

BLOOD, BREAD AND FIRE

The Christian's Threefold Experience

by

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CHAPTER TEN

WHERE ARE YOU AT CALVARY?

IN our thought, let us go back to a little hill called Calvary and look on an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame. And as we survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, I trust we shall count our richest gain but loss and pour contempt on all our pride. As we gather around Golgotha to visualize afresh that tragedy that marked the crossroads of the ages, let us remember that each of us is represented in one or another of the groups that met at the cross. It seems that God so arranged it that every sort of man or woman is typified in the different classes that watched Him die.

There is a song, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" Yes, you were there, you are there, for Calvary stands in the midst of the swarming multitudes today. There is a sense in which you stand at Calvary now, and your condition is declared, your salvation is decided, your destiny is determined, by the attitude you take toward the cross of Christ and the Christ of the cross.

Study the groups that gathered at Calvary, and see if you can find your crowd there.

I. Consider first the soldiers.

They clad Him in the robe; they spat in His face; they pressed the crown of thorns upon His brow and watched the blood and spittle mix upon His face; they smote Him and mocked Him and nailed Him to the tree. But they only administered the wounds that all the sin of all the world had caused.

It was you and I who spat upon Him, who crowned Him with the thorny diadem. Your sins and mine nailed Him to the tree. We had a part in that, for **"He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

When you refuse Him, when you live on in sin and spurn the Word and reject the pleading of the Spirit, you are pressing the thorny crown upon Him, you are spitting upon Him, smiting Him, crucifying Him.

You cannot blame it on the soldiers; for you are more guilty than they. He said they knew not what they did, but you know: you live in a land of Bibles and churches. I had rather have been that ignorant Roman soldier than an intelligent American now if I were determined to reject Him.

We read further of these soldiers that “**sitting down, they watched him there**” (Matthew 27:36). As you read this message presenting Christ crucified, you also “**sit and watch Him there.**” And although you helped to put Him there and are more guilty than the soldiers, you do not seem to care. How can men’s hearts be so hard? How can they watch Him there in sermon and song and yet politely go away as though it made no difference that He lived or died?

The soldiers also gambled for the seamless robe (John 19:23-24). It was bad enough to watch, but they gambled, and for His vestments they cast lots! The world plays its games today at the foot of the cross.

No matter where you are, you are facing Calvary, and men sit before the eternal fact and gamble away health and time and talents and reputation and soul while the crucified Christ looks on. It matters not what else you are, if you are not a “soldier *OF* the cross” you are a soldier *AT* the cross, gambling away your day of grace, gambling for money and pleasure and position and the tinsel trinkets of earth. And soon you must pass away and other gamblers take your place, while you move out into darkness, for the cross will have sentenced you: “**He that believeth not is condemned already.**” Are you a soldier at the cross?

II. *We read next of those who “passed by, wagging their heads”* (Matthew 27: 39-40; Mark 15: 29-30).

These passers-by did not actually crucify Him; they only passed by, reviling Him. It is fashionable nowadays to pass by Calvary, wagging the head. From the blasphemers of Russia to indifferent souls who use the name of Jesus as a by-word, men pass by the cross today and jeer at the Prince of Glory.

The Word records three things of these passers-by.

First, they misquoted the claims of our Lord.

They shouted, “**Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself.**” He had not said that; He had said, “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**” (John 2: 19). But that is as near as critics ever come to the truth! What a perfect type of those who twist the Scriptures to suit their own purposes!

Then, they minimized His death. “**Save thyself; come down from the cross.**”

They did not believe He “**must needs have suffered**” or that “**He that saveth his life shall lose it.**” So modern critics make light of Calvary, see no need for atonement, ridicule a “slaughter-house theology.” It is the same old philosophy of “save thyself” that would bring Christ down from the cross, because to them His death was unnecessary.

Finally, the passers-by mocked His Deity.

“If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” But that was exactly what kept Him on the cross! Today critics wag their heads and deny His deity and speak of the peril of worshiping Jesus. They reduce His holy name “Emmanuel” to mere “man”; they see a great teacher, an idealist, the crystal Christ but not the Calvary Christ. The first word of their creed is **“If,”** just as these passers-by cast their doubts at Him: **“If thou be the Son of God . . .”**

Are you among the passers-by, wagging your head at Calvary?

Do you misquote His claims and twist the Scriptures to suit yourself?

Do you minimize His death and whittle down the meaning of the cross?

Do you doubt His deity and see in His death only a noble example of self sacrifice?

It is a dreadful thing to be a passer-by at Calvary.

III. *Consider a third group at the cross, the chief priests, scribes and elders (Matthew 27:41-43).*

Here is the religious class! One would have expected them to be quiet and dignified at least, but even the sanctimonious chief priests forgot themselves and cried with the rabble. Alas, no group of men behaved worse at the cross than the religionists. Who were these men who stood at Calvary and taunted the Son of God? Men who studied the Scriptures, prayed in public, attended the house of God, gave tithes, led clean moral lives; but for all that they joined the enemies of Christ at Calvary.

Today there are no worse enemies of the Lord Jesus than those hypocrites whose names are on the church books, who work in the church, read the Bible, pray in public, give their money to the church, but for all that, **“draw near with their mouths and honor with the lips but their hearts are far from Him.”**

No group of men and women has caused more pain to the heart of Christ than the Pharisees, who go through all the motions of Christianity, sing its hymns and recite its creeds and keep its ordinances, but never come under the blood of the cross in a genuine experience of saving faith. No matter what else they may do, their lives are a hollow mockery; they stand with the priests, scribes and elders at Calvary.

IV. *Another group stood at the cross—the general crowd termed simply “the people.”*

“And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned” (Luke 23:35, 48).

They did not revile, nor wag their heads; they just looked and did nothing. Most people come under this classification: When Christ is preached and the cross is held up, they do not revile nor insult the Lord; they just look on respectfully and then do nothing about it. But all that any man need to do to be lost is just that . . . nothing.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” and to neglect one need do nothing at all. It is not necessary to be a drunkard, a thief, or an infidel. One need only **“stand beholding,”** listen to sermons, pay polite attention, and let it go at that, and he will find himself as truly lost as the worst criminal. Looking unto Jesus will save us, but merely looking at Jesus has never saved anyone and never will. These people behold Him; they looked at Him but not unto Him.

It is added that **“they smote their breasts and returned.”** It is possible to go a step farther than beholding Him and still be lost. These people were impressed at Calvary; the darkness and the death of the Lord stirred them; and the awful solemnity of the greatest hour in history hushed them with an awful silence. But they only smote their breasts and went away.

So do men sit under the preaching of the gospel, and as the awful realities of sin and the cross and judgment and hell are made vivid before them, they are impressed, stirred, moved. But they walk out the door and say it was a good sermon; they only smite their breasts and go away. It takes more than a pious gesture to save the soul.

In Luke 18: 13 I read of another man who smote his breast, but he followed it with a prayer, **“God, be merciful to me a sinner,”** and he went home justified. The people smote their breasts and went home terrified; the publican smote his breast and went away justified because he followed it with confession and prayer for mercy. It does no good to be impressed and smite your breast unless you follow it with humility and confession and prayer for pardon.

V. But there was another at the cross who went still farther.

Combining the different accounts of the centurion, we find that he did four things that lead to conversion. He not only was impressed, but he gave expression to his impression, yet I do not believe he was saved.

First, **“he feared greatly,”** but **“the devils also believe, and tremble”** (James 2: 19). Fear may lead to conversion as with the Philippian jailer, but fear not followed by faith is of no avail.

Next, the centurion declared, **“Certainly this was a righteous man,”** (Luke 23: 47) but that was only an opinion about Christ, and it is not an opinion about Christ but faith in Christ that saves.

Furthermore, he called Christ the Son of God, but since men may call Him Lord and do not what He commands, so this may have been only a wordy tribute of the lips inspired by the moment. He that believes Jesus is the Son of God has life through His name (John 20:31); God dwells in him (I John 4:15); he overcomes the world (I John 5:5) and has the witness in himself (I John 5:10). But there is all the difference in the world between believing with the heart unto righteousness and merely uttering a lofty sentiment under great excitement.

Finally, the centurion glorified God, but although God, Who makes even the wrath of men to praise Him, received glory, this may have been glorifying Him with the lips and not with the heart. It is possible to say, **“Lord, Lord,”** and be told, **“I never knew you.”**

Of course, if the centurion believed with his heart, he was saved. But it is possible to make all four of these expressions concerning Christ and not be saved. One may fear, call Christ righteous, call Him the Son of God, and even glorify God under the pressure of the moment, and still be lost.

VI. *But we come to one who was saved beyond a doubt, the penitent thief* (Luke 23:39-43).

The Scriptures record but one case of “death-bed repentance,” “One that none may despair, and only one that none may presume.” Here was a criminal, the vilest of the vile. But of all the throng that witnessed the death of our Lord, the lowest character was the only one saved that day. Truly, **“not many mighty and noble are called.”**

How simple was his prayer! He only asked to be remembered, not given a place in the kingdom as had been asked for James and John. He did not even ask to be let in—just remembered. Abraham said to Dives, **“Son, remember.”** The only way to avoid having to hear that hereafter is to pray, **“Lord, remember,”** now!

How gracious was our Lord’s reply! **“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”** There has been much argument as to paradise, where and what it is. Is it not enough that He said, **“Thou shalt be with me”!** Wherever He is will be paradise!

So the first person to enter paradise after Jesus was this thief, not some dignitary of earth, some man of wealth and position. The first recruit for glory was a criminal! Is it not in keeping with the whole tenor of the gospel that this should be the case? The friend of publicans and sinners died first. He had to die first or the thief never would have died, for no one ever died in the presence of Jesus. But on that very day the first to follow Him into the glory was the basest character at Calvary. Verily, God hath chosen the base and despised that no flesh should glory in His presence. No wonder that we sing:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!

Of all the groups at the cross considered thus far, I would rather have been this thief ten thousand times than any other. Little did the Roman soldiers and haughty Pharisees and indifferent people who passed by dream that the man who got most from that awful day was the very last man anyone would have imagined to be in line for a blessing. It has been thus through the ages. Those who have gotten most from Calvary have been those who came just as they were without one plea but that His blood was shed for them.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

Finally, all who plunge beneath that fountain filled with blood belong to the last group at Calvary, those who loved Him, His acquaintance, and the women who followed Him from Galilee (Luke 23:49), His mother and John the beloved. I am glad that on that day He was not utterly forsaken; a few who loved Him stood by.

Are you among those who love Him? You sing, "Oh, How I Love Jesus," but do you love Him crucified, and what does His cross mean to you? It is one thing to sing "The Old Rugged Cross" on Sunday morning; it is another to survey that wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died and count our richest gain but loss and pour contempt on all our pride. It is one thing to talk about His love . . . and what a love it is! "**Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**" (I John 4: 10).

Call back all days of the ages,
All snowflakes come down from above,
All flowers of summer departed,
But think not to measure His love.

It is easy to talk of such love, but such love demand? something from us.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Who loves Jesus, anyway? "**He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me**" (John 14: 21). "**If ye love me, keep my commandments**" (John 14: 15). "**If a man love me, he will keep my words**" (John 14:23). How do we love Jesus? The natural man does not, cannot love Jesus, but "**unto us who believe, He is precious**" (I Peter 2:7). We first must receive Him into our hearts as Saviour, then "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5: 5). And we prove that we love Jesus by loving one another (John 13: 35) with a practical love that really helps (I John 4: 19-21).

Where do you stand at Calvary? After all, there are but two classes at the cross: those who rest upon the work our Lord accomplished for salvation and those who reject the provisions of His love. There is a sense in which, while we are at the cross, we also are on the cross. "His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Peter 2: 24). Why? "**That we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.**" Paul said, "**I am crucified with Christ**" (Galatians 2:20) because his self-life was nailed to the tree in the body of Christ. He just put Himself in your place and mine. His work there is a finished work. Will you believe it and rest upon it and commit yourself to the Great Shepherd and Bishop of your soul? Where are you at Calvary?

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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