

Exalting Jesus Christ

"The Cross – Part 1"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When we come to the crucifixion of Jesus all four gospel accounts record the events of that day.
 - A. You would think that such an important event in the history of Christianity would be treated with great detail, but you would be wrong.
 1. The writers of the gospel treat this most terrible and yet most historic event with great brevity.
 - a. Matthew covers the entire crucifixion of Jesus in 24 verses.
 - b. Mark, in 20 verses.
 - c. Luke deals with the events of the crucifixion in 23 verses.
 - d. And finally, the gospel of John, like the gospel of Mark, also covers the events of the entire crucifixion in just 20 verses.
 - B. This morning as we continue our studies through the gospel of John entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ," we finally come to the cross.
 1. From the moment Jesus was born, to the moment He stood before His accusers who shouted for His crucifixion – every event in the life of Jesus pointed to the cross.

2. And so, let's turn our attention to this terrible scene and examine what happened there in "The Cross of Christ – Part One."
 3. While we will use John's account of the crucifixion as the text of our study, we also want to consider some of the comments by the other inspired writers of the gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke.
- II. As we open our Bibles to the nineteenth chapter of John we find the events of the crucifixion unfolding before our eyes.
- A. Immediately after the Jewish and Roman trials of Jesus, the Savior was tormented by His jailers and eventually led away to be crucified.
1. **John 19:17-37** – *And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, 18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. 19 Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. 21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews.'"* 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. 24 They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,"

that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

Therefore the soldiers did these things. 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"

And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. 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.

31 Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

III. There are some things about the final moments during the life of Jesus that are important for us to understand.

A. As the time drew near, the Scriptures say Jesus cried with a loud voice, and said, *"It is finished!"* (**John 19:30**)

1. This wasn't a cry of pain or of despair, but rather a cry of triumph!
2. He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do.

- a. The job of bearing the sins of the world was finished.
- b. The work of becoming the Lamb of God was completed.
- c. And the task of paying the awful cost for our sins had finally been accomplished.

B. Then, according to Luke, Jesus uttered His final words.

1. It was a simple prayer – a prayer every Jewish mother taught their child to pray before going to sleep. The words were, *"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Having said this, He breathed His last."* **(Luke 23:46)**
2. And so, with the words of a child's prayer on His lips, Jesus bowed His head and died.
3. Jesus was now on His way home!

IV. We are all familiar with the events of the crucifixion – we all know the horrible details of the torturous death of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

A. But what do we really know about Jesus during those moments as He suffered on the cross?

1. What does the crucifixion actually tell us about Him?
2. And, perhaps more important, what message was God trying to send to us through this horrible scene?

- B. Unless we come to fully understand the significance of the cross, we will never fully appreciate what Jesus did there.
 - 1. He accomplished much more than simply die – a lot of men died on the cross.
 - 2. His death was far more meaningful – far more significant.
- C. Therefore, in this lesson and the next, I want us to look closely at the cross and learn everything we can about the cross of Christ and what it represents.
 - 1. So, let's go back in time some two-thousand years and place ourselves at the foot of the cross on that terrible day when Jesus was crucified.

BODY:

- I. As you stand there and gaze at Jesus suffering and dying on the cross, what do you actually see?
 - A. The first thing you should see is the great courage of Jesus.
 - 1. Crucifixion was considered the most terrible and agonizing form of execution known to man.
 - a. While most forms of execution brought death rather quickly – crucifixion victims often lingered for hours and even days in complete and unimaginable agony.

2. These terrible facts were well-known to every Jew, especially those who were raised in Galilee – like Jesus.
 - a. Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian who lived during the first century, tells us that in the political unrest that followed the death of Herod the Great, the Roman general Varus captured those who were responsible for the uprising in Galilee, and lined the roads of Galilee with more than two-thousand crosses.
 - b. Every Jewish boy, like Jesus, who grew up in Galilee would have heard about that horrible event perhaps a hundred times, or more.
3. Therefore, Jesus knew all about crucifixion.
 - a. No doubt, He had even witnessed crucifixion with His own human eyes.
4. But that didn't deter Jesus from accomplishing His mission.
 - a. Knowing the fate that awaited Him when He returned to Jerusalem, Jesus boldly and courageously walked straight into the hands of His enemies.
 - b. Any other hunted man would have simply disappeared into obscurity – but not Jesus.

b. The apostle John encountered this kind of teaching in his day as well.

(1). **1 John 4:1-3** – *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

c. To these people, the body of Jesus was not real, and therefore they believed that He only "appeared" to suffer.

d. Some even maintain that the Son of God came into the body of Jesus at the baptism by John in the Jordan, and then left the body of Jesus shortly before the crucifixion.

e. Others have even gone so far as to say that Jesus had a supernatural body, and not a body of flesh and bones like you and me.

- f. They claim He had a body that was not subject to the laws of physics, and therefore, not subject to human desire, emotion, or pain.
2. However, the gospel accounts paint an entirely different picture. The Scriptures vividly portray the real humanity of Jesus.
- a. We see Jesus staggering under the weight of the cross, so much so, that another man (Simon of Cyrene) was compelled to carry the cross for Him.
 - b. We also see Jesus so physically exhausted that He had to be half-carried up the hill to Calvary where He was crucified.
 - (1). **Mark 15:22** – "*they brought Jesus,*" meaning, "to bear or to carry."
 - c. We see His pain and agony as the iron spikes were driven through His hands and feet, and we heard Him cry out, "*thirst*" – all purely human feelings and desires commonly experienced by those being crucified.
3. The gospel accounts of the life of Christ show the real and full manhood of Jesus, and vividly depict the complete reality of His suffering.

- a. There was no phantom body on the cross – and no supernatural body that somehow escaped all the pain and suffering of the cross.
 - b. This is God the Son, wrapped in human flesh, feeling human pain, and suffering human agony.
4. It's been said that perhaps the most extraordinary thing we see in the moments of Jesus' suffering on the cross is His absolute refusal to use His divine powers.
- a. With just a simple word the Hill of Calvary could have been overwhelmed with legions of angels ready to respond to His command.
 - b. But Jesus refused to use His powers for His own gain, His own profit, and for His own comfort.
- C. And, as you stand at the foot of the cross and gaze up at Jesus, you can also see the identity of Jesus with sinners like you and me.
1. It is no coincidence that He was crucified between two thieves. In fact, the prophet Isaiah spoke of this very thing centuries before.
 - a. **Isaiah 53:9, 12** – *And they made His grave with the wicked – But with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth... Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the*

spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

2. But this should come as no surprise to any of us. Jesus had always been a friend of tax-gathers and sinners – a friendship that shocked the orthodox Jewish religious leaders of His day who called Him *"a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"*
 - a. **Matthew 9:10-13** – *Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*
3. Being crucified between two criminals (thieves) was not a coincidence – it is symbolic of His whole life-long work – a work of coming into the world to bring sinners like you and me back to God.

- a. He came to bring reconciliation between sinners and God.
 - b. And by offering Himself on the cross, Jesus also became our High Priest (from the Latin: "Pontifex," which means "bridge-builder").
 - c. Jesus came to restore our relationship with God, and to rebuild the bridge between us and the God of heaven – a bridge we tore down by our own rebellious sins.
- D. And as you stand at the foot of the cross, perhaps more than anything you see the forgiveness of Jesus.
1. Even as the iron spikes were being driven through His hands and feet, He prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."* (**Luke 23:34**).
 2. This great act of merciful forgiveness tells us something else about Jesus.
 - a. In Jesus, we see the true character of God fully displayed.
 - b. We see there are no limits to God's love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.
 - c. The forgiveness God extends to all mankind throughout the ages is vividly displayed in the forgiveness Jesus gave even to those who were nailing Him to the cross.

- E. But as you stand at the foot of the cross, you also see the selflessness of Jesus.
1. During moments of intense pain and suffering, we tend to think only of ourselves – our needs, our desires, our comforts.
 2. But, even when Jesus was at the height of His pain and suffering, He looked down from the cross and saw the sorrow and loneliness of His mother, Mary.
 - a. He knew that someone responsible and trustworthy would need to care for, and comfort, her in the days ahead, and so He committed her to the care of John, the disciple whom He loved.
 - b. **John 19:27b** – *And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*
 3. Even in the midst of unimaginable suffering and pain Jesus continued to focus all His attention on the needs of others.
- F. And, as you stand at the foot of the cross and gaze up at Jesus, you can't possibly miss the deep suffering of the Savior.
1. At the darkest hour, Jesus suddenly cried out, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (**Matthew 27:46**)
 - a. The moment Jesus dreaded the most had finally come.

- b. It was a moment filled with indescribable horror. Human words can't even begin to express the sheer horror of that moment.
 - c. Almost universally, Biblical scholars believe this was the very moment when Jesus bore the guilt of every sin committed since the beginning of time, and every sin yet to be committed until His return.
2. Unless you've carried the tremendous burden of guilt for some terrible sin you've committed, you can't really relate to this.
 3. Jesus not only, "*bore our sins in His body on the tree,*" (**1 Peter 2:24**), the apostle Paul says God, "*made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*" (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).
 4. But what is even worse, there was some kind of momentary separation between God and Jesus at that very moment.
 - a. We may never fully understand what happened at that moment, nor fully grasp its significance, but it must have filled the heart of Jesus with indescribably horror.
 - b. Perhaps Jesus experienced, in just one brief moment of time, the horror we will experience for an eternity, if we die still bearing the guilt of our own sins.

- c. Perhaps this is what prompted Jesus to cry out, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (**Matthew 27:46**)
 - d. Maybe He briefly experienced what it will be like for us to be hurled into eternity, separated from the love and mercy of God forever.
- G. As the end came for Jesus, you can also see the victory for Jesus.
- 1. As we said at the beginning, the cry, "*It is finished!*" was a cry of victory.
 - a. His task had finally been accomplished, and His work was done.
 - b. He came into the world sinless, and now He was leaving the world in the same sinless condition.
 - c. The sinless Lamb of God had taken away the sins of the world, and now the victory was complete and the price for our redemption was paid!
- H. And finally, as you stand at the foot of the cross, gazing up at the lifeless body of Jesus, you see His peace.
- 1. **Luke 23:46** – *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'"*

2. **John 19:30** – *He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*
3. Jesus prayed a simple child's prayer, and then bowed His head and died.
 - a. The word "*bowed*" used by John describes someone whose head peacefully lays back, as one might place his head on a pillow to sleep.
4. When death finally came for Jesus:
 - a. There was no disappointment as though He had somehow failed.
 - b. There was no broken heart over having been so cruelly mocked.
 - c. There was no uncertainty about the future.
 - d. And there was certainly no fear of the grave.
5. When death finally came for Jesus, there was only the peaceful contentment of one who knew He had faithfully finished the work the Father had given Him to do.
6. And now, Jesus was on His way home to the greatest homecoming in the history of the universe.

CONCLUSION:

I. In 1939, just two years before the death of her husband, Mrs. E. M. Bartlett copyrighted a song her husband, Eugene Bartlett, had composed just a few years earlier.

A. Although Eugene Bartlett would only live two more years, dying at the age of 56, his song has continued to this day to stir the hearts of everyone who hears it.

1. The words are familiar:

*I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from glory,
How He gave His life on Calvary to save a wretch like me;
I heard about His groaning, of His precious blood's atoning,
Then I repented of my sins and won the victory.
O victory in Jesus, My Savior, forever,
He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood;
He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him,
He plunged me to victory, beneath the cleansing flood.*

(Eugene M. Bartlett, 1885-1941)

B. "He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood!" How true!

1. Jesus came to this world to seek and save sinners like you and like me, and to redeemed us through the blood He shed on the cross of Calvary.

- a. This means the price to free you from your sins has already been paid.
 - b. You don't owe a thing – you're debt free.
 - c. The debt for every sin you've ever committed has been paid in full!
2. But no one can receive the benefits of that wonderful blessing unless we come to Him and accept the gift of salvation He offers.
 - a. He gave His life for you.
 - b. And now, He wants you to give your heart to Him.
 3. If you've never come to Christ in faith, repenting of your past sins, confessing your faith in Him, and being buried with Him in baptism, then you need to do that this very moment.
 - a. That's the only way you can receive the gift of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ.
 4. And if you've done that but for some reason have allowed sin back into your life, then all He asks is that you come back to Him with a repentant heart so He can cleanse you of those sins as well.