

“There Were Three Crosses on Golgotha!”

John 19:17-18

Intro. – The place where our Lord was crucified was called *the place of the skull*. Calvary is a Latin term from which we get our modern day words for: *baldness or scalp without hair*. It literally means “skull.”

Golgotha, often mispronounced, is a Greek-from-Aramaic word that also means “skull.” Thus, an accurate and graphic English equivalent for Golgotha/Calvary = “the place of the Cranium.” Why it was called this is open to speculation. Perhaps the shape of this hill had something to do with its name.

The real point of this text and the point of this message is that two others were crucified with our Lord. Have you ever noticed how when referring to Calvary we often make reference as if there was only one cross? There are lessons to be learned from all three of these crosses.

As Christ hung upon the cross, two criminals were crucified next to Him. One of these men is now in the place of the lost. His doom is sealed. The other is with the ransomed and free. What made the difference? Their attitude toward the One on the center cross. With this in mind let’s turn to all three of the crosses:

Purpose: to learn the lessons from all three of the crosses on Calvary

I On One Cross a Man Died IN SIN

- Isaiah 53:12 – “...*He was numbered with the transgressors...*” Certainly in Christ we find the fulfillment of this...
 - here, however, is an example of one who lived *in sin* and *died* in sin:
 - A. He Was a Criminal (evil-doer – robber)
 - 1. This man had lived in rebellion – rebellion against the laws of the land and of God.
 - 2. He now was paying the penalty... Not given the detail, but there was a trial and he was convicted, leaving no doubt he was deserving of what he was getting...
 - 3. In short, here was a hardened criminal reaping what he had sown.
 - B. He Was Unrepentant
 - 1. To the very end this one remained bitter and unrepentant.
 - 2. The agony of death brought no softening to this hardened individual.
 - 3. We read of no word of regret coming from his lips:
 - Illus. – movie concerning a teacher/coach caught with immoral intents... After being found guilty the Judge said: “Not only do I find the evidence disturbing... what’s more disturbing, I find no regret.”
 - 4. Only bitterness and abuse characterized this one in his dying hour = he was not repentant!
 - C. He Died IN His Sin
 - 1. One of the objects of this man’s hate/bitterness was Jesus... Thief wanted salvation/deliverance, but, he wanted this on his terms... This is the spirit characterizing many today...!
 - 2. Christ never promised to save us *from* the cross; however, promise to save us *through* the cross.
 - 3. This unrepentant criminal rejected this to his dying breath; therefore, he died IN his sin!
 - 4. Lessons to be learned from this individual:
 - a. impossible for those to be saved from death who reject the only means of salvation.
 - b. possible to be close to Christians... like being around them... etc. ; yet, without the blessing of having accepted His gift of grace on His terms...
 - c. risky business at the very least to put off accepting His gift of grace on His terms to the 11th hour: 1) may not have opportunity... 2) may continue in sin thur the very thralls of death...
- See with me, one man died on the cross IN sin... a fate so tragic because it was so unnecessary!...

II On Another Cross a Man Died TO SIN

- A. He Was a Criminal (evil-doer – robber)
 - 1. Matthew and Mark record both criminals scoffed and blasphemed the Holy One – repeating the words and sentiments of the leaders and rulers...

2. Why? Perhaps resented fact their execution was hastened in order to furnish evil company for Jesus in His death...
3. Luke records this criminal and the other were aware of each other's worthiness for such punishment – perhaps they were even partners in crime together.
4. At any rate, this man was also receiving what he had sown, just like the other thief.

B. He Was Repentant

1. Luke tells us even though 2 criminals scoffed at first, one grew silent and even came to the point of repentance.
2. In this we're told:
 - a. he rebukes the unrepentant criminal...
 - b. admits his own guilt and worthiness of punishment...
 - c. He confessed that Jesus was the Christ... declared his conviction that Jesus was innocent!
3. What brought all of this about?
 - a. fear of falling unprepared into the hands of the living God...
 - b. first words of Jesus on the cross (Father forgiven them...) and those that followed...
 - c. calm/majestic behavior Christ on the Cross... Miracles surrounding the Cross...

C. He Died TO His Sin

1. Asking Christ to remember him, this repentant thief was promised not only to be remembered, but to be in the presence of Jesus in Paradise (heaven's guest room)...
2. This promise was a promise of forgiveness and heaven – Note: given by Jesus Himself!
3. Some, tragically seek to make this a pattern for salvation – “ask Jesus into your heart”...
 - a. thus leading to age old question: “What about the thief on the Cross?”
 - b. was repentant (Luke 23:40ff) – repentance that led to a belief in Christ as Son of God
 - c. appealed to Jesus to “remember” = save him
 - d. this thief realized what was happening... this was God's sacrifice for sin – once and for all!
4. Lesson for us to learn:
 - a. this thief realized Who Christ was and Who was responsible for Jesus' present circumstance – i.e. the thief knew who killed Jesus!
 - Rembrandt's painting *The Three Crosses* – attention is drawn to the center cross... Then it is drawn to crowd and the different expressions. Art critics say one figure, almost hidden in the shadows is a self-portrait of Rembrandt. He recognized his sins helped nail Jesus to the Cross!
 - b. this thief came with the proper attitude... for the proper reason... through proper channels...

III On the Center Cross a Man Died FOR SIN

A. He Was Not a Criminal

- unlike the other two, this man was 100% innocent... so innocent He wrote the book on it!

B. He Was Unrepentant

- because He had absolutely nothing for which to repent...

C. He Was/Is God and Man

1. He, God came in the person of Jesus Christ with a mission and it was while hanging on the Cross the completion of that mission was announced – “It is finished!”
2. Lessons to be learned
 - take up our crosses daily and follow Him... crucify self and follow Christ!

Conclusion: Isaac Watts at age 4 knew Latin, at age 9 knew Greek, at age 11 knew French and at age 13 knew Hebrew. At age 15 he said, “The singing of God's praise is the part of worship nextest to heaven and its performance among us is the worst on earth.” His father said, “Young man, give us something better!” And better he did! He wrote over 600 hymns and became known as *The Father of English Hymnody*.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross was one of these. Its message clearly summarizes this message:

*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.*

In other words, if we owned the whole realm of nature and gave it as a gift back to God, it wouldn't be enough! Christ's wants more – our life, our soul our all!

First Cross = the power of God will not interfere with man's choice...

Second Cross = God hears the weakest of cries from the worst of sinners...

Third Cross = in none other than Christ is there the promise of salvation...!