



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

The indifference of men to the agonies of Christ

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger, Lamentations 1:12.

(A gospel message preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church by the then minister, Rev Ivan Foster, on Lord's Day evening, 17th January 1999)

What a mountain of triviality occupies the interest of mankind! This is never more obvious than at 'Easter' time! Bunnies and chocolate eggs take precedence over the glorious events of the Saviour's sufferings, death and resurrection.

There are those in the scientific world who are renowned for their knowledge of bugs and beetles, lice and leeches. Some men ceaselessly gaze at the stars in order to catch a glimpse of some unbeknown lump of matter. Others sift the soil and the slime of the earth's surface in order to discover something new about the creatures that once roamed the earth. The activities of bats and birds, of the antelope and the ant, of the leopard and the lizard have all been studied at length by men consumed with an interest in such things.

But no man has a desire of himself to examine the sufferings of Christ on the cross. When an invitation is given to consider Calvary, all with one consent begin to make excuse.

The account of Christ on the cross is one that ought to interest men. It contains all that in which men have shown an interest in a different setting. Suffering, injustice, miraculous events — these are the matters that excite man's interest. But not in the case of the Saviour's death. Indeed, man is the only part of creation that does not react to the cross. Sun, earth, angels all manifested a reaction but not man. He mockingly walked past unmoved.

Let us look at this verse which is the cry of Jeremiah at the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in the year 588 BC approximately, some 620 years before the death of the Saviour at the cross.

This cry of the prophet is suited to the cross, indeed is prophetic of Calvary's sufferings.

I. THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST WERE WITHOUT EQUAL

Men had been crucified before. So what made the Saviour's suffering worse?

1. His perfect innocence. Every accusation levelled against the Lord Jesus was false. Hear the testimony of the Scriptures.

- "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," 1 Peter 2:22.
- "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin," 1 John 3:5.

2. He suffered for His tormentors. Those who oppose Him are the benefactors from His death.

- "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," Romans 5:10.
- "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unrepvable in his sight," Colossians 1:21-22.



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3. What it was He suffered. The fierceness of God's eternal wrath. Indeed, I believe it to be correct to say that He suffered greater punishment than will the devil, for Christ suffered the wrath that was due to ALL His elect - a vast multitude of people that cannot be numbered.

II. THE INDIFFERENCE OF MEN

1. Universal. All pass the cross by. There are no exceptions except where God has moved by His grace and power and opened the eyes of the sinner, such as was the case with the 'dying thief'. He had been indifferent along with the other thief, when grace opened his heart and he became aware of the true identity of the Glorious person beside him and the nature of the great work He was undertaking in His sufferings.

Your presence here in a gospel meeting is no denial of that truth sinner! No matter how poor the preacher's presentation of these truths they ought to move our hearts to tears!

Are you truly looking upon Christ?

2. Manifested. "Pass by." We preach to a world interested in something else. Its mind and eye are upon other matters. The spirit of the priest and the Levite is in us all. "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side," Luke 10:30-32. You have spent your life so far passing by the Saviour on the cross!

3. Refusal even to look or listen. The cry and the sight of the cross are refused. The sound of the gospel is heard throughout the world yet the world remains indifferent.

III. THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

Why do men react so?

1. We are of His tormentors. The spirit that wrought in those who crucified Christ is at work in us also. As they had no pity, so neither has unregenerate man. The collective ye of Acts 2:23 may be applied to all of us as well. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." See also verse 36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

2. We are aware of our guilt. Man cannot look at the cross and hear the groans of its victim without becoming convicted of his guilt. It is for this reason he hides his face for the sight would work conviction within his heart.

3. There is power in the cross to melt those who behold. It is the preaching and the presenting of the cross that melts and breaks the hardest heart. It is the 'power of God unto salvation.'

4. The wrath of God against sin is displayed there. What the Saviour bore for His people is what rejecters of Christ will bear for their own sin throughout eternity. The sight of Christ on the cross brings home this truth. O how unwelcome is such a truth and how men seek to avoid every witness to it!

This is something of the reasons why men will not look or linger at the cross.

May God in mercy stop you and may your soul be overwhelmed as was the crowd on the day of Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37.