

Sermons 2008

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Chapter 1. A Glimpse of the Cross

Note: Preached on Good Friday, 2008

READ - *Luke 23:39-53*

TEXT - *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. (Luke 23:33)*

THEME - If we truly see Christ on the cross, we must be changed.

Introduction

Behind me on the wall is a beautiful wooden cross. It is a work of art - an example of beautiful woodworking skills.

The real cross didn't look like that at all.

ILLUS - coworker's son - touched and disturbed when he was first exposed to the reality of what happened on that cross. And he was viewing it from a purely human perspective - he was distressed by the physical aspects of the crucifixion - something which is disturbing, indeed.

ILLUS - Passion of the Christ - many were shocked, dismayed, sickened by what they saw - and yet that was probably nothing compared to the actual event.

One of the good things about Good Friday is that it gives us an opportunity to get a glimpse of the cross - an object from which most would normally avert their eyes.

Tonight, let's look at it - get a glimpse of the cross, through the eyes of 4 men who were changed by what they saw there.

Thief on the Cross

cf. *Luke 23:39-43*

May I suggest that here was a man whose life was defined by his choices.

We all live with the choices we make in life.

Some people make bad choices. Some people make bad choices over and over. Sometimes those choices begin to define us.

ILLUS - Rahab "the harlot"

ILLUS - David and Bathsheba, the "adulterers"

ILLUS - "Doubting" Thomas

ILLUS - This man - "thief," "malefactor" - he is nameless, except for such descriptions.

This evil aspect of his life lasted right up to the last minute. Right up to the last few minutes of life, he clung to his wickedness:

Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. (Matthew 27:41-44)

But he saw something when he saw Jesus on the cross. (He did have a ring side seat!)

What do you suppose he saw? Was it something in the eyes of the Savior that influenced him? Or was it (more likely) something He said, such as "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?"

Whatever it was, the thief believed, and was saved.

And he demonstrated the mechanics of salvation for all of us.

- Confessed his own sin - (vs. 41)
- Believed Jesus could save Him - (vs. 42)
- Called upon the Lord and asked for salvation - (vs. 42)
- Received an immediate answer - (vs. 43)

Like the thief, we all have a choice to make concerning Jesus Christ!

ILLUS - Joshua said, *Choose ye this day whom you will serve...* (Joshua 24:15)

ILLUS - Moses said, *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Friend, have you seen Jesus on the cross? Really seen Him? Have you noticed, as did the thief, that Jesus had no sin of His own, but was bearing the punishment of yours and mine? As you look into that bloody face, do you see that it was bloodied for your sin - not his? As you see His pierced and bleeding body, tortured by the agonies of crucifixion, do you - like the thief - recognize that it was to pay the price for what you could not pay for yourself - to pay the price for the bad choices you have made? ... the sins you have committed?

What is your choice? QUOTE - "When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that is in itself a choice." (William James?)

It matters not how late the hour. Nor does it matter the choices you have made. Choose Jesus Christ, and all other choices are wiped away. It is not too late if you will just catch a glimpse of the cross.

Roman Centurion

cf. *Luke 23:44-47*

"Centurions" (i.e. Roman officers in command of a "century" or 100 men) played an interesting role in scripture:

Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, was a centurion (Acts 10:1, 22). Other centurions are mentioned in 3 verses in Matthew; 2 verses in Luke; and 12 verses in Acts.

Though I cannot be dogmatic about these things, for the scripture is silent about them, I have some thoughts about what kind of man this centurion was:

- A man of the world - an educated man; an enlightened Roman - one who probably thought himself above the foolish and backward superstitions of the Jews.

QUOTE (Polybius, Roman historian of the Mediterranean world famous for his book called *The Histories* or *The Rise of the Roman Empire*) "... the centurions were chosen by merit, and so were men remarkable not so much for their daring courage as for their deliberation, constancy, and strength of mind.", (from Dr. Maclear's *N. T. Hist.*)

- A "man's man" - tough as nails - not the kind of guy you would find worrying about getting in touch with his feminine side!

ILLUS - General George Patton

- A man who had killed other men.
(Probably many.)
- A man who had watched other men die.
(Probably many.)

- A man who was probably shocked by very little.

(And yet, he was shocked by what he saw on the cross!)

And if you get a glimpse of what he saw there, it will amaze you, too.

You see, Jesus did not die as other men die.

He died VOLUNTARILY.

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17-18)

cf. *Luke 23:46*

No matter how many men he had seen die, the centurion had never seen anybody just DECIDE it was time to die, and do so. Jesus, when He had born our sins on the cross and satisfied the penalty for those sins, laid down His life - voluntarily.

All over the world today, people are talking about the cross. Singing about the cross. Thinking about the cross.

And they will ask question after question - Did it really happen? (There are those who deny the history of it.) How did it happen? (They'll think about the mechanics of the thing.) When did it happen? (Some erroneously conclude it happened on Wednesday, rather than on Friday, as the Bible teaches.)

And yet there is a much more important question that must be asked. WHY?

SONG -

Why did He have to die?
What is the reason why?

This Roman centurion may have understood the answer to that question a bit better, as He watched Jesus voluntarily lay down His life - not a victim of Roman justice, but as a sacrifice for your sins and mine.

Can you see Him there? Voluntarily dying at just the right time? For you? What kind of man could do that? WOULD do that? For you and for me? I don't know if the centurion was saved or not. He didn't express faith in Christ as savior, nor call out for salvation - as did the thief, but he saw something different in Jesus, and you will, too, if you get a glimpse of the cross.

Joseph and Nicodemus

cf. *Luke 23:50-53*

(I include Nicodemus along with Joseph for John tells us he worked hand-in-hand with Joseph in this - cf. *John 19:39*.)

We could say many things about these two:

- Rich - they had everything this world could offer. (Joseph is described as a "rich man" in *Matthew 27:57*.)
- Religious - trained and steeped in religion.
- Powerful - (Nicodemus described as "a ruler of the Jews" in *John 3* and in *John 7* he is seen deliberating with the Jewish leaders.)

But there was one specific thing they both had in common - they were closet believers. They followed Christ "secretly."

ILLUS - Of Joseph, John wrote *And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews... (John 19:38)*

ILLUS - Nicodemus was the one who came to Jesus by night... secretly. (cf. *John 3*)

Closet Christians! Until, that is, they got a glimpse of the cross. Suddenly, they found the boldness to approach Pilate. Suddenly they were bold enough to take their faith to the streets - to be open about what they believed.

We live in a day when it has become fashionable to be a closet Christian. "My faith is a personal thing, Preacher. It's nobody else's business." If you believe that, you need to get a glimpse of the cross.

Read the book of Acts and search for closet Christians. You won't find any. Only as the years have blurred the view of the cross have so many so-called believers gone underground with their faith.

LET US GO BACK TO THE FOOT OF THE CROSS TONIGHT and get a glimpse of what happened there. But be warned - you will not be able to keep quiet about it anymore, once you've seen it.

When Nicodemus and Joseph got such a glimpse, it was known to all.

Conclusion

A thief, a soldier, and 2 rich men - Four men changed by what they saw on the cross.

Have you had such a glimpse of the cross?

We will conclude our service this evening by observing the Lord's Supper. And we invite all who are believers to join with us.

As we do so, will you cast your eyes back to the darkened hill? To Calvary? To Golgotha? And will you gaze for a while at what happened there?

Some of you tonight may need to, like the thief, choose Christ. If you never have done so - will you do so today?

Some of you tonight may need, like the centurion, a reminder of why He died. He died for you. He died for me. In your place. And in mine. For your sins. And for mine. Voluntarily.

Some of you tonight need to begin living openly for Christ - not secretly. Perhaps you need to stop skulking in shadows and tell the world that you're a Christian.

Have you had a glimpse of the cross?