they are still self-centered, and only things that interest them and profit them are of any concern. They do not see the sufferings of others. We have

to ask ourselves if we were on that road to Jerusalem, would we have been concerned? Are we so wrapped up in our own problems that we do not see the burdens others are bearing? John Wesley had to learn the hard way. He rebuked a man in anger for his small contribution to a worthy cause. He knew the man had a good income and it angered him that he gave so little. The man looked him in the eye and said, "I know a man who buys in the market once a week and boils parsnips in water and lives on that all week." "Who is that?" asked Wesley. "I am that man." Wesley responded, "I don't understand." The man explained, "I made many debts before I became a child of God, and now my goal is to repay them." Wesley thought only of his perspective, and he did not see from that man's perspective. So it was for those who passed by the cross.

This tragic self-centeredness is seen even more clearly in their cry for Him to come down and then they would believe. This is the height of self-centered pride. Man is dictating the terms by which he will believe. Man is demanding that God conform to his will or he will not believe. People still do this, and they say if God will do such and such, then they will believe. Leslie Weatherhead tried this and when it failed he woke up to realize he was reducing God to a magic rabbit's foot. He realized that God is not a cosmic slave who runs our errands. We can thank God He did not answer that foolish prayer and come down from the cross, for had He done so we would have had to take His place. Tragic is their blind self-centered request, but more tragic would it have been to have had that request granted.

They cried, "Save yourself," or in other words, "Be like us and put self first and second, and everyone else last." What they said amounted to, "Stop saving us and we will believe." Thank God that Jesus knew if He would save others, He could not save Himself. By dying on the cross Jesus made the tragedy around the cross only temporary.

II. THE TERRIBLE TRIUMPH ON THE CROSS. v. 45-46

The cross was a victory, but it was not an easy battle. We cannot begin to grasp the meaning of these verses, but they are so significant that we must try. Jesus had hung on the cross from 9 until noon, and then came three hours of darkness and silence. The clamoring of people stopped. There was no more shouting and reviling. Men suddenly feel that things have been taken out of their hands, and something is going on that is deeper than they can know.

What was the darkness? Some say it was an eclipse, or poetically the sympathy of nature, or God's expression of sorrow. None of these are likely as an explanation. G. Campbell Morgan feels these 3 hours are the most significant of the whole of account of the crucifixion. In that period all the forces of Satan, the prince of darkness, were gathered together to quench the Light of Life, and Jesus had to face him alone. He was forsaken by family, friends, followers, and now when He most desperately needed Him, He was forsaken even by His Father. This was that which caused Jesus to sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane. This was the cup He so dreaded to drink. He became sin for us, and was forsaken by God to be left in the hands of Satan. No one ever knew such darkness. Daniel went into the lion's den, but God was there. Shadrack, Meshack, and Abed-nego went into the fiery furnace, but God was there. Jesus went into the den of Satan and the fires of hell,

but no one was there, and He was all alone.

The Apostle's Creed says that Jesus descended into hell during the 3 days in the grave, but it seems that if Jesus ever went to hell it was in these 3 hours of darkness, for what is hell but separation from God. Here is the only time where Jesus was forsaken by the Father. If Satan could have held Him, the light of the world would have gone out forever. It is easy to see the terror side of these words, but where is the triumphant side? This is seen in the fact that Jesus has conquered the darkness and the light continues to shine. The words are past tense, and they are spoken, not in the hour of terror, but after that hour. Both the Greek here and the Septuigent of Psa. 22:1 are past tense. Matthew says it was about the 9th hour, and so it was at the end of darkness that Jesus said, "My God, my God why did you forsake me?"

There were no words during the 3 hours of darkness, but now at the end the Father returns and Jesus cries out to Him, "Why did you leave me?" It is as if I left my son in a dark room and for several hours of terror he sits in fear. Finally, I open the door and he cries out, "Daddy, daddy why did you leave me here?" He does not cry out until I return. We see Jesus coming through this ordeal, and He is reconciled with the Father. God and man were reconciled on the cross, and Jesus had to be reconciled with His Father to make this possible for all men. Jesus had successfully atoned for the sin of the world. The price of man's redemption has been paid, and now it is possible for all to come to the Father, for Jesus is now the way.

We could never have known the price He paid had He not uttered these words. So great is the price that some cannot believe it, and they say Jesus is only quoting Psa. 22 in delirium. No one can understand such a sacrifice, for no one has ever gone to hell and back. No one ever could but Jesus, for He was the only perfect sacrifice that could take our sin and still return from that realm of separation from God. One thing we can understand is why God, after seeing His Son pay such a price, is a consuming fire to all who trample under foot the blood of the cross. You cannot take the cross too seriously.

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night
That the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

11. TO HELL AND BACK Based on Matt. 27:45-54

One of the greatest paradoxes of history is the story of the young English sailor by the name of Noble. His job was to deliver a large cannon from Portsmouth, England to Boston in the Colonies in the mid 1700's. After two days on the ship HMS INTREPID, they encountered heavy weather. Ensign Noble hurriedly secured the cannon thinking these ropes should hold it, for it doesn't look like that much of a storm. But he was wrong. It was so intense that the cannon broke loose and began to rumble across the deck, and they could hear the sound of wood splintering below. Ensign Noble came on deck just as the loose weapon was rolling toward two sailors who were busy trying to untangle some sails. He threw himself in front of the cannon and stopped it before it hit its shipmates, but both his legs were broken by the weight of the cannon. This is where the saying "Under the gun" came from.

The next day, the entire crew assembled for a special ceremony as the captain of the ship bestowed on ensign Noble his country's highest award for heroism. He was in great pain as the cheers went up, and the captain pinned on the medal. But then the captain called for silence, for he had a more solemn duty to perform. Since the young ensign was the cause for the problem in the first place for not securing the cannon properly, the captain pronounced him guilty of dereliction of duty and sentenced him to die before a firing squad; the sentence to be carried out immediately. He had just become a hero for saving lives, and then was shot for being guilty of endangering lives. What a paradox! He was a hero and a condemned criminal at the same time.

This same perplexing paradox confronts us as we look at the cross. Is Jesus dying as our hero saving us from the consequences of sin? Yes he is, and that is why we glory in the cross. On the other hand, is he dying because he deserved to die, and was actually guilty? Look at the circumstantial evidence against Jesus.

1. He was betrayed by one of his closest companions. It is suspicious when one of your own inner circle betrays you. It hints at something being known that is not available to the public.
2. The rest of his disciples fled and did not fight to release their master. There seems to be great doubt about his claims when he is so treated by his core group.
3. The highest court in the land convicted him of blasphemy. These were the most godly and learned leaders of Israel. If they can't be trusted, who can?
4. The mob of common people chose a known murderer to be released instead of Jesus. They wanted Barabbas set free and clamored for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Now this circumstantial evidence does not convince us because we know they were all blind, and Satan was pulling their strings. They were mere puppets for the forces of evil in their sinister plot to kill the only truly innocent man who ever lived. But then we come to the fourth word of Jesus on the cross, and we are shocked for it seems that God, the ultimate judge, has reviewed all of this evidence and agrees with the sentence. The supreme court of the universe let's the lower court's judgment stand.

When Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me!" He admits he has been forsaken by the one Person we expected to be his supporter to the end. But God cast his vote with the rest and says, guilty. How could his sinless Son be so godlessly guilty that he

was worthy of the cross? How can our Savior hero be abandoned as a guilty criminal? The answer is, Jesus became our substitute. He took our place and became as guilty as the sinners he died for. Paul put it clearly in II Cor. 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

What a paradox! The sinless one becomes the very embodiment of sin, and thus, is worthy of all the judgment that sin deserves. Jesus was, in fact, guilty of the sin of the whole world. He was God-forsaken because he was the object of all God's wrath on sin. He was worthy of all that sin deserved, and this means hell and total separation from God. The greatest punishment of history was inflicted on Jesus because he was guilty. He was as guilty as the sin he bore, and he bore the sins of the world. You may never have owed anybody a dime in your life, but if you take on my debts and the debts of others, you are responsible to pay them. Jesus never sinned, but when he took on your sin and mine, he was responsible to pay the penalty. Innocent? Yes! But still as guilty as sin. In the cross we have the perfect paradox, for we have two complete opposites, but both are true at the same time. He was innocent and guilty.

All of this background explains the most mysterious words ever uttered by Jesus, which is the fourth word from the cross about being forsaken by God. God forsaken by God! The Son abandoned by the Father! It can only make sense in the light of Jesus being made sin and becoming guilty for all the sin of the world. Spurgeon said, "At that moment the finite soul of the man Christ Jesus came into awful contact with the infinite justice of God." It was like two incompatible chemicals coming together that cause an explosion, and when the holiness of God confronted the soul bearing all the sin of the world, he was repulsed and abandoned that soul even though it was the soul of his own Son.

Had Jesus not suffered this abandonment he would not have paid for our sin, for that was the just penalty. He had to drink the full cup of judgment, and drink it dry to the last drop or man would still have hell to pay. Jesus could not atone for sin half way. He had to go all the way or there was no point in going any of the way. If you are going to build a bridge only half way across a river, you just as well not bother, for half a bridge is not an improvement over no bridge at all. Half an atonement for sin would be equally worthless. Had Jesus never been forsaken by God to endure hell for us, he never could have said the words, "It is finished." What good would it be had he said, "It is half done?"

So this horrible word out of the heart of a terrorized Savior is, in fact, good news. It is a paradox that such an awful experience can be the foundation for good news, but it is. Because Jesus was forsaken we can count on his promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He took all the forsakenness necessary, and now can assure all who come to him that they will never need to taste of hell and be God forsaken. There is no need, for that penalty has been fully paid. Because of Jesus, man owes nothing to the kingdom of darkness. Hell is paid off, and man is debt free in Christ.

The fact that there was three hours of darkness before Jesus spoke this word reveals he had been in the darkness of hell, and the fact that his next word was, "I thirst" is symbolic of this as well. The one request of the rich man in hell was for a drink of water, or even one drop. Darkness and thirst are the two experiences of Jesus as he spoke these words. He was

God-forsaken in darkness, and He was thirsty. Jesus was in hell for you and me.

**Why did they nail him to Calvary's tree?
Why? Tell me, why was he there?
Jesus the Helper, the Healer, the Friend,
Why? Tell me, why was he there?**

**All my iniquities on him were laid,
He nailed them all to the tree;
Jesus the debt of my sin fully paid,
He paid the ransom for me.**

And what was the price? It was hell. Is there hell on earth? There was for Jesus, for in those three agonizing hours of darkness Jesus experienced literal hell, which is separation from God that leaves one absolutely alone. This word is Jesus' Et tu Brute! as the Father joins all the others in forsaking him, leaving him to pay the penalty for the world's sin alone.

Hundreds of thousands of sermons have been preached on these words of despair, but no one pretends to be able to explain their depths fully, for we would have to go through hell ourselves to grasp them, and Jesus did this so we would never have to know or experience this depth of separation from God. Spurgeon says it for all the great preachers of history, "Well may I tell you that this unutterable darkness, this hiding of the Divine face, expresses more of the woes of Jesus than words can ever tell."

These three hours were the longest three hours of all history, for in them Jesus endured the eternal judgment on all sin. If time goes fast when you are having fun, how slow it must go to get through three hours of God forsakenness. But keep in mind that before the cross experience was over, and before Jesus died, he was back in the light of fellowship with God. He died saying, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit." He was only forsaken for three hours, but it had to seem an eternity to Jesus who had never been out of fellowship with his Father for all eternity. There had never been a time like this in the infinite past, nor will there ever be in the infinite future. Here, and here only, for three hours we see the most momentous event in all the history of the universe. God was enduring hell to make it possible for man to escape hell.

This was the cup Jesus so dreaded drinking, but he yielded, for there was no other way to save man. Jesus went to hell and back to save us. The magnitude of God's love is here revealed to be so far beyond our comprehension that all we can do is stand in awe. The full answer to why God forsook Jesus is incomprehensible, but the essence of it is this: He forsook his Son that He might forgive fallen mankind, and have many sons and daughters in his eternal kingdom.

**I do not know, I cannot tell
What pains he had to bear.
I only know, it was for me
He hung and suffered there.**

The way to heaven was through hell, not for us, but for Jesus who had to endure our hell that we might enter heaven.

Martin Luther wrote, "So then gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ who descended into hell for your sake and was forsaken by God as one eternally damned.....In that picture your hell is defeated..." You can be assured that after paying such a price Jesus will fight to redeem as many as possible. That is why his final words were to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Jesus is not willing that any should perish and suffer their own hell, when he has already suffered it for them.

Evangelism is not a top priority with those who have not paid anything for men to be saved. Jesus paid three hours of hell, and for the infinite and innocent Son of God that was a price beyond calculation. No wonder it is a top priority with him. Only as we begin to grasp something of the cost that Jesus paid can we begin to see why it is so important that we care to win those for whom he died. "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ," says Paul. But what about those not in Christ? They shall face the judgment of God. His lightning of judgment will not strike twice in the same place, and so all who are in Christ are safe forever. In him there will never be another drop of the cup to drink. He drank it all. But outside of Christ people face judgment.

Imagine bombs falling on the city and you know where there is a safe bomb shelter where all who are there are safe. Would you not share that good news with those in danger as they hear the sirens screaming? So we need to sense the urgency of telling people of what Jesus provided for them: a shelter in the time of storm-a storm that can sweep them into the abyss of judgment. Sure it is hard and inconvenient, and there is a price to pay, but what is all this in the light of what Christ paid? To complain after what we have received in Christ by his sacrifice is like winning the lottery, and then complaining that you had to go out and feed the meter to collect it.

We should be embarrassed to ever complain that it is hard to obey Christ. In light of this fourth word from the cross, the only response can be, so what if it is hard! If he suffered hell for us, we can suffer hard for him. In this word we see the power of love as nowhere else. God so loved the world, and here is the measure of that word so. How much is so? He so loved that he gave his only begotten Son. But even that great text of John 3:16 does not tell us how fully he gave, and how completely the Son gave. Only in this fourth word do we get to see how measureless was his love. God could have blown up the whole universe in a mega-explosion that would make a super movie seem like a lady finger firecracker, and it would not have saved a single soul. Power was not the answer to the sin problem. Only love could do the job, and Jesus did it. He so loved that he bore the hell of what all sinners were worthy of, and this made it possible for all sinners to be set free from condemnation.

Even though this was the greatest act of love ever, and the greatest show on earth, there will be no Jesus II, or a series of sequels, for what he did he did once and for all, and there is nothing more to do to accomplish what is necessary for all men to be saved. That is why he could say before he died, "It is finished." Hell has no claim on those in Christ, for all penalty has been paid in full. This is the only one of the seven last words that is recorded twice in the Gospels. Both Matthew and Mark record it. None of the other six are recorded twice. This

is the central word of the seven. There are three before and three after. Even these trivial details support the view that this is the most profound sentence ever uttered. Herbert Lockyer, author of dozens of books on the Bible, says of these words, "The most appalling utterance that has ever fallen upon human ears." Yet when we see the depth of love that led to this being uttered, we can add they are also the most appealing that has ever fallen upon human ears. Because he uttered them no one else ever has too.

Paul makes it clear in Gal. 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a cross." What a perplexing complex paradox. The only sinless one ever to live, and yet he was made sin for us. The only perfect one ever to live, and yet he is cursed for us. This fourth word is the cry of the cursed, and the despair of the damned. To compare the death of Jesus with any other, as if he was just another martyr, is to reduce the sun by comparing it with a candle, or to reduce the sequoia by comparing it with a twig. To put Jesus in the same category with any other death is to totally miss the significance of the cross.

This word reveals the ultimate identification with man. In the incarnation Jesus took on the nature and the body and the mind of man. But now he takes upon himself even the depravity of man, and he becomes sin and, therefore, liable for all the penalty that sin deserves. He was in this state fit to be forsaken by God, for he represented all that God hated.

The scourge, the thorns, the deep disgrace,
These thou couldst bear nor once repine,
But when Jehovah veiled his face,
Unutterable pangs were thine.

Jesus was now feeling the full cost of the incarnation and his identification with man. When he was born in the night the sky was filled with holy light, but when he died in mid-day the heavens turn to horrible night. Being born was indeed a radical step down for the Son of God, but it was a mere step in comparison to the plunge he now takes into the very pit of hell. The principle God follows is, the lower we go in humility the higher we rise in God's eyes. This explains why Jesus was exalted to the highest place and given the name above all names, for he plunged to the lowest depth conceivable.

What a contrast between the biography of the Savior and Satan. Satan was among the highest and in pride sought to go higher to take the place of God, and he was plunged to the pit of hell in judgment. Jesus was the highest but was willing to go to the lowest level of hell to fulfill God's plan, and the result is he ends up the highest in the universe. The paradox is that Jesus has the record at both ends. We know his is the highest name, and he is equal with God, and there is none higher. But seldom do we think about it that Jesus was also the lowest. There will never be anyone lower in hell than Jesus was, for no matter how awful they were, they bear judgment for their own awfulness only. Jesus bore the awfulness of the world, and, therefore, takes the record of being the worst to ever enter hell, for he entered it with the sin of the world on him. The lowest place in hell will be ever held by our redeemer, and because of that price he will hold forever the highest place in heaven.

Jesus knows what it is to be on the bottom of the pile, and the lowest man on the totem pole. He also knows what it is to be number one, and king of the mountain. He holds all records and they will never be broken. What is startling is that Jesus knows by experience what it is to be lost, and not just lost in the woods, but to be cursed and damned, and God forsaken, and literally lost as a rejected soul. These three hours of darkness were not just the dark ages for Jesus, they were the doomed ages. He experienced lostness first hand, and he did it that we might never have to experience it. We can experience savedness and never lostness because he took our lostness for us. Robert M'Cheyne wrote,

When I stand before the throne
Dressed in beauty not my own.
When I see Thee as Thou art;
Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know;
Not till then, how much I owe.

How much do we owe to someone who saved us by going to hell and back?

12. THREE HOURS IN HELL Based on Matt. 27:45-56

People die all the time just to advance our knowledge. Have you ever wondered how doctors knew the precise steps in the development of the fetus before there was any means of seeing inside the mother? It came from a team of Harvard doctors who asked a group of women who were scheduled for hysterectomies to stop practicing birth control before their surgery. This was long before all of the present controversy concerning when life begins, and the abortion issue. They did not see it as abortion, but simply as a removing of the female organs. But in doing so they were able to study 30 embryos and see the actual development of the fetus. Thirty babies had to die to give man this knowledge.

Doctor Lawrence Altman in his book *Who Goes First* tells numerous stories of doctors who have died in trying to get information on various diseases. I will share just one. In Lima, Peru there stands what may be the only statue in the world of a medical student. It memorializes Daniel Carrion who in 1885 decided to solve the mystery of a strange disease that was killing many of his people. He took some of the blood of an infected person and

tried to inject it into his own arm. He failed at first, and so a fellow medical student helped him. He got the disease as expected, but his case was far more severe than expected. Thirty-nine days later he died. Some called it a horrible act and a disgrace to his profession. They young man who helped him was charged with murder. It was quite a scandal, but three professors came forward and sighted the many doctors in history who risked their lives in self-experimenting. The charge was dropped and Carrion became a hero. The medical students sing a ballad to his memory, and enough was learned about the disease to bring it under control. Others live because he died.

This is not an isolated incident. Every new medicine, every new test, and every new therapy has to be performed on a human being before it can be approved. If a doctor had not first put a tube into his own heart, which could have killed him, we would not have many of the heart surgeries we have today. Somebody has to go first, and that somebody often has to die to enable others to follow and not die, but be saved by the procedure. We are looking at Jesus as our Great Physician who was also the Pioneer of our faith. He went first into the hell of God forsakenness that you and I, and all who trust in Him, might never have to endure it.

Those few hours of history in which Jesus laid down His life for the world of sinners were the most unusual hours in all of history. Nothing was normal. It was the Creator Himself putting Himself through the greatest self-experimentation of all time. As the author of life He would experience death, and in so doing all of reality is being altered, for He was turning the world of both nature and super nature upside down. The hours of His death were hours of complex confusion. Let's look at these strange phenomena.

I. THE CONFUSION OF NATURE.

Verse 45 says that from the 6th hour until the 9th hour darkness came over all the land. Mark and Luke record this same thing. Dr. Luke gives us one other word, and he says that the sun stopped shining. We are not talking about a cloudy day or an eclipse. We are talking about an event in creation that has never happened but this one time in all of history. The sun took a break, and for the only time in its existence it ceased to shine for 3 hours. This is one of the greatest miracles of all time, and Herbert Lockyer in his *All The Miracles Of The Bible* includes this one, which most of us would miss as a miracle.

Jesus was born in the darkness of night, but it was a natural night. He died in the darkness, which was a supernatural night because it came just when the day was brightest. It was from noon to 3 in the afternoon. That is the least likely time to have darkness, and so the whole thing is being timed by God to give the world a message. God never turned the sun off before, and He has never done it again. From God's perspective this was an event without parallel. It was a once in a history, and a once in a universe, time and space event. When you add the most unusual earthquake of all time to this darkness, it is no wonder the Centurion and the others were terrified and exclaimed, "Surely this was the Son of God!"

They were observing what was very frightening in nature. Nobody had ever seen anything like this before, and they knew they were in the presence of the supernatural. It makes sense why God the Father would turn off the sun for 3 hours while His Son died.

What greater statement could God make concerning the significance of this event. Isaac Watts wrote,

Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut His glories in,
When Christ the mighty Maker, died,
For man the creature's sin.

It was God's way of wearing black for His Son's death, and thereby symbolizing the sadness of heaven at the price that had to be paid for man's salvation. It was a dark and heavy load He had to bear to see His Son endure separation from Him that man might be reconciled. There is no symbol great enough to convey how dark and heavy it was other than the sun. It is the source of light and life for all the world. For 3 hours it ceased to function as a symbol of the 3 days in which the light of life would cease to function, because Jesus entered the realm of death.

This confusion of nature created confusion in the minds of men as well. When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me," the people misunderstood the words of Jesus, and they thought He was calling for Elijah. The Aramaic word eloi, eloi sounds like Elijah, and so they are confused and hear a message Jesus did not give. In their confusion they say let's see if Elijah comes to rescue Him. There is total chaos around the cross as both nature and man are confused, and they are not functioning with the capacity they normally have. Disharmony reigns, and in all this confusion as the earth shakes that everything is backwards. People are coming out of the tombs instead of staying dead like dead people always do. The whole world is wired wrong, and nothing seems to be working right. The veil in the temple is ripped from top to bottom, and everything is out of whack from what is normal.

You get the unmistakable feeling that God is trying to say something that has never been said before. One of the things He is saying is that the cross and the death of His Son is the most awesome event of human history. It is in a class by itself. It is not one of the many martyr stories of great men dying for a cross. It is not a Socrates laying down his life for a principle, or a soldier laying down his life for his country. These are noble and praiseworthy sacrifices, but they do not qualify to be in the same category as Calvary. Here is an event that covers heaven and earth, all of creation, and all of mankind. The sun shuts off for no man but the God-Man, and even then only in the hours of His dying for all men. More miracles happen at the cross than anywhere else in the Bible. The veil is rent, the earthquake shakes dead people into life, people are converted, the trinity is separated only this once in all eternity, and the sun goes off for 3 hours.

Some see the darkness as the Father's mourning and sympathy for His Son. Jesus was stripped naked when he was nailed to the cross, and God in mercy lessened his shame by the cover of darkness. We know that from 9 in the morning until noon the leaders of the people mocked Jesus unmercifully, but when the darkness the mocking ceased, and then there was three hours of silence. The darkness veiled Jesus and halted the cruel mocking.

The darkness marked a turning point in the atmosphere around the cross. Nature's

expression of sympathy led even cruel men to follow and begin to feel sympathy for Jesus. The compassion of people was born in the darkness and silence of those hours. One man ran to fill a sponge and give Jesus a drink. Others watch to see if Elijah will come and rescue him. Many felt with the Centurion that this was no ordinary man, and the Centurion said he was the Son of God. Dr. Luke tells us that the crowds of people who were so cruel began to doubt their dogmatic stand, and they began to smite their breasts as if to say, "What fools we have been." The darkness revealed to them that Jesus was no mere criminal, but someone uniquely different from anyone else.

In His dying hours nature shocked man into seeing the cross for what it really was. It was the greatest act of folly and sin the world has ever seen. Man in his sinful blindness and rebellion was actually killing the light of the world, which was God's greatest gift ever given to man. The darkness made men see what they never saw in the light, and there were people converted in those dark hours. The Centurion was the most prominent. Matthew Mark and Luke all end this strange period of darkness with a focus on the gentle women who stood afar off. There were many women Mark says who followed and ministered to Jesus. They beheld this awesome scene at the cross. The male disciples were all hiding but the females were there watching through the dark to see what would happen. It was a violent death in the midst of violent acts of nature, but in the presence of it all were the women disciples who added a touch of gentleness to a terribly confusing scene. Even the presence of the women is part of the confusion, for everything around the cross is not normal. This is where the men should be strong, and the women off crying in despair, but it is the opposite.

There is nothing about the cross that is normal. Not only did God withdraw His power from the sun in the sky so that it ceased to shine, but He withdrew His presence from His Son on the cross, and for the first time in His eternal existence He felt forsaken by His Father. This is what Jesus most dreaded about the price He had to pay to save man. He dreaded the darkness of being deprived of His Father's light. Not only was the external world thrust into darkness, but His internal world was darkened and Jesus cried out with the feeling of one forsaken. There was a power shortage in the solar system, and it was symbolic of what man cannot see, and that was the power shortage in the very triune nature of God as the Father and the Son were cut off from communication. Jesus had to experience hell, which is the darkness of being cut off from God's light and presence. Those three hours of darkness were literally hell for Jesus.

Jesus died what is called the second death, which is the death, not just of the body, but of the body and soul in hell. Many have died for our bodies, and we have Memorial Day to remember them and honor them. Many have died that we might have freedom and the right to health and a host of other blessings, but nobody ever died that we might escape hell and spiritual death of separation from God. Nobody ever did this, but Jesus, for he alone could do so as the perfect Lamb of God worthy of being the sacrifice for all sin. We need never die this death for Jesus died it for us. No wonder the cross is the central symbol of our faith. What happened there is a once for all unrepeatable event. That is why the whole creation was involved. It was a time of un-paralleled confusion.

Even God the Son was asking why on the cross, and this gives us a hint as to the cost of

saving man from sin. If the sun in the sky could feel what it is like to be turned off and not shine it would feel what it is like to be forsaken by God. The sun could not feel it, but Jesus the Son of God could, and He felt the inner darkness of being cut off from the power source of the universe. It had to be the most painful experience ever endured in this universe. It was not the nails, the crown of thorns, nor the whip lashes on His back, for these physical pains have been endured by millions, but it was the eclipse of His very being, and the abandonment of His relationship to the Father, which was the greatest pain every endured. That is the price Jesus paid for our salvation. He was abandoned by God and man, and He was in hell for 3 hours.

Three hours did not seem long, but try laying your hand on a red hot stove for 3 hours and you will get an idea of just how seemingly eternal 3 hours can be. We just cannot imagine what 3 hours of separation from the Father means. It is in the realm of the infinite where we cannot even think or imagine. We do not know what Jesus experienced in the 3 days and 3 nights in the tomb, but these 3 hours of God forsakenness were the 3 most painful hours ever experienced in this universe. And Jesus did it for you and me. Spurgeon saw in this the greatest crisis in history, and the greatest comfort for sinners. He wrote, "As to my sin, I hear its harsh accusing no more when I hear Jesus say, Why hast thou forsaken me? I know I deserve the deepest hell and the hand of God's vengeance, but I am not afraid. He will never forsake me, for He forsook His Son on my behalf."

To grasp even a fraction of what the cross means is to be filled with gratitude to the Father and to the Son, who together paid such a price for our salvation. And out of the gratitude of heart comes the cross carrying life. The life that is willing to sacrifice to advance the kingdom of God. Paul said that he dies daily. He died to self and gave up a self-centered life every day for Christ. Someone asked a missionary to Africa if he liked his work and he said, "No! We do not like dirt and crowding into vile huts through goat refuse. We do not like association with ignorant, brutish people. But is a man to do nothing for Christ which he does not like?"

We reveal just how much we grasp the message of the cross, the 3 hours of darkness, and the cry of forsakenness by how much we are willing to do what we do not like for the sake of our Savior. I am sure Jesus did not like His 3 hours in hell. It was the worst experience of His existence, but He did it for us so that we might never need to experience hell. May God help us to be always filled with thankfulness because Jesus took our place in those 3 hours in hell.

13. GOOD FRIDAY STUDY Based on Matt. 27:45f

Two leading British scientists have done a great deal of research, and they have concluded that Jesus died on Friday April 3rd, 33 A.D. Collin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington of Oxford University published their findings in the British Science Magazine. Their combined study of the Gospels and scientific records lead them to this conclusion. All 4 Gospels agree that Jesus died just a few hours before the start of the Jewish Sabbath, which was at nightfall on Friday. They also agree that it was at the Passover, which was the annual Jewish feast held at the full moon.

The lambs were killed between 3 and 5 P.M. on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan, which corresponds to our March-April. Jesus was on the cross from 9 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon, and so He died just as the Passover lambs were dying. He was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, and Paul says in I Cor. 5:7, "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." The timing of His death was like the timing of His birth. It was in the fullness of time that God sent forth His Son to be born of a woman. And now on the cross it is precisely at the fullness of time that Jesus died, for it was at this time that the sacrificial lambs died. It was all planned for precision timing that Jesus might be seen as the Passover Lamb.

Jesus is identified with the lamb, for they die without a fight. They meekly go to their death without attacking or resisting. Jesus laid down His life voluntarily, and He did not, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, snarl and rip and tear at His crucifiers to take some of them down with them. He had that power to be ferocious, but He submitted like a lamb. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 53:7 which says, "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth." This was the Lamb God provided that made all other sacrifice unnecessary. That is why the veil in the temple was rent when Jesus died, for there was no longer any need for sacrifice to enter God's presence for all people. The wall was down for good, for when this Lamb died, He died for all.

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish alters slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the Heavenly Lamb
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.

When we go to the book of Revelation and listen in on the songs that will be sung in that land of total victory, we do not hear songs about the Lion and Conqueror, which Jesus was, but about the Lamb. In Rev. 5 the Lamb that had been slain was in the midst of all as the central figure in heaven, and all other beings fall down before the Lamb and sing this new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." Then millions of angels joined in with loud voices singing: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory

and praise." And then, as if this was not an enormous enough choir, every creature alive in the entire universe joined the song singing: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever." The poet was right who wrote,

The whole creation joined in one
To bless the sacred Name.
Of Him who sits upon the throne,
And to adore the Lamb.

And we sing in one of our popular hymns:

Crown Him with many crowns
The Lamb upon the throne.
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns
All music but its own.

The song of the Lamb will be the theme of music forever. And so though it may seem a trivial detail that Jesus died at the same time as the Passover lambs, it is, in fact, a marvelous example of God's providential guidance to link His Son's death with theirs, and thus give Him a title that will be honored forever. Bible trivial can sometimes be Bible significant. Let's look at some of the other details of that Good Friday experience.

Verse 45 says, "From the 6th hour until the 9th hour darkness came over all the land." This is from noon to 3 P. M. When the sun goes dark at high noon you know something of cosmic proportions is going on. What does this 3 hours of darkness symbolize? It is clear from the prophets that it was a symbol of God's wrath and judgment. Amos tells of a great day of judgment coming on Israel. We read in Amos 8:9, "In that day, declares the sovereign Lord, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight." God uses nature to convey His emotions, and darkness at midday tells us that God is angry. There is a deep anger in this darkness at Calvary, for God was angry at the evil of the crucifixion of His Son, but He was also angry at His Son who became the substitute for sinners. He took on himself the curse of the law and the wrath of God.

Darkness is a sign of God's judgment all through the Old Testament. One of the plagues of Egypt was 3 days of solid darkness in which nothing could be done, for people could not see. In Joel 2:2 the day of the Lord is described: "A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness." Other prophets describe it the same way, and John Calvin says this darkness is "An incomparable proof of God's anger." The cross becomes the central focus of both the anger of men and the anger of God. Man has put Christ on the cross because man is mad at God's ways. He does not like it that God will not go along with the system of legalism that men have devised. Jesus came and defied the establishment, and in anger they crucified Him.

The cross represents all of the anger of man at God. God will not play ball according to man's rules, and this leads to great anger. We have all gotten angry at God to some degree. Even the righteous in the Bible express that anger because God's ways are not their ways.

All of this anger of people in all of history came together at the cross, and human anger murdered the Son of God. If you don't think anger is a dangerous weapon, just look at the cross. The paradox is that the cross also represents the anger of God at the world. All of the sin and folly of mankind was laid on Jesus. Those three hours of darkness represent the wrath of God on all the sin of mankind. The cross is just how much man can get angry at God, and just how much God can get angry at man.

The cross represents the greatest battle of anger this universe has ever seen, and since Jesus was God, He took all of the wrath of man at God, and since Jesus was man, He took all of the wrath of God at man. God and man are pounding each other and Jesus is the representative of both, and so He takes the blows of both. To compare the death of Jesus with any other death in history is to have no comprehension of the magnitude of what is happening at the cross. No other death in history represents the anger of mankind at God, nor the anger of God at mankind. To compare it is not just comparing apples and oranges, but it is comparing an apple with the orange groves of the world. The death of Jesus is both qualitatively and quantitatively in a category by itself.

This darkness sheds a lot of light on the cross, and it makes it the most unique death in all of history. We have many days to honor and celebrate the birth of great people, but how many of them have a day to celebrate their death as well? Good Friday is certainly not the celebration of Christian, but the fact is, it is a day to remember and to rejoice in the death that made eternal life possible. It was a dark day that made it possible for God's people to enter a kingdom where darkness will be no more. Ever since the cross men have had to decide to choose the love of power that resists God's way and produces darkness, or choose the power of love that brings light.

In verse 46 we have the 4th word from the cross, and it is the most important of the 7, for Mark and Matthew make it the only one they record. They felt the others could be bypassed, but not this one. This is the essence of what the cross is all about. This is the only break in the life of Jesus between Him and His Father. It was His only experience of the absence of God. In this verse we hear the universal question of men to God in a fallen world-why me? We can be so grateful that Jesus asked this question, for had he not done so His death would not have been a truly human death. It would have been only a God-like death. Jesus is representing the whole world of sinners in this death, and if He never asked why, He would not really be representing them, for that is what they would all ask. All unjust suffering brings forth the response of why?

It is not a sin to ask why. If it was, then Jesus would have been sinning in the very act of atoning for sin. But Jesus was not sinning. He was asking why sin has so much power that it can separate God and man? Joseph Parker remarked that he was so glad Jesus asked why before he did. This is the Lord's prayer from the cross. This was His human nature puzzled by the ways of God. Later on, after His resurrection and ascension, we see Jesus asking the same question, but then it was His divine nature puzzled by the ways of man. In Acts 9:4 Jesus confronts Saul on the road to Demascus, and out of a bright light in the heavens he asks, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Notice the repetition in both places, for Jesus says my God, my God, and Saul, Saul. Repetition stresses the true mystery of why it is so hard for God and man to get along. They always seem to be mad at each other and fighting

each other. The good news is that Jesus has reconciled the two, and in Him the fight is over.

One of the reasons Jesus chose Saul to be His great Apostle was because Saul was fighting and persecuting Him. Paul represented the anger of man that put Him on the cross. Saul was a God-fighter, but Jesus converted him and made it clear that God is not interested in fighting man. God gave His Son to reconcile man to Himself, and the whole goal of the kingdom of God is to bring peace between God and man. As far as God is concerned the war is over. On the cross Jesus died for all men. God won the war and wiped out the enemy completely in Christ. There were one hundred per cent casualties. God is satisfied, for the penalty has been paid and all sin is atoned for. Now God's goal is to be at peace with man and end this war that lead to the cross in the first place.

The cross was the culmination of this war at its worst, but it was also the key to the end of the war once and for all between God and man. We glory in the cross because, though it represents the worst war in history, the civil war between God and man, it also represents the end of that war and the possibility of eternal peace between God and man. So this darkness on Good Friday did not rob Good Friday of its name. It is good because the darkness did not overcome the light. The darkness was temporary, but the light is permanent.

I asked the heavens, what foe to God hath done
This unexampled deed? The heaven's explained,
Twas man, and we in honor snatched the sun
From such a spectacle of guilt and shame.

It was the worst thing that ever happened, and the best, for by coming to this climax God was able to end the war of God and man and offer peace. Beware of those who minimize the despair and distress in Christ that made Him burst forth with this question. There are many who just say He was quoting Psa. 22. Jesus did love the Psalms and quoted them often, but to reduce this to a mere quote, as if He never really felt the despair of abandonment is to reject the truth that Jesus really did go to hell for us.

Bruner in his commentary on Matthew says of this verse, "Jesus's life line has been cut. He dies here before He dies." The point is, Jesus died the death of separation from God first, and then He died a physical death. Jesus had to conquer hell before He entered death in order to die a victor. There are two deaths and Jesus died them both, for only by so doing could He really be our substitute. Jesus took the death of separation from God first, and then the separation of spirit and body. So Jesus did actually die before His death. These three hours of darkness were His first death, and it was His victory here that enabled Him to enter the realm of the dead, not as a captive, but as one who came to conquer and lead all the captives to liberty.

Why did Jesus have to ask why? It was because only by taking on our despair, doubt and death could He really be our substitute and set us free. The little boy began to sob in church as the pastor told of the cross, and the mother whispered to him, "Don't take it so seriously." That is the problem that many have, for they do not take the cross seriously. When the seriousness of the cross is set aside or minimized, you get such nonsense as that of Dr. Hugh

Litchfield. Somebody came up with the idea of a guilt bag. You breathe into the bag and symbolically breathe out all of the guilt into the bag. Then you throw the bag away, and that is how you get rid of your guilt.

This is the humanistic substitute for the cross. The war goes on, for man says that sin is not that big of a deal. It is natural and normal, and so they come up with gimmicks to get rid of it. God says that sin is radically serious business, and the only way to get rid of it is to pay the penalty. If you break the laws of the state you are punished. No policeman is going to accept your blowing into a bag to settle the issue. We need to recognize the great cost that Jesus paid to make it possible for our forgiveness. We dare not treat it lightly, but come to Him in repentance to deal with our sin.

In verse 47 we read, "When some of those standing there heard this, they said, He's calling Elijah." Here we see a misunderstanding at the cross. Eloi, Eloi sounded like Eli, Eli to those standing by, and they concluded that Jesus was calling for Elijah. Elijah had not died, but was taken to heaven in a chariot. This led to the folk belief that he could sweep down and save Israelites in times of trouble. Bruner says he was sort of a Jewish St. Christopher—a patron saint of those in trouble, and Jesus was certainly in trouble. They think Jesus is trying to save Himself by getting Elijah to come and rescue Him from the cross. It was a total misconception, for Jesus was struggling against all such temptation to escape the cross. How easily people hear what they want to hear, and they distort the words of Christ to mean something opposite of what He was saying.

The most mysterious of the last 7 words is also the most misunderstood. They are the deepest of the words, and yet they are seen as so superficial. We see the reality of the depth of the cross, and yet the reality of the superficiality of the cross. The two go together all through history so that the cross is a mere piece of jewelry worn even by people who have no hint of its profound meaning. For many it is a mere good luck charm.

In verse 48 we read, "Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge." This strange detail reveals one of the men as having some compassion for Jesus. He is crying for help they figure, and he ran to do what he can to give some comfort to Jesus. It was a small service, but it is recorded. We see one stranger at the cross seeking to give a minor service to the Savior, who is giving the most major service ever to all mankind. Will he be one at the judgment who will hear Jesus say, "I was thirsty and you gave men something to drink, enter into the joy of the Lord?" Jesus said that a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unrewarded. What about a sponge full?

In verse 51 we read, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn into from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split." All three synoptic Gospels have the identical account. Here God speaks by a visual aid to convey the significance of the cross. It was at the very moment that Jesus cried out and gave up the spirit that the tearing of the curtain in the temple took place. God did not waste a second in tearing apart this age old barrier between God and man. The very second that sin was atoned for, the way was made open. It was like cutting a ribbon for a new highway, and as soon as it was cut the way was open to travel it. This split veil said that judgment was complete. It is all over and not another atonement need ever be made, and now salvation is open to all.

Someone had quite a job sewing that curtain back up, for it was not until 70 A.D. that it was destroyed once and for all. This tearing, which coincided with the death of Jesus, was God's affirmation of the effectiveness of the cross. The kingdom exclusive to Israel is now ended. The kingdom exclusive to the priests is now ended. A new religion is born in the death of Jesus. It is a religion for all people where Jews and Gentiles, male and female, slave and free have equality of access to God. The split veil is God's commentary on the cross. This is what the cross means to God, for it says welcome sinners. Before the death of Christ the mat before the holy of holies was not exactly a welcome mat. It was more like a threat saying, "Perish all ye who enter here." But now a new mat is out saying, "Everyone welcome."

The cross changed the whole relationship of God and man. It reconciled them so that now they can be in the same room together. This rent veil was God's clapping in proud appreciation for the heroic sacrifice of His Son. Bruner says the whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a commentary on the split veil. He says in verses 51 to 53 we have these responses to the 7 last words of the cross: 1. The curtain split. 2. The earth shook. 3. The rocks split. 4. The tombs opened. 5. Bodies were raised. 6. Bodies came out of the tombs and went into the holy city. 7. They appeared to many people.

In verse 52 we see a preview of coming attractions. Death was killed by the death of Jesus. It was not the end of life, but the end of death, and this was symbolized by the resurrection of dead people to life. In John 5:25 we read of the last shout to the dead to rise, and here is a preview in the last shout of Jesus as He dies. It was a grave opening cry. The two main problems of man are sin and death. In the death of Jesus there was an immediate solution to both problems. The ripped veil meant sin was taken care of, and the open tombs meant death was taken care of. Here is the greatest example ever of killing two birds with one stone.

It was bodies that were raised and not just souls. God loves the body, and total resurrection is the goal that God is interested in. Let others have their partial resurrection, but God is going for the whole man. If a person is alive they have a body. There is no bodiless state for the living. Matter matters to God. He never would have become a creator of the universe if He was satisfied with non-matter. He created matter and then entered it in the incarnation, and made it permanent in the resurrection.

In verse 54 Matthew records that it was a Gentile who was the first to honor His death, and it was Matthew who records that it was the Gentile Magi who were the first to honor the birth of Jesus. Gentiles were the first to acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God. They saw the effect of His death on nature. It was supernatural, and they knew God was speaking by acts of wonder. The death of Jesus woke up dead saints, and this made alive the spiritually dead also. At the cross we see the two resurrections. We see that of the literal dead and the spiritual dead. Both come to life, and so surrounding the cross of death is abundance of life. New life is springing up from the dead.

It was not just one centurion, but a number of the soldiers were converted to believers here. The temple veil was split saying welcome to all, and as soon as that path was open Gentiles began to travel it. Good Friday is good because it is a preview of that total victory

to be revealed on Easter. It is a mini Easter, which links the cross and the resurrection. Good Friday is good because it reveals to us the total Gospel for which we will be giving our Savior praise for all eternity.

14. GOOD FRIDAY MESSAGE Based on Mark 15:21-32

Martin Luther one day sat down determined to try and understand the cry of Christ from the cross. He meditated for a long time, and went without food or drink, and little movement. Finally, he broke his silence with a cry of amazement, "God forsaken of God, who can understand that?"

No one could understand that, at least not in all its fullness, but just because you can't exhaust a subject does not mean you can't examine it and get some measure of understanding. We want to look at the cross again on this Good Friday, and try and see more of the meaning hidden in its mystery. First let's look at-

I. THE TEMPORARY TRAGEDY AROUND THE CROSS.

It was temporary because even the hate and evil of those who crucified Jesus was forgiven, and they too were free to receive the pardon which He purchased on the cross for all sin. Jesus was dying for all sin including the sin of crucifying Him. The cross was on a hill near a main road going into Jerusalem. There were people constantly going past who could see this awful scene. Many of these people were going to the temple, or were coming from the temple. They were people on a religious journey. This was part of their religious heritage and duty. They saw Jesus on the cross, and remembered He was the one who said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." That seemed like a proud boast to them, and they shouted at Him to come down and show that He had power, and prove He was the Son of God.

There was no sign of sympathy, but only contempt. They were on their way to worship the God of compassion, but they had none themselves. They were just like the priests and Levite who walked past the man who had been robbed and beaten. There was no compassion for his need and suffering. The tragedy of the cross reveals just how self-centered man is, even religious men. These people were the people of God. They had the highest revelation God had given to man. They were the cream of the crop, and yet they lacked compassion.

"Is it nothing to you all you who pass by?" The answer of God's people is, "No it isn't anything to us." The cross revealed the depth of human depravity. It shows us that people

basically do not care. That is the major sin all people fight. We just don't care about other people's problems and needs. It is scary to imagine yourself on that road to Jerusalem that day. Would you and I be different? Would we have stopped to talk to Jesus to comfort Him, or would we join the mockery because we love to see the noble fall, for it makes us feel better.

John Wesley had to learn the hard way that we have a tendency to be judgmental rather than sympathetic. He rebuked a brother for his small contribution to a worthy cause. He knew the man had a good income, and it angered him that he would do so little. The man looked him in the eye and said, "I know a man who buys parsnips in the market once a week and boils them in water, and lives on parsnips and water all week." "Who is that?" asked Wesley. The man said, "I am that man." "I don't understand," said Wesley. The man explained that he had made many debts before he became a Christian, and that he was now determined to repay those debts to let people know how much Christ had changed his life. Here was a man doing a noble thing, and he was being rebuked for selfishness. Jesus was doing the most noble deed of history, and He was being mocked and rebuked.

In verse 32 the leaders of Israel mocked Him and say that they will believe if He comes down from the cross. This is the height of self-centered pride. Man is dictating to God the terms by which he will believe. It is man demanding that God conform to his will. It is part of the universal pride of man that says, "God, you do this or that, and then I will believe." Leslie Weatherhead tells of the time he had a test, and he prayed for God to help him, but he failed it. It shrank his faith for a while until he woke up and realized he was trying to use God as a slave to do his will. Jesus was on the cross because He prayed, "Not my will but thine be done." But we reverse that and pray, "Not thy will but mine be done." Do it my way, and I'll believe and follow you as Lord. Such is the tragedy of man's self-centeredness.

Thank God He does not cooperate with man's self-centeredness. Had He answered that prayer and come down, all of us would have had to pay for our own sin and be sunk forever. The whole plan of God depended on unanswered prayer, and a denial of their request that He come down. He rejected their request and stayed on the cross, and became their Savior, and ours. That is why it was only temporary tragedy. But look next at-

II. THE TREMENDOUS TRIUMPH ON THE CROSS.

Jesus had been on the cross from 9 to noon, and then came three hours of darkness and silence. The clamoring and mocking ceased. Men suddenly became aware that something was happening here that went beyond this world and its affairs. It was out of the hands of men. G. Campbell Morgan felt these three hours were the most significant in the whole account of the crucifixion. In these hours all the forces of Satan, the prince of darkness, were gathered together to quench the light of life, and Jesus had to face these forces alone. His family, friends, and followers, and now even His Father had forsaken Him.

David went into the lion's den, but God was with him. Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego went into the fiery furnace, but God was there. Jesus went into the den of Satan, and the fires of hell, but no one was there. He was alone, forsaken by all. Why? Because hell is separation from God, and this is what Jesus paid for us. He went to hell and endured an

aloneness that only those in hell can know. We can't begin to grasp what Jesus had to go through in bearing the sin of the world. But it was a literal hell experience.

**But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night,
That the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.**

We cannot know all He went through, but we do know that He came through. Jesus did not end His life in tragedy, but in triumph. He did not die forsaken of the Father. Even this cry of being forsaken is in past tense, and in Psa. 22:1 also it is a cry about what is now over. It is as if you put your child in a dark closet, and then three hours later you open the door and they cry out, "Daddy, daddy why did you do this?" Jesus does cry out in wonder at what He has had to endure, but He does not die forsaken. He ends His life with the words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Jesus was in hell on the cross, but He ends His experience by being reconciled to God, and headed for heaven. He pioneered the way so that all lost sinners can now escape hell and enter heaven reconciled to God.

It was a terrible tragedy, but it was a tremendous triumph, and that is why we call it Good Friday. It was the best Friday that history has ever recorded, for on that day sin and death and hell met their Master, and they were defeated. It was not until Easter Sunday that that defeat was demonstrated, but the victory was already won on the cross. That is why Good Friday is a day to celebrate a great victory, and that is what we do through the means of observing the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." He knew that as long as we keep our eyes on Him and the work He did for us on the cross, we will always be able to live in a spirit of victory. The cross was the worse thing man ever did to God, but the best thing God ever did for man. We celebrate the cross because it is there that we see just how much God loves us.

