

THREE “CROSSES”

- A. **Crucifixion** was one of the most horrible forms of capital punishment ever devised by man.
1. Darius, a Persian ruler, crucified 3000 leading citizens of Babylon when he overtook the city.
 2. Alexander the Great crucified 2000 men of military age when he destroyed Tyre.
 3. A Jew named Alexander Jannaeus crucified eight hundred Pharisees involved in a revolt.
 4. The Romans crucified 6000 recaptured slaves along the Appian Way leading to Rome.
- B. **As you know**, the verb “crucify” is used to depict the mode of Jesus’ death.

1. But there were two other men crucified at the same time.
 - a. One on either side of the Savior (**Matt 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:32; John 19:18**).
 - b. These two additional victims are identified as “robbers” - “malefactors” (“evil worker,” **2 Tim 2:8-9**).

[This fourfold testimony emphasizes the importance of understanding the full picture of this historical event.]

I. THE CROSS OF CHRIST IN PROPHECY

- A. **The prophets** indicated the manner of Christ’s death.

Psa 22:16 (David) – For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. **They pierced My hands & My feet**; 17 I can count all My bones. They look & stare at Me. 18 They divide My garments among them, & for My clothing they cast lots.

Isa 53:5 (Isaiah's portrayal of the Suffering Servant of the LORD) – **But He was wounded for our transgressions**, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, & by His stripes we are healed.

Isa 53:9, 12 – And **they made His grave with the wicked** [Deut 27:26; 21:23; Gal 3:10, 13], ...& **He was numbered with the transgressors**, & He bore the sin of many, & made intercession for the transgressors.

Luke 22:37 – I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: '**And He was numbered with the transgressors**.' For the things concerning Me have an end."

Zech 12:10 – And I will pour on the house of David & on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace & supplication; then **they will look on Me whom they pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, & grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

Zech 13:1 – In that day a **fountain** [blood; Matt 5:29; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19] **shall be opened** for the house of David & for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, **for sin & for uncleanness**.

[While it is the death of Christ that we reflect on most often, there are also valuable lessons to be learned from all three crucifixion deaths.

But let's begin with the most important crucifixion, the cross of Christ.]

II. THE CROSS OF A SAVIOR

[Paul used the phrase "cross of Christ" three times (1 Cor 1:17; Gal 6:12; Phil 3:18) as a metaphor of the message God gave him to preach concerning the life & manner of Jesus' death (1 Cor 1:17-18; Gal 5:11).]

1 Cor 1:17-18 – For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest **the cross of Christ** should be made of no effect. 18 For **the message of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but **to us who are being saved it [gospel] is the power of God**.

A. A Cross of Love.

Early in his ministry Jesus declared: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, **even so must the Son of Man be lifted up**" (John 3:14; cf. 12:32-33).

He then explained why that must be: "For **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (3:16).

Similarly, John later would write these words: "**To Him who loved us & washed us from our sins in His own blood**" (Rev 1:5).

[Clearly, the "cross" was a manifestation of God's love for humanity, which was lost or separated from Him by sin.]

B. A Cross of Sacrifice.

Eph 5:2 (Paul reminded the Ephesians that they were to) “walk in love, as *Christ* also *has loved us & given Himself for us, an offering & a sacrifice to God* for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph 5:2).

1. Though the cross of Christ was indeed a sacrifice, Jesus sacrificed much more than just His physical life (John 1:18)?

Time away from Heaven: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

His equality with God: “Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, & coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself & became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:6-8).

His immunity to temptation (Jas 1:13; Heb 4:15)

A spotless reputation & became a sacrifice for sins; He appeared (seemed) to be the sinner (2 Cor 5:21).

C. A Cross of Reconciliation & Peace.

1. The purpose of the cross of Christ was to bring unity & harmony to every relationship.

- a. Reconciliation & peace between sinful humanity & the Holy God (Isa 59:1-2; Eph 2:1ff).

Col 1:19-20 – For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 & *by Him to reconcile [to bring back to a former state of harmony] all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

- b. Reconciliation & peace between nations.

Eph 2:13-16 – But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For *He Himself is our peace, who has made both one*, & has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, *so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace*, 16 & *that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross*, thereby putting to death the enmity.

- c. Reconciliation & peace between races, social classes & genders.

Gal 3:28 – There is neither **Jew** nor **Greek**, there is neither **slave** nor **free**, there is neither **male** nor **female**; for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**.

D. A Cross of Joy.

1. If you had to encourage a Christian, who was being abused for his faith, not to turn his back on the Lord, would you direct him to the cross of Christ? *That's what the Hebrew writer did!*
2. It is difficult to think of “joy,” & the “cross of Christ,” at the same time. *But Jesus did!*

Heb 12:1-3 – Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, & the sin which so easily ensnares us, & let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto **Jesus**, the author & finisher of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame**, & has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary & discouraged in your souls.

3. In what did Jesus find “joy”?

- a. Was it just in the prospect of sitting at the right hand of the throne of God?
- b. Or did Jesus find joy in the prospect of our salvation (**Heb 2:10-13**)? A joy so full & rich that it even eclipsed the shame of the cross.

III. THE CROSS OF A HARDENED CRIMINAL

A. Two robbers were crucified with Jesus.

1. Initially, both men “railed on” (blasphemeo) the Lord (**Matt 27:39, 44**).
2. Joining the chorus of passersby, together with the chief priests, scribes, & elders, the robbers endorsed the vicious chant:

Matt 27:42-44 – “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, & we will believe Him. 43 He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 **Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.**

[Setting aside the fact that one of these men would soon change his mind; let's focus on the one who did not.]

B. **How could a man** be so cruel & depraved at the very moment of his own death?

1. **“He had no fear of God (Rom 3:10-18):** No respect for God's law. No sense of justice. No fear of God's judgment & punishment. He was a fool. His heart was so resistant to righteousness & truth that not even the discipline of a horrible crucifixion could bring him out of his stupor.
2. **He had hardened his heart in disbelief.** Since he endorsed the sarcastic sentiments expressed by the passersby, then he must have know something about Jesus—his miracles & his teaching (John 11:47; 12:37).

[For whatever reason, this man rejected outright every bit of evidence that proved Jesus to be the Son of God. Paul described such people as “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Rom 9:22).]

IV. THE CROSS OF A PENITENT SOUL

Luke 23:40-43 – But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, **“Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”** 42 Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” 43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

A. **We'll never really know** why this robber changed his mind about the Man on the cross next to him.

1. At this point the man could only notice the character of Jesus as He was taunted unmercifully by the crowd.
 - a. Was it the restraint Jesus showed?
 - b. Was it His prayer for His enemies?
 - c. Or, did the thief remember something a believer told him about this Man?

d. Whatever the cause, he had “astounding insight into the status & identity of Jesus”.

e. He possessed “faith”, & faith come by the Word of God (Rom 10:17).

B. **Jesus’ response** to this man’s request shows Jesus’ power to know men’s hearts (43; Acts 1:24) & to forgive sins even while the life blood drained from His body.

C. **This case** is often used to negate the conditions for salvation revealed in the gospel (including baptism for the remission of sins).

1. But until the new covenant or will was probated, men were not accountable to its conditions.

a. While the Testator, Christ, lived among men, He could grant salvation to whomsoever He wished (Mark 2:5).

b. But after his death for sins, salvation is only granted according to the terms of the new will (Heb 9:15-17).

c. That new “will” mandates: “He who believes & is immersed shall be saved....” (Mark 16:16).

CLOSING

A. **Three crosses:**

1. The victim in the middle was God incarnate, the Savior, the Son of God.
2. On one side of Him was a resolute renegade.
3. On the other side of Him was a penitent sinner who confessed his faith in the divinity & Lordship of Jesus Christ.
4. Of these latter two, which do we identify more closely with – in attitude?

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