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editorial



Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

THE RUGGED CROSS

The trial and death of Jesus Christ revealed both the wicked heart of men and the gracious heart of God. When men were doing their worst, God was giving his best.

The Cross is the perfect finishing point of Jesus Christ in His act of atonement for the remission of human sin. The Cross is the exact point from which man begins his journey of a new life that will lead him to eternity. This can be further proven by Tim Lahaye's illustration in his book *'Why Believe in Jesus?'*. Over a hundred years ago, a large symposium on religion was held in the city of Chicago. Seven hundred people crowded the pavilion to hear one of the most brilliant Hindu speakers in the world, Swami Vivekananda. He did not disappoint them, for he was magnificent as he laid out the philosophical facets of Hinduism, the religion of India, finishing to thunderous applause. He was followed by a famous Christian clergyman who, for some reason, chose not to present the philosophy of Christianity. Possibly he feared the simple story of the Son of God dying for the sins of a rebellious human race would pale by contrast to the beautiful ideals of Hinduism.

When the chairman announced that the next speaker chose not to speak, a thick silence hung over the pavilion. In desperation,

the chairman asked if anyone would care to speak on behalf of Christianity. Suddenly, someone sitting in the back, a Chicago Sunday School teacher named Joseph Cook walked forward and said, "I would like to tell a story". Then he told Shakespeare's tale of Macbeth and how Lady Macbeth and her husband had connived to kill the king, after which her guilt drove her to the edge of madness. Finally, when she could no longer rid her hands of the blood guiltiness of her sin, she cried that famous line, "Out! Out, damned spot!"

Turning to Swami Vivekananda, Joseph Cook humbly asked, "Sir, what relief does Hinduism have to offer to Lady Macbeth to cleanse her sin?" The flustered Swami admitted that Hinduism had no means of forgiving sin. Joseph Cook then reached into his pocket for his New Testament and said, "I would like to show you Christianity's remedy for her sin". He read, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sins. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Then Cook explained how Christ died on the Cross for the sins of the whole world and invited those who had never done so to receive the Savior. ●



MEANING OF THE CROSS

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE DYING THIEF



Dr. Kris A. Jackson
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There were three crosses on Calvary Hill that Passover. One felon died “in” sin, I too was nailed on a cross where I died “to” sin, and the Man in the middle, the innocent One, died “for” sin. Paul had three crosses in mind when he penned – “But 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” (Galatians 6:14). All are crucified, “the good, the bad and the ugly”, to use the western idiom. I’ll get to the Good soon, but first let’s address the malefactor at Jesus’ side. Then I’ll talk humbly of my own cross because I was there, on Skull Hill, the afternoon when the sun went dark for three hours.

The court called him a thief, liar and robber. He had no defense. The gavel struck the judge’s desk and in short order a hammer drove nails through his wrists. Law did its work. A price was paid. The sentence must be carried out. Eye for eye. Tooth for tooth. Justice was served. And every honest heart will admit that Pilate’s order was fair and deserved for conscience is able to accurately weigh guilt, so Calvary took another eye, and another tooth. More bones were left behind at the Place of the Skull, Golgotha. Please don’t think I don’t feel badly for the man, for I do, but I was helpless to intervene. For I don’t see how a criminal can pay for the crimes of a fellow-criminal. Plus, my own case was pending. Soon I was hoisted on the opposite side of where the Nazarene was executed.

This is the world’s cross. It is emblemized by vertical and horizontal beams, rusty spikes and Adamic blood dripping down splintery wood. I know because that day “the world was crucified to me, and I unto the world”. When theologians mention “the cross” it is often used as a metaphor. The real cross is made of burdens, fears and torments. The hammer that drove the nails is a forging of stress, disease, inflicted pain, toil, sweat and



Family members and prayer partners at the service

THE CROSS

not only displays the wrath of God, love of God and wisdom of God, I found in it the power of God, for it gave this dying thief a living hope. Jesus Christ saved me from a cross, with the power of His cross.

every other scourge that was absent Adam's original garden. Humanity has been paid. What happened on the three crosses was microcosmic of all ages of man. I was there but so were you, in type. The wage according to the New Testament epistles is death.

Scan now to the center of the hill. This man died "for" sin. He was different. No other could serve as Substitute, Mediator or Sacrifice. Remember, my hands were nailed to the other cross. I couldn't reach my wallet, naked and helpless, suspended on the post. Truth is, silver and gold wouldn't help anyway because of the severity of the fine. I saw something in the Middleman, He had done nothing amiss. And I overheard that Pilate found no fault in Him. He was stripped bare, pinned and unable to move, cursed at, mocked, bleeding and slowly dying, and for what? Healing someone on the Sabbath as was alleged. Seriously? I remembered what the rabbis taught, for my mother shared these things when I was young, before I turned to a life of rebellion and selfishness, running from God.

This is what I was taught, the sins of the whole nation would be transferred to the atoning victim. God would see the blood on the wooden door and judgment would be passed over. Isaiah said he would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. David added that they would pierce his hands and feet. The priests were slaughtering Passover lambs on yonder hill. I began to wonder if there was any correlation. The rabbis said the flesh

of the sin offering would be taken outside the camp. I asked myself, "Is this what they meant?" Sacrificial hides covered Adam and Eve, our first parents. Under the Law goats and bullocks were slain for various degrees of sins. "Am I hanging on the very hill where a ram was sacrificed in the stead of Isaac?" If it was not, I knew my own dilemma, for nothing else mattered as I hung there nearing my own death. I desperately needed a Savior. I needed Jehovah-jireh, a God who would "provide Himself a lamb".

"Is there any hope for such a worm as I?" The temple altar was so far away. And I couldn't free my nailed feet to travel there. I had no go-between, no priest, no last rites were spoken. But somehow, I felt that this man was everything my mother had told me she looked for in the coming Messiah. I asked again, "Who is He? Everyone in town had heard of His miracles and mighty deeds. He can be no sinner, for he prays as we scoff. And He intercedes for His accusers and murderers". Suddenly I sensed that God Himself had drawn near my side. I couldn't reach this man, my head pained to even face his direction, but I gathered what little breath that remained and pleaded, "Remember me".

From my current vantage I know that what was kindled in my heart that day was what we call faith. I saw it, clear as day. "Here is the Passover door. Here is my way of escape. This man is Lord". It all added up for me. The doctors of the law called the story that he was virgin-born a hoax. And there were many other accusations. But every rumor I had heard faded as I looked His way. It dawned on me, He wasn't dying in sin, as I so feared that I soon would. He was dying for sin. "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world..." (Galatians 1:4) "For sins" meant my sins! The moment I asked, He replied – "Today you will be with Me in Paradise". In an instant, a wave of peace came over me. Panic vanished. I was no longer afraid to die. And being rescued from the cross was no longer my chief desire. My own cross beam now seemed a pillow of peace.

I was asked to explain the meaning of the cross. Hmm, if anyone could I guess it would be me, having witnessed the whole gruesome scene, but can one drop of water explain the whole ocean? Let me just say that it was unfathomable that He would die for the likes of me. He also died for my former accomplice – how I wish he would have only softened his heart.

This much I can say, the cross points two directions, toward heaven in worship and toward earth in work. It reaches upward to God and outward to man, wood with brass nails like the altar of burnt offering with its horns and rings of brass. It was the judgment seat where the unmitigated wrath of God was poured out on sin, but it became our mercy seat, for Jesus stretched out his hands wide enough to receive even me. For twenty centuries, because of the middle cross, I have been in the bliss of His paradise, and in all that time no better sacrifice has been needed, because Jesus died once and for all, for all men. And along with the wrath of God and love of God, I see the wisdom of God in the cross, for when Jesus died it served as a boomerang against the devil. The very device schemed to kill God in the flesh became the weapon that defeated sin and Satan, like Haman hung from the very gallows he built for Mordecai. Someone said the cross was a minus turned into a plus.

In my case it was life's dividing line, because two of us, one no better than the other, determined our destinies by how we responded to the Man in the middle. The cross is where I crossed over. Mercy built a bridge, its beams sawn from an earthen tree, with nails forged from metals dug from a cursed earth. The cross is a curse turned into a blessing, a doorway opened by a death. You know, I cherish the old rugged cross! My only regret is that I didn't have time to bear my own into all the world. One thing I have discovered, there are no crown-wearers in heaven that were not cross-bearers on earth.

Finally, the cross not only displays the wrath of God, love of God and wisdom of God, I found in it the power of God, for it gave this dying thief a living hope. Jesus Christ saved me from a cross, with the power of His cross. I was lucky enough to be within voice-range of the Middleman. Your calling is to voice what He did on the cross to end of the earth – "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Now release that power! ●



Special singing and music by Sis. Giji Sam and Bro. Jeelson



WOMEN AROUND THE CROSS



Mrs. Starla Luke

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"Scripture has no stories of women betraying Jesus or abandoning Jesus. His female followers remained loyal." LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

Contemplating on the women around the cross of Christ, one thought that stands out is that these women - some named and others unnamed - were no ordinary or simple women. They were women of great faith and courage; women who were willing to walk alongside Jesus, gave of their resources to help Jesus in His ministry; traveled crossing all boundaries; gave up the safety and security of their homes; boldly and publicly displayed their loyalty to Jesus even at the cost of risking relationships. Some stood with Jesus at the very cost of their reputation.

A close look at the scene where Jesus was arrested shows how some of the disciples (including Peter) ran away, some watched from a distance and the others stayed close by. John 19:25 reads that his mother Mary, his mother's sister and Mary Magdalene stood close to the cross - the physical closeness happened because of the deep emotional closeness with Jesus.

Surprisingly, many real life incidents regarding the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus are so clearly passed down to us because of the narratives of these women who stood around the cross. They remained close to Jesus, by the cross, until the very end despite the hopeless situation they faced.

Mary Magdalene was demon possessed. Mark 16 talks about how Jesus delivered her from them all. She was set free - set free from demonic oppression, from a past filled with guilt, shame and all pain. It was out of deep gratitude for this mighty deliverance that she



MARY

teaches us, never to assume we are abandoned by God in times of distress. At such times, may we kneel at the foot of the cross and seek His intervention. Our sufferings ought to become opportunities to draw us closer to Christ and learn from Him.

kept following Jesus, even to the cross. Her deep devotion and allegiance sprung from the memories of her great deliverance. She must have found it difficult to let go of her pain until the moment Jesus touched and healed her. The resurrected Jesus commissions her to be an evangelist and even sends her to the apostles as a carrier of good news of His resurrection! She was regarded as a visionary and leader.

Today, we live knowing Jesus died on the cross and rose again - in the power of the resurrection. He can do mighty things. You and I may not need outright deliverance from demonic oppression, however He is more than able to draw us out of the shame and pain of the past that grips our hearts and mind, if only we will willingly surrender them to Jesus like Mary did. And like Mary Magdalene, the commission to share the 'good news' is given to each one of us. None of us are exempt from this task. Mary carried out the mandate very faithfully. How faithful are we in fulfilling this mandate?

Mary, mother of Jesus was at the foot of the cross too. "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene". John 19:25

How heart wrenching it must have been for her to watch her beloved first born hanging on the cross. How would she, a mother, have borne the agony of her son crying out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Imagine Mary's helplessness, watching her son die such a cruel death. Words cannot convey the pain this mother must have felt to see her son suffer.

It is quite possible that Mary would have assumed that, Jesus, conceived of the Holy Spirit, whose very birth was announced by angels would also enjoy angelic protection in times of crisis. Mary, who quietly pondered in her heart the wonderful things spoken by the angel at His birth, now stands at the foot of the Cross wondering about the hopeless situation. She must have been longing to hear some angelic voice giving hope. She heard none.

It would have been only natural for Mary to anticipate that the Messiah would be delivered miraculously. But, it did not happen. Jesus died a senseless human death! As a mother, she was crushed by His death. However, on the third day, Mary heard of the greatest of miracles! Jesus rose again - conquering the grave; conquering death itself! Jesus' coming back to life revived in Mary every promise that was foretold of Him even before His birth. What a fitting reward to her faith in and love for Jesus. This resurrection of Jesus is what makes the Christian hopeful of life in eternity. All one has to do is believe in Jesus and he/she is rewarded with eternal life.

Mary teaches us, never to assume we are abandoned by God in times of distress. At such times, may we kneel at the foot of the cross and seek His intervention. Our sufferings ought to become opportunities to draw us closer to Christ and learn from Him.

Mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) - "Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses and Salome" Mark 15:40

Reading Matthew's narrative below clarifies to us that Salome mentioned by Mark was was the wife of Zebedee.

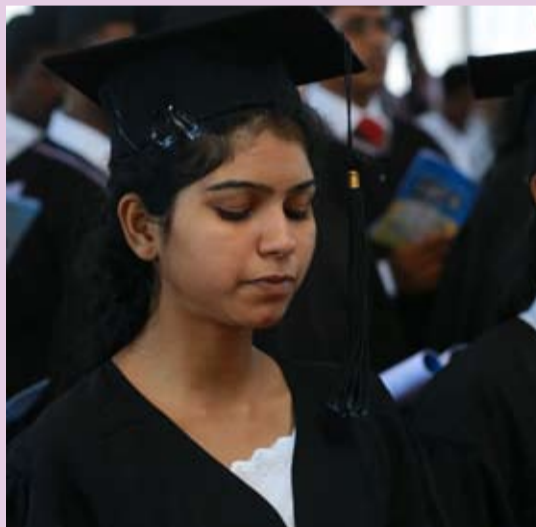
Matthew 27:55-56 reads, "Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for His needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Salome, considered the mother of the sons of Zebedee, puts forth her request in Matt.20:20, 21, "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons,... " Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." She dreamed of her sons gaining prominent positions in the kingdom of God. That is all that mattered to her. All that she was concerned about was her sons secure future. She anticipated a kingdom to be established wherein her sons would be groomed by Jesus for greater glory and power!

And now this very Jesus hangs on the cross - on the cursed tree. How devastating for this mother! What would be the future of her dearly loved sons? All her dreams are shattered as she stands at the foot of the cross and looks up to see the mangled face of Jesus on wooden cross, lying helpless between the two thieves!



Dainu Das



Anjana K. S.



Jyothi Rana



Evening class graduates





The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been brought into being by the cross, and the focus of its worship is the Lamb once slain, now glorified.



-John Stott

What a devastating sight for one whose every waking thought and dream was to behold both her sons seated in glory, beside the LORD in His kingdom. This is how we often feel when faced with situations that are trying and challenging. When we are faced with utter despair, and every hope seems lost. For three days there was nothing but silence. No sign of

life from the One on the cross. Nothing to look forward to.

But suddenly on the third day is the resurrection! And life springs forth! Because Jesus died and rose again we have hope of eternal life with Christ. It was the Cross that changed everything. From despair rose hope; from death came life!

Salome's two sons were much loved disciples of Jesus. Instead of ensuring that her sons continued to be the best of Jesus' disciples, it appears she was trying to gain His favor by her selfish recommendations. Salome's deep love for her sons caused her to be highly ambitious for them. It is not wrong for a mother to want the very best for her child. But if her desire for her child is at cross purposes with God's, that spells danger. May our desires for our children stem from true faith in Jesus and may the methods to fulfill those desires always be honorable ones!

INVALUABLE LIFE LESSONS FROM THE WOMEN AT THE CROSS

1. None of the women followers of Jesus abandoned Him. All of them stayed faithful till the end. What a tremendous responsibility we women have as we follow our Lord today!! We will go through challenges - cornered and compelled to quit. In such trying times may we remain faithful. May we never betray, backtrack or break faith! We must be faithful to Christ and to others. We must be known to be people of our word.
2. The women from Galilee followed him and ministered to Jesus by preparing spices and perfume for His burial. They not only ministered to His many needs while he was alive, but also showed deep regard and care after his death. This is a reminder for us to always be prepared to serve and be mindful of the needs of others. Service to God and man ought to be the focus of our lives as women. We certainly have a responsibility to take care of those in need and around us.
3. His women followers became His brand ambassadors. They went around speaking what they heard and saw. They were commissioned by Jesus to share the good news to the disciples (Apostles) - which they did valiantly. We are given the same freedom and responsibility today. May we 'preach and speak' intentionally and become messengers of the gospel. We should speak with clarity and reach more people with the gospel of salvation.

Just as the women at the Cross proved their faithfulness until the very end, may we women of God prove our faithfulness to Christ and His Word to the very end. ●



Well wishers, Mrs. Annamma Mathews (Headmistress Bala Bhavan School) with staff of IBC





THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS



Rev. Philip P. Sam

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“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Apostle Paul makes this affirmation even as he addresses the issue of emerging schisms and groups in the Corinthian church. These schisms were centered on human personalities like Apollos, Peter and Paul himself. Some of the members of the church followed Apollos, while others followed Peter and still others hooked on with Paul (1 Corinthians 1:12). These internal issues were a reflection of the ‘hero worship’ that was popping up subtly in the ministries and the life of the Church. It is in this context that Paul makes his point that the cross is not to be preached with human wisdom (1:17) or else it will become devoid of its power. Paul drives home his assertion that the message of the cross is basically foolishness and hence the personality of the messenger and his skills as well as wisdom becomes redundant to attract a following.

We need to address two basic questions at this juncture: Firstly, how is the message of the cross foolishness for the world? Secondly, why did God reveal the message of salvation through the foolishness of the cross? Apostle Paul addresses both these questions in his arguments that develop the theme of the foolishness of cross firstly in terms of the context of the message (the Jews and Greeks 1:18-22), secondly, the content of the message of crucified God (1:23-25), thirdly, in terms of the recipients (weak and lowly people) of the message (1:26-31) and fourthly, the communication of the message in weakness and trembling (2:1-6).





who in their past history manifested Himself in signs and wonders on their behalf. For the Jews, Yahweh is the God of Israel who is powerful and would act mightily to establish their kingdom. The Jews sought for a Messiah who would be manifested to establish the kingdom of Israel. How could they believe in a messiah who would end up on an old rugged cross? That was a scandal and a stumbling block in their belief system. In the contemporary world also, a major section of the people seek after a wonder working God, who would work on their behalf to establish their well being. Such a belief however is incompatible with the wisdom of the cross. To such believers, the cross and the suffering of Christ is something off-track, undesirable and hence a stumbling block.

The Greeks on the other hand looked for wisdom and studied the meaning of life in a philosophical way. For things to be meaningful, it had to be logical to the human mind. How could the 'death of God' be logical to the human mind? It would not be an exaggeration to state that all the religious systems of the world is the result of human philosophies and the search of meaning of life. The cross can end up in religion if it is understood and oversimplified in terms of human wisdom. God's ways are very different from the way of the humans, and the cross was God's way to nullify the wisdom of the wise (1:19 & 20).

The Christian world today is full of philosophers and preachers who are trying to make the cross understandable in terms of human logic. In this attempt they make the cross empty of its own divine power.

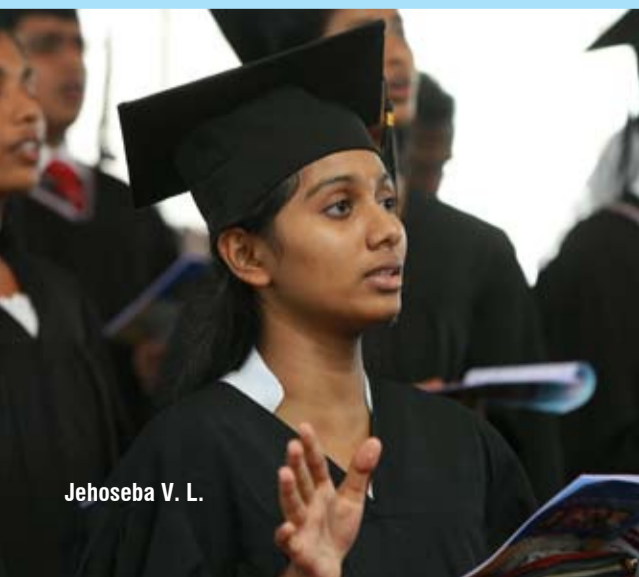
THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE

The message of the cross is about the "crucified God". It is something which human minds cannot grasp. To the world it is foolishness. In the eyes of the world, what is the power that is demonstrated in the helplessness of God hanging upon a cross? Human religion and philosophy seeks a God who demonstrates his power through signs, wonders and a higher wisdom. However the cross does not display any of these characteristics and hence it is foolishness to the world.

The cross lacks the form of human wisdom and power; however it is the power of God for the salvation of humankind. Jesus is the wisdom from God- that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1:30). Though the message of the cross is stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek, yet for those who are called, it is the power and wisdom of God. The cross is God ordained way for our redemption, salvation and right relationship with God.

THE CONTEXT OF THE MESSAGE

The message of the cross is foolishness to the world. The context of the message is the world which however is looking for signs and wisdom. The Jews and Greeks together defined the population of the first century world of Paul. The Jews sought after a miracle working God,



THE CALLING OF THE MESSAGE

Paul further spells forth the calling of the message whereby God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1:26-31). Paul explains that God chose the vile things of the world so that no one can boast before Him (1:29).

THE COMMUNICATION OF THE MESSAGE

The communication of the message is not in eloquence and higher wisdom but in meekness, fear and trembling so that the message is communicated not in wise words and forms but in the demonstration of the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1-6). The communication of the gospel in meekness makes sure that the faith of the believer rests not on the wisdom of the

communicator but on the power of God (2:6).

After a brief section addressing the believers of Corinth about their spiritual wisdom in living a worldly life filled with Jealousy, quarrelling and following human leaders, Paul asks a rhetorical question: Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?... (1 Corinthians 3:5) Paul in this part of the letter to the Corinthians wants to admonish the believers to understand the true nature of the gospel of the cross and the true value of the preachers so that the Christian faith does not become reduced to a false religion of human splendor and display of human skill and wisdom.

Have we emptied the power of the cross by preaching the gospel in human wisdom? And by doing so have we attracted people to follow us? To put the question the other way round, are we giving more importance to the personalities and preachers of the message? This question is particularly important for our times because Christendom is divided today because of preachers who are reducing the Christian faith into personality cults. The message of the cross is foolishness yet the power and wisdom of God, preached in meekness but demonstrated by the power of the Spirit and accepted by a foolish people to nullify the wise, so that no one can boast before God. The message of God is foolishness so that the faith of the believer may rest not upon human wisdom but on the power of God alone (2:6). The cross is the greatest display of God power, let that power not be reduced or limited or bypassed by human wisdom. Let all glory and honor be to God. •

