

The Cross of Christ

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Would you turn please to the 23rd chapter of Luke and verse 32. And there were also two other malefactors led with him, that is Jesus, to be put to death.

And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.

And the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

Then said Jesus, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And they parted his raiment and cast lots, and the people stood beholding. [00:01:06] And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others, let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself.

And a superscription also was written over him, in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews.

And one of the malefactors, which were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, they save thyself and us.

[00:02:04] But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.

And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the [00:03:01] ninth hour.

And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

And having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

And all the people that came together to that site, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned, and all his acquaintance, and the women that followed [00:04:01] him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

The epistle to the Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20.

I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The last chapter, chapter 6, verse 14.

[00:05:03] God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

I want to speak, beloved brethren, dear friends, about the cross of Christ.

You may have noticed, as you have read the 23rd chapter of Luke, probably to any lover of Christ, one of the most oft-read portions of the Word of God.

[00:06:12] There is a depth and a fullness there that the heart of man will never plumb.

But you may have mentioned that as Luke, the beloved physician, writes in his Gospel, by the power of the indicting Spirit of God, he presents and brings before us at least six classes of people that beheld the cross of Christ.

[00:07:04] Three of them good, three of them bad.

Now I want to ask you, my dear friend, that I hope at the end of this Gospel meeting, you will, with conviction of heart and certainty of faith, be able to number yourself amongst those who rightly surveyed the wondrous cross of Christ.

As always, there are perfections that delight the soul in the Word of God.

Where we began to read, it is recorded that there were two other. I want to talk about those two other, but first of all, we'll talk about Jesus.

[00:08:10] Those two other crosses, to speak volumes, beloved friends, but first of all, I want to focus your attention upon that central cross.

Two other, as a common next, they were malefactors, were crucified with him, the sinless, perfect Christ of God.

He was not a malefactor, the two other were malefactors, but you remember he had said to his disciples yet, and oh the pathos of the words, this must be accomplished in me.

[00:09:10] And he quotes the words of his heirs, the prophet. He was numbered with the transgressors.

Oh the wonder of the grace of Christ, who in that depth of that mighty stoop which some of us remembered this morning, he moved from that sphere of eternal glory in lowly grace to be numbered amongst the transgressors.

You remember how the apostle Paul addresses himself to the Corinthians in the second epistle chapter eight.

[00:10:03] He says to them, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, and I say beloved brethren, there is no computer that will ever total up his riches, but he says though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.

Where we began to read together, we read that they crucified him in between two malefactors.

And it is to that blessed person, dear friend, that God tonight would direct your gaze, the cross of Christ and he who hung upon it.

[00:11:09] We have read of the apostle Paul who could say concerning this person, the son of God who loves me.

And in order to express that love to me, he gave himself.

In the twenty-third chapter of Luke's gospel, we read the circumstances and the scene that encircled him when in wondrous grace, when in wondrous love, he gave himself to die for guilty sinners.

[00:12:02] And when they were come, it goes on to say, they, the men that he had come to save, when they, puny, weak, sinful men, think of it beloved brethren, dear friend, they took him who was the Christ of God, who was none other than the Lord of glory, who was none other than the creator of God as to his person.

But in lowly grace had become a man, they took him and crucified him.

Previously in the chapter, his earthly judge Pontius Pilate asks a profound question and [00:13:03] I would ask it and God would ask it, dear friend, to you tonight. What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ? Their voices were instant.

They were in accord.

The progress of evil and wickedness was at its height. Crucify him.

He's not fit to live.

And that, dear beloved friends, was this world's estimation of God's beloved son. And they were

allowed to take him and to nail him to a tree suspended between earth and heaven with pierced hands, pierced feet, pierced brow.

[00:14:06] They crucified him and sat down and watched him.

The ages of eternity will ever resound with the blessed effects that have accrued to God out of that wondrous seed, the cross of Christ. Beloved friend, is there one in this room that knows not the love, the intimate, the personal love of Jesus, has not learned and felt the warmth and the charm of his blessed embrace? Cannot say. He loved me and gave himself for me. [00:15:02] I ask you, my friend, because it is to you particularly that I am speaking, that God is speaking.

Have you ever sat down and surveyed the cross of Christ? Well, as I have said, there are at least six different types of people in this chapter who beheld that scene.

The first one is in verse 35.

The people stood beholding.

You know, I believe even in the world today there is not a symbol that is known throughout the world like that of a cross.

You never have to go very far in this world, cast your eyes upon public buildings or where [00:16:02] you will, but sooner or later you will see a cross.

It has become a symbol, a byword in the world.

But sad to say, by the many, it's just like these in verse 35.

They sat down and they beheld him and they watched him. Christ rejecters, haters of God, lost, eternally lost men and women.

You know, that's an awful category to be numbered amongst. Those who refuse the love of Christ and the overtures of the love of God, these were they.

[00:17:07] Awful and eternal will be their lot when he whom they cast out, crucified and sat down and watched will stand before them, not as a rejected man, but as a judge set up of God.

Their testimony, you know, was quite remarkable. He saved others.

You know, sometimes even from the hearts of men who have no affection for Christ, there comes a wonderful testimony.

You think of what was involved when these men, yeah, and I say, beloved friend, what an awful condemnation of themselves came from their own lips. [00:18:03] He saved others.

There was witness surely that the power of God had been evidenced amongst them. They had beheld his works. They had beheld his words.

They had seen his acts of kindness and grace. And they had to say, yes, he saved others.

My beloved friend, there is evidence in this room tonight that he has saved others. Has he saved you?

These men said he saved others. They didn't deny it.

But they knew not his saving power, dear friend. Do you have to just pass by and admit, yes, he saved others, but with sadness have to [00:19:02] admit it need not be.

He hasn't saved me. He can, he will, if you will but let him.

Let him save himself if he be Christ, the chosen of God. We pass on.

Soldiers there were there who may have been ignorant as to what they were doing. They were but carrying out commands of superiors, hard men, heartless men, men without feeling. They it was who took him and nailed him to that gibbet.

They offered him vinegar.

They said the same if thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. [00:20:04] But you know, the hymn writer, I believe it's in this book, has wonderfully penned the words, himself he could not save.

And the hymn writer as knowing something of the wonder of that scene could give the reason. Love streamed, too deeply flowed, himself in love he gave to pay the debt we owed, yes.

In his blessed and omnipotent power he could have come down from the cross. He had said to Peter that at his words there would have been twelve legions of angels only at one word from his mouth.

And yet never was there such a cry of vengeance from that blessed man. [00:21:06] You remember that Peter, who had denied him, yet when he was converted he pens those beautiful words in his first epistle.

In presenting this blessed man to our hearts, those of us who love him, as an example he says of him, oh how they out-tell the character of Christ when he was reviled. And these men were reviling him, they railed on him, but Peter says he reviled not again.

And he goes on to say when he suffered he threatened not, no. But hear the words that did come from his lips, for it was not a dumb silent Christ [00:22:07] that hung there.

Seven times you can read in the Gospels there comes from his lips profound words. This I believe is the first, after men had done what they could to him, after that men had crucified him, they stopped his feet, they pinioned his hands, they pierced his brow, but they could not stop his voice. Father, he says, forgive them.

That beloved friend is the character of the love of God told out in the death of Jesus on the cross.

[00:23:01] Think of it, think of what he had said upon the Sermon on the Mount as he could say to his

disciples, pray for them who despitefully use you. Was there a man so despitefully used as Christ?

But what was his demeanour when men railed upon him and abused him? Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.

A prayer, I believe, that was answered, could you imagine that such a prayer from a pained Christ and yet a Christ still in blessed, undimmed intimacy with the Father? Could you ever suppose that such a prayer would go unanswered? Never.

[00:24:01] But this was the grace of the heart of Christ, Father, forgive them.

It may be that these blessed words were that which affected the heart of the repentant thief, it may be these words that moved that centurion to say what he did, but how wonderful to realise, beloved friend, that this is the attitude of the heart of God to men that could go so deep into sin as to crucify the Christ of God, to such the heart of God has forgiveness, full and free.

Does that not give you to understand why the writer of that hymn that we sung together [00:25:03] penned those words?

Love so amazing, so divine, this is divine love, it's not the love of men, it's beyond it, this is the divine love, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, it demands an answer, beloved friend, from your heart this night, the love of Christ. And then we come to these two malefactors, look at them, a central Christ on the cross, and a cross on this side, and a cross on that side, and John's gospel puts it more pointedly, and Jesus in the midst.

Look carefully at those two men, beloved friend, why? [00:26:07] One was a Christ rejecter, the other was a Christ acceptor.

One went out of this world into the blackness of a darkness of an eternity without God, without Christ, without hope.

The other heard those words today, thou shalt be with me. And he went out of this world, crucified next door to Christ, but safe, eternally safe, in the arms of Jesus.

Now dear friend, you're one or the other. There are only two classes of people in this world, those who accept Christ, and those [00:27:06] who refuse Christ.

And on these two crosses, the malefactors that were crucified were him, our two representative men. Now I ask you, which man are you following behind?

The one of them said the same as the soldiers, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

He was a man that asked Christ to save him. That's astonishing, isn't it? He said, if thou be the Christ, save thyself and us, but he could not be.

[00:28:02] His statement began with an if, an if, a doubt, no faith, no love, no salvation, and no hope.

But the other, oh let's turn aside from Christ rejecters. My friend this night, turn aside from that which

would influence you to reject Christ. Look at this other man, look at him, get your eye on him. Turn aside just for a fleeting moment from that central cross, just to look at this man. Only for a moment.

He says he rebuked him. He was a man that stood, convicted, condemned, and executed for the deeds that he had done, [00:29:06] and yet thank God not dead.

He was a man in true contrition of heart, who can say in all honesty before God and proclaim it to his fellow, we receive the due rewards of our deeds. I'm dying, why? Because I'm a sinner.

But he says this man, and beloved friend even this man that I've asked you to look at for a moment would direct you to Christ. He says this man, he says of him, he's done nothing amiss.

And Peter again in his epistle says of him, who did no sin, who knew no sin, and yet you [00:30:09] know he went on to say, who himself bear our sins in his own body on the cross.

And he turned to him, and what did he say? Lord, oh how brightly the face of this man shone, a dying, rejected, crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

What a spectacle was he to this man, and yet he turned to him in a full, glowing, God-given faith, and he says to him, to such an one, Lord, and he is Lord, God has said at the [00:31:05] name of Jesus, every knee shall bow of things in heaven, of things on earth, and things under the earth, and that all shall confess him, Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And men will, sad to think that thousands will acknowledge his Lordship, but be ushered away into a lost eternity.

I believe you know men will stand at the great white throne, raised in their bodies, but only for one moment to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, but it will be too late. But God will have the last word. [00:32:01] He whom men cast out and slew shall rule, and all will acknowledge his Lordship. This man in the faith of his soul, faith in a dying, soon-to-be-dead Christ, and yet he could say, Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. He crowned him Lord of all in his heart, oh the joy of the heart of God, when a sinner in true repentance crowns Jesus Lord in their hearts.

He confessed him Lord, and you know, he must have believed in his heart that this man was going to be raised from the dead. How else could he come in a kingdom? And thanks be to God, we can finish Romans 10 and 9, he was saved.

[00:33:09] Jesus said to him, a personal word from a dying, crucified Jesus, to him, to nobody else in that scene, there was a lot beheld that scene, but these words were directed only to one man, today thou shalt be with me in paradise.

Oh the peace that must have come into the soul of that man, as there almost at the point of death, he could with assurance pass out of this world, into eternity, in the knowledge [00:34:05] that he was going to be with Jesus.

Oh how sublime this is, how full, this is the heart of God, an erstwhile, guilty, condemned, executed sinner, and yet, because of a personal, real faith in a dying, soon to be dead Christ, he went out of this world with a testimony of his faith, from the lips of the Saviour himself, today thou shalt be with me, it doesn't really matter where, but in paradise. And I say, beloved friend, look at these two crosses, and honestly, I beseech thee, in Christ's name, take account of them, and ask yourself this

night, at this very moment, [00:35:05] there upon that seat, which man is a representation of me, can I in all honesty, put myself in the company of this repentant thief, and know with full, blessed assurance, that I have peace, forgiveness, and salvation, through the work of Christ.

But you know as you move down this chapter, have you ever thought, we will have to pass over that part that Luke passes over, you know he tells us nothing of those three hours of darkness, he only but records that it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the land, until the ninth hour, the sun was darkened, we cannot go in, to what [00:36:06] was involved in those hours of darkness, when he, that blessed man, as was said in this room this morning, made his soul, an offering for sin, I'll only but quote you the words again of a hymn, that have oft moved one's soul, in thankfulness to God, the hymn says this, our sins, let's make it personal, my sins, my guilt, in love divine, were confessed, and borne by thee, and in those three hours of darkness, he bore the penalty of the judgment of God, against our sins, and it says at the end of it, when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, [00:37:06] we know that that was those words that John records, it is finished, God was glorified, the work was finished, but he says again, the Holy One that had been the sin bearer, and yet now in the blessed intimacy of that relationship, which nothing could sever, he says again, Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit, and John says, he bowed his head. Oh, the submission, the willingness of Christ to die, according to the will of God, for you, and for me, he bowed his head, and he died, he died when he wanted to, no man shall take my life [00:38:11] from me, I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it again, Ecclesiastes says, no man hath power over his spirit to retain his spirit, but this man, he said, Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit, and he died for you, and for me, and have you ever noticed that at this very moment, there is a heart that glorified God? It says the centurion, when he beheld this, it says he glorified God, thank God for a heart that at a moment like this, survives such a scene, a dying Christ, and at the moment [00:39:06] when he dies, the Spirit of God says this, the centurion, he glorified God. Oh, my beloved friend, as you survey the death of Jesus, is there something in your innermost soul that goes out in thankfulness to God? Oh, I trust that there may be. Certainly, he said, this was a righteous man. But you know, the Spirit of God puts in again a little verse which tells us that there were many that went by, they looked, and they were affected, with downcast head, downcast eye, it says they smote their breasts, it says they went on. Ah, you know, as many a man that has survived the [00:40:10] cross of Christ, like that, has been appalled at its awfulness, at its injustice, at its shame, its suffering, yes, but have passed on, unsaved, unaffected in heart, unmoved in conscience, cannot say in truth, yes, he died, that I might live. Oh, my friend, I pray that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ may not just affect you emotionally, because it's worthless. It's no good [00:41:01] just looking at that scene, and being appalled, and moved emotionally, because if it is, you're just like these, they passed on, unsaved. No, my friend, there must be a real conviction in the soul that this precious, peerless man was dying for you, and for me. But you know, we finished up with a little verse which says, and his acquaintance, I like that word, his acquaintance, you know what an acquaintance is, don't you? The world says at the end of a year that there are some that should be forgotten, but never forget this one. His acquaintance, they knew him, they loved him, and they stood afar off. It was too much for them, but it seems as though a sense [00:42:14] of the holiness, the awful magnitude of what was transacting before their eyes came upon their souls, and despite the fact that they loved him dearly, they put themselves afar off, and they stood, and they beheld, and we could go on and say they wondered, and I believe later on, when he arose from the dead, they worshipped. And again I say a true believer of Christ, a true lover of Jesus, cannot but ever survey the sufferings, the holy sufferings of the Christ of God, but what [00:43:01] there is not come from his innermost soul, a sense of worship, and praise, and thanksgiving to God. So the Apostle Paul, he glories in this, and there's nothing else to glory in. He had proved the power, and the worth, and the value in his own soul of the death of Christ, and he could say, I live, I

am crucified with Christ. He went out of this world the same way as Christ did. He was prepared to place himself alongside that rejected, crucified Christ, and say, I'm done with this world, be crucified by Saviour. And he says, I live by faith, faith of the Son of God, and there ever glowed in his innermost soul, a burning, and a joy, a responsiveness to this fact, [00:44:03] that the one who died there was the Son of God. And so to speak, turning aside from everybody else, he says, who loved me, and gave himself for me. And so at the end of that epistle, where he four times mentions the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only time in scripture you have his full title associated with his cross. But he goes on to say, and beloved brethren, dear young Christian, have you entered in exercise before God into the meaning, not only of the cross of Christ, as to your sins and your forgiveness, but your present contact through this world. Paul looked at the cross of Christ, and he looked at the world, [00:45:04] and he said, by the witch, the world is crucified under me. But he didn't finish there.

The world would take account of Paul as a man who was crucified as well. Oh, dear young one, not only trust him as your saviour, but take your stand alongside him. And in the true meaning of baptism, it's essential. Take your place in testimony, alongside a crucified, rejected Christ. God give you grace to serve him, till he comes. Till he comes. Oh, beloved friend, I commend it to you. God give you grace to survey the cross of Christ this night, and in truth, in honesty, [00:46:09] be able to say like the apostle Paul, he loved me and gave himself for me.