

The Cross

Perhaps, at this time in history, what must be held up to bring all people together is a simple little tree, the dogwood by tradition, which was cut down outside Jerusalem over two thousand years ago and a man died there. Jesus, the Son of God, died so that the gulf of sin would be crossed and reconciliation, unity, and love can finally be accomplished.

Sadly, the cross has been profaned by many, Christians included. While saying we need to take up the cross, we make it into a symbol of human love which does not even take sin into account. We make faith a wonderful experience which promises that all things will be fine, when in reality God does not take us out of the world until death.

We must recapture the cross for what is once was. Whether the crucifix or the empty cross, it must be about Jesus, the suffering, challenge, and miracles that God makes possible through that long ago action.

Matthew Henry, a Presbyterian pastor born in the 1600's in Wales, wrote "Come, and see the victories of the cross. Christ's wounds are thy healings, His agonies thy repose, His conflicts thy conquests, His groans thy songs, His pains thine ease, His shame thy glory, His death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation."

The need for our connection to the cross of Jesus is unmistakable. That is why Jesus died there. Our sins must be crucified daily as we find that connection with Jesus, and the ultimate connection to Heaven.

It is amazing that there is no other symbol which has changed the world so much. It is also amazing how much change still can be wrought in a world which increasingly goes its own way without concern or love for others. Jesus suffered a violent death to eradicate the need for us to hurt any other human being.

"Love was compressed for all history" writes Philip Yancey, "in that lonely figure on the cross, who said that he could call down angels at any moment on a rescue mission, but chose not to – because of us. At Calvary, God accepted his own unbreakable terms of justice."

So much more powerful is the cross when we know that Jesus could have called down angels to rescue him, but saw a bigger need. The need to purchase our freedom, to satisfy the debt of all sins including our own, was paramount that day on Golgotha. Billions of Christians have gone there to marvel at the moment, and to walk on blessed by that same Savior.

Jesus made a conscious decision to embrace his birthright. Who could have dreamed that he little baby in the manger of Bethlehem would one day die by the hands of the Roman executioner? But he came to do that, and we must look to him for faith and hope in the choices we daily make.

“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

We must recapture the glory of that ancient cross, and see how it cost Jesus his life, and must call us to trust in God rather than ourselves. Let’s look at the old rugged cross, not the shiny new one being held up by many today.

“The cross [today] is not the cross of the New Testament. It is, rather, a new bright ornament upon the bosom of a self-assured and carnal Christianity whose hands are indeed the hands of Abel, but whose voice is the voice of Cain. The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it. The old cross brought tears and blood; the new cross brings laughter. The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross; before the cross it bows and toward the cross it points with carefully staged histrionics--but upon that cross it will not die, and the reproach of that cross it stubbornly refuses to bear.” ~A.W.Tozer

With the cross before us, the world behind us, we can go on in confidence no matter that the world might hand us. The world becomes irrelevant, only such that there are many who need to know of the cross.

When Christians come together before the cross of Jesus, not the cross of convenience and black and white concepts of popular culture, we will truly know

the selfless faith which glorifies God and not ourselves. In fact, the goal is that Christ lives in us, and we no longer live it.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20

This Easter, may the cross be for you, dear reader, a new and glorious wooden way of grace. Because you found it for what it really is, for the very first time.