

STEPS TO THE CROSS

Four Perspectives of the Cross

John 19

INTRODUCTION: For five weeks we have focused our attention on the steps of Jesus as He resolutely marched toward the cross. Were anyone's steps ever more carefully planned than the steps of Jesus as He journeyed toward His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection?

Last week we saw that on Jesus' final night before carrying His cross to Calvary, He gave His disciples a meal to eat together to remember His body broken and His blood shed on the cross for the remission of sins.

We will participate together in that meal in a little while, but before we do, we need to take a moment to consider what happened as Jesus hung upon the cross. To help us, let's read what the Spirit gave to John to write. Would you stand, please?

John 19:1-3 NKJV 1 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *Him*. 2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. 3 Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

John 19:6-7 NKJV 6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify *Him*, crucify *Him*!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify *Him*, for I find no fault in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

John 19:14-17 NKJV 14 Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" 15 But they cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" 16 Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away. 17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha,

John 19:28-30 NKJV 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" 29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth. 30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

We shall this morning consider the facts about the cross that we just read, but perhaps in a different way than we have considered them before. For there were a multitude of people who saw what happened that day as Jesus died by Roman execution, yet their perspective of what was happening varied widely. This morning I invite you to consider with me four perspectives of the cross.

I. HOW DID JESUS' FOLLOWERS SEE THE CROSS?

We are talking about Jesus' disciples, including the apostles but many more people than just the apostles, all of those who believed that He was the Messiah sent by God.

For most of them the thoughts and emotions brought on by the events of the day were similar to the reaction of most of us when we saw the movie "The Passion of Christ." Only they were there. Their senses of smell, touch, and even taste were assaulted by the vicious cruelty in addition to sight and sound. What all or at least most of them lacked was an understanding of the purpose of it all, the necessity of it all.

To those who loved Jesus and then saw Him so inhumanely beaten, tortured, and killed, their focus was upon the fact that here was an **innocent man, falsely condemned** to a gruesome death. And right they were, more right than they knew. Jesus was the **sinless Son of God**. His sinlessness was not merely the automatic consequence of His deity. For although Jesus was 100% God, He also was 100% man. And with His humanity came the possibility of sin! For the Bible says, he was "... in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." **Hebrews 4:15** If sin were not for Jesus a genuine possibility, there would have been no temptation, for temptation by definition means enticement.

Although He was tempted in all points and to a greater degree than any of us will ever experience, He resisted every temptation, saying "no" to the flesh and to the devil and saying "Yes" to His Heavenly Father. He was the perfect Son of God and sinless Son of Man.

But there was something else that grabbed the mind of those who loved Jesus. He said He was the **Messiah**, and they believed Him. But the Messiah was to be the conqueror of evil, not be conquered by it. The Messiah was to be God's ultimate victor, not just another victim. And while they held fast to their faith for they had seen Him heal the sick, raise the dead, multiply bread and fish, and walk on water, still they did not understand. How could the Messiah, who so obviously exercised such power from on high, how could He be subdued by mere men. Why did God's powerful Son let men treat Him this way?

In the back of their mind was a clue. It would not lead them to understanding before the cross, but it would later. For they remembered that **Jesus had often spoken of His approaching death**. And **He spoke of it not as an event** to be avoided but as one **planned for a very long time** that absolutely had to happen. It was not just that He was resigned to the inevitable; He moved purposefully toward it. **Jesus had walked intentionally to the cross.**

But everyone who witnessed the spectacle of the cross did not love Jesus. More unbelievers watched Him be beaten and die than believers. And so the second perspective of the cross we shall examine is from the point of view of the enemies of Jesus.

II. HOW DID JESUS' ENEMIES VIEW THE CROSS?

We are immediately prompted to ask, “**What was their complaint against the sinless Son of God?** What evil did He ever do?” In fact, Pilate asked that very question because He found no wrongdoing in the life or words of the Christ.

Jesus’ enemies had two primary accusations. One, they said Jesus was a rebel. They painted Him as a would-be antagonist to Caesar because He presented Himself as a King. Pilate debunked their accusation by asking about Jesus’ Kingdom and learning that it was not one of this world but was a spiritual kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Even the Roman Governor did not consider this to be rebellion in a legal sense.

But Jesus’ enemies were not interested in legalities. The accusation that Jesus was disloyal to Caesar was a ruse. What really riled them was that Jesus was disloyal to their traditions. He violated their Sabbath laws and reviled the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It especially angered them as Jesus pointed out with the aid of the Holy Scriptures that the religious leaders actually violated the commandments of the Almighty in order to keep the traditions of man. **Jesus was a rebel against their ungodly system.** That is why they wanted Him dead.

A second, and even more serious charge they leveled against Jesus was that He was a blasphemer. They rightly considered that any mere man claiming to be God blasphemed the Creator. But they erred in not recognizing that Jesus was no mere man. The One who told the masses of the Father’s love was the same One that spoke the stars into the sky. **Jesus clearly claimed to be God in the flesh. But it was not blasphemy. It was true!**

And there was a nagging thought in the mind of many of His enemies. We do not see that thought expressed in every enemy we read of who witnessed the events of the cross. But we see it in enough of them to know that it existed, and it was probably in the minds of many that never expressed it openly so as to be recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. **What was that thought that plagued many of the enemies of Christ?** It was “**What if we are wrong? What if Jesus really is the Son of God?**” We saw it in Pilate’s wife who tried to warn her husband not to condemn Jesus. We saw it in Pilate Himself who asked Jesus, “What is truth?” We saw it in the Centurion who finally declared after Jesus died, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

The third perspective of the cross may well be one you have never considered at all: the perspective of unbelievers who had already died and gone to hell.

III. HOW DID PEOPLE IN HELL LOOK UPON THE CROSS?

Those that waited there in torment of flames because they had rejected God's provision for their sin in the coming Christ even before He had come, could not of course see directly what was happening, for hell has no windows. But often enough, a new lost man or woman would die and the word of what was happening in the world would slowly filter to the captives mixed with the groans of unending pain and the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The word that Jesus might really be the Messiah they never believed in had been most unsettling. If He were, then all hope for them was gone, for that

confirmed that the Word of God was true. They were not only lost and in hell, their condemnation was for eternity. So every report of His walking upon the water or calming the sea, every word about His healing of the sick or giving sight to the blind, or any other indication that this Jesus really was God in the flesh, brought even greater anguish to their hearts.

Frankly, the word that Jesus had died upon a Roman cross must have been greeted in hell with enthusiasm. Surely if this were the Messiah, if this were God inside a man, no one would be able to take His life. For even in hell they had learned something of the tremendous power of the Almighty God, for with all their so-called wisdom and self-sufficiency they could not find a way to cross the great gulf that imprisoned them nor could they find any means of relieving their own agony. So **if this Jesus was dead, maybe He was not the Christ.** Maybe there really is not a Christ. Maybe they could still be right, and Satan could win the battle with God, and one day they could leave this place of wretched misery. And the reports that kept coming back indicated that Jesus really was dead. The soldiers ran a spear up His side and the Centurion certified Him as dead to Pilate. His followers had taken Him from the cross and had prepared His body for burial. They had laid Him finally in a cold dark tomb. These facts gave them an evil hope.

Yet even in the midst of this wicked glee, there was a sense of foreboding. Several things fueled the growing sense of doom: One was a comment by a man, who although he was lost, knew a lot about the Sacred Scriptures. When the news of Jesus' death came, he said, "**Now Christ's heel has felt the bruise of Satan as the serpent has injected the poison of death into His body. What awaits us now is to see how this Christ shall bruise the head of the master of sin.**"

At the same time a report was being passed through the screaming amidst the flames that there was unusual activity and great shouts of joy and praise coming from the other side of the gulf from a place called Paradise. This was where those who had believed God and His promise of the provision of the Messiah went when they died. The inhabitants of hell could not fully see Paradise, but they could see the distant fringes and even call out from one side to the other. They could tell that Paradise was a place of comfort and joy as opposed to where they were being of fire and agony. The people were happy there. And they were waiting, waiting with great excitement and joy for their Heavenly Father to fulfill the promise to send the Messiah to save them from their sins and bring them into His presence in Heaven.

Now, there were sounds of joy and gladness such as had never been heard. It was as if they knew something in Paradise that those in hell had not yet learned. And there was the very common feeling that when the news reached hell, it would not produce the same reaction.

Of all the perspectives of the cross the fourth is by far the most exciting.

IV. HOW DID GOD VIEW THE CROSS?

As Jesus was being led up the hill to Golgotha, men, friends and enemies alike saw a man already half dead, His back was bleeding profusely from the beating

with the Roman Cat of Nine Tails. But as the Almighty, Sovereign King of the Universe peered down from His heavenly throne, **He saw the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, now appearing as the Lamb of God**, approaching the altar upon which He would make the eternal sacrifice of His own blood to pay the price for the sin of all mankind.

It was in the heart of the Heavenly Father a time of great sadness. **Here before His eyes was the result of sin**. The wages of sin had always been death and now to pay the price of sin once and for all, His own Son had entered into the body of a man so He could die. What was more, for the first time since eternity past, there would be a separation between God the Father and God the Son. For as Jesus hung upon that cross, the Father was to take the iniquity of all mankind and place upon His Son as if Jesus Himself had committed it. And so He that committed no sin would be made to be sin itself. And He would pay the death penalty for that sin.

In the midst of the great sorrow that engulfed the heart of the Sovereign God of Heaven, there was in a most remarkable way also a surge of celestial joy. For **the Father knew that even though His Son would lay down His life, He had the power to take it up again**. He would rise from the dead. **He also knew that once the price of sin was paid** and the blood of the eternal Son of God had been offered as a sacrifice for sin, **the Son of God would set the captives of Paradise free and bring them to the heavenly city, their eternal home**. And He knew that all of those men and women who died in the future, having trusted Christ as Lord and Savior, would be able to immediately enter their home in Heaven and dwell with Him for all eternity.

CONCLUSION: What should be the disciple's perspective of the cross? As a follower of Christ, how should I view this event where the most holy man who ever lived was brutally murdered in the most vicious way wicked men could devise?

- 1. I should see it as definitive proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who fulfilled all the prophecies of the coming Messiah, including those of His sacrificial death.**
- 2. Because of the cross, I should see why trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior is the only way to avoid hell and live with Christ forever.**
- 3. I should see at the cross the magnitude of God's love for a sinner like me that Jesus should pay the penalty for my sin.**