

“Nailed to the Cross”

Colossians 2:13-15, Good Friday, April 3, 2015

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the un-circumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

Brothers and sisters you and I are here again tonight, to remember with all of the courage we can muster, that whenever we look at the Christ on his cross of Calvary that we are not merely witnessing a murder! Nor are we simply taking another hard look at the death of a martyr! Nor are we remembering the execution of a political revolutionary who made a gigantic error in judgment with respect to his own public relations campaign; and therefore, ended up, getting crucified!

We are not simply witnessing a drama or that of an actor following a script, for the 53rd chapter of Isaiah tells us plainly: *“It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the LORD shall prosper in his hands (v. 10).*

Jesus never won an Oscar - because he wasn't acting. Calvary was dead serious. Calvary was a sacrifice. It was God dying in man's place. That's why he came!

Brothers and sisters when St. Paul wrote these words of our sermon text this evening, he had something firmly fixed in his mind of which most of us, no doubt today, are now totally unaware! Paul is reminding us that if a man who was a defendant, was found guilty of a crime in a Roman court, and then given a prison sentence in punishment for his crime, that it was then customary among the Roman magistrates to craft a placard to be affixed atop his prison door. Everyone who passed by his jail cell would see written upon that placard: (1) the nature of the crime of which he had been convicted, and also (2) the amount of time he would have to spend in prison in payment for his crime.

This “record of debt, would have been firmly fixed for all to see above his prison door. FURTHERMORE WHEN THAT PRISONER’S TIME IN PRISON HAD BEEN FULFILLED, HIS “RECORD OF DEBT” WOULD ALSO BE TAKEN DOWN AND MARKED: “PAID IN FULL.” That placard was then taken to a judge, who would put his seal of authenticity upon it! If anyone were ever to accuse him of his crime again, he could pull out his notarized certificate of debt as proof that he had served his time. In other words, he could then say: “You’re not going to bring me into double jeopardy; I’ve already paid for my crime! My debt to society is paid!”

Now if the criminal in question was not a ROMAN CITIZEN and was guilty of a capital offense, then that same placard, that same “record of debt” and could have been easily nailed it to a cross, above the convicted criminal’s head, upon which he could be crucified. This is the reason that Pontius Pilate had that placard placed above our Savior’s head that said in Latin JESUS CHRISTUS REX IOUDORUM, and in also in Greek and in Aramaic: “JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE JEWS!”

Pilate wrote this also as a way of getting in one last dig against the Jewish people as a great expression of sarcasm now being expressed by him who was the Roman procurator on his part!

Jesus’ crime, judicially speaking therefore, would have been a crime of insurrection against the Roman emperor; a crime that law proclaimed as worthy of death. Let me remind you also that the Romans crucified people openly, in public, because they wanted all people to see what could someday possibly become their own fate if they were ever found guilty of committing crimes against the state. Crucifixions were also meant to be deterrents to crime in the Roman Empire. But St. Paul is reminding us here that there was also another record of debt that one time stood against all of us as God’s human creatures in this world; and this was the law of God that we all have broken and that convicts each of us of our own sins!

(1) I titled this message: “Nailed to the Cross” because here St. Paul is teaching us that it is not just the physical body of Jesus that was nailed to the old rugged cross, but the law of God itself as the record of debt that stood against every one of us! This is what Paul is speaking about when he speaks of *“the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (v. 14)!* God’s Holy Law was nailed up from the heart and mind of God upon that cross.

Well, had Jesus himself broken any of God’s holy laws?

The answer is no. But listen closely once again to what St. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:21, words of Scripture that every Christian would do well to memorize: *“God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, so that through him we might become the righteousness of God!”*

So in the divine court of God’s justice, his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ is pronounced guilty of breaking the holy commandments of God—commandments one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and ten.

While the people who were physically present there on that first Good Friday may have actually believed Jesus was dying for crimes he had committed against Caesar, the real reason he was dying was for all of our sins against God!

And yet here we are again this evening, gathered together in this place by the Spirit’s power, just as there are millions of other people gathered in many other places all throughout the world to commemorate with thanksgiving and a profound sense of gratitude in our hearts—the unjust crucifixion of our Lord!

Looking back upon that dreadful day we can now see it as both a tragedy and a triumph. It was a tragedy because it was the greatest miscarriage of justice ever carried out by any human court on any human being!

“Unjust!” you say? Yes, unjust because many witnesses lied to convict Jesus of his supposed crime! People mocked him, spit upon him, whipped him and crowned him with a piercing crown of sharp thorns that were then pressed into his sacred head.

Yet, St. Paul is teaching us that it was not only the law of God that was nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ, but even more graphically it was—OUR SINS THAT WERE THE NAILS THAT PINNED JESUS OF NAZARETH TO THAT CROSS, AND OUR HARD HEARTS WERE THE HAMMERS THAT DROVE THOSE NAILS FIRMLY INTO PLACE.

He died because of our sin! Yes, he died willingly; even though as the Holy Son of God he had never sinned, but he died there in payment for our sins! And so, on the one hand, it was tragedy, but on the other hand—it was for us—a great triumph—a great personal victory on our part!

From a merely human point of view, it was the Roman government, prompted by the religious authorities, who nailed Jesus to that cross! But we also know it was the Heavenly Father’s will, because of the Heavenly Father’s great love for us, and the Son of God’s own great love for us that he died there that day!

2. The second thing that was nailed with Jesus to his cross was our sins.

Just in case you might think I am exaggerating a little too much, then listen to what St. Paul says on another occasion in Romans 8:1-4: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but accord to the spirit!” (Romans 8:1-4)*

What I believe we are celebrating, among other things, here again tonight is that the condemnation of your sin and my sin was nailed to the cross. Even if you and I were to try and recall for ourselves what we believe to be the great sin we have ever committed in this life, Good Friday declares that not even one scintilla of an iota—can ever be marked up against me and you!

(3) The third thing that was nailed with Jesus to his cross was the seductive power of the charms of this world.

And here when we say “the world” we are not talking about planet earth. There are times when New Testament writers like St. Paul and St. John use the word “world” to speak about the reality of an ungodly system that is totally and constantly opposed to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. In I John 2:15-16 we read, *“Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever!”*

St. John is certainly not saying to us that it is a sin for us to live in a very beautiful home, or to drive a very fine car, or to have a boat on the lake or a membership at a country club. But Paul is speaking about “the love of money,” and being in love more with what “money” can buy than what God longs to give us as a free gift of his grace—by which he longs to remake us into new creatures now bearing the very image of Christ. Paul tells Timothy, *“As for those who in*

this present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good work, generous, and ready to share!" (I Timothy 16:17).

It was the charms of this world that St. Paul is also speaking about when he says in Galatians 6:14, *"Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world!"*

(4) Fourthly, Paul teaches us that the control of the devil was nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ. This is what St. Paul means when he says, *"This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them" (v. 15)!* When St. Paul talks about *"rulers and authorities"* he is talking about the power of Satan. He backs this up when he says in Ephesians 6:10-12, *"Finally be, strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrest against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places!"*

The devil thought that he was destroying Jesus on the cross, but Jesus was destroying the devil.

When Jesus died on the cross the devil said, "Ha! He's finished!" But Jesus said, "Satan, you're finished!" And Jesus himself told us this very thing in that Upper Room on the night before he died when he says in John 12:31, *"Now is the judgment of this world, and now shall the ruler of this world be cast out!"* Jesus wasn't speaking about the judgment that would be heaped upon him in this instance, but about the judgment he would be heaping about the old evil foe and all his evil forces.

(5) Fifthly, of course, there is the conquest of death itself.

It was above all, death that was crucified there again that day, because Jesus was paying the penalty of death. And he proved three days later on that first Resurrection Morning. *"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive!" (I Corinthians 15:21-22)*

Because of our Savior's glorious victory over all suffering and even death itself, we who pass through lesser forms of trials, temptations, and sorrows can see them in their proper perspective - as avenues through which God can accomplish his higher purposes. Every affliction and seeming tragedy ultimately can result in unfathomable blessing.

So in closing let me share with you a true story that has been well-documented by reliable sources. Years ago, in the late 19th Century, a tornado struck the prairies of Minnesota, killing many, injuring hundreds and almost demolishing the whole city of Rochester. An elderly doctor and his two sons worked for days aiding the stricken, bandaging wounds, and setting broken limbs. Their heroic work did not go unnoticed.

A short time later, financial backing was offered for a large hospital, provided the doctor and his sons took charge. They agreed, founding in 1889 a clinic which soon attracted wide attention. For years from fifteen to twenty operations were performed daily. People came from all walks of life to the Mayo Brothers' Clinic. When the tornado struck, people reacted, "God has forgotten!" Yet blessing came out of disaster, and today the prairie city is known around the world and has brought blessing to uncounted millions. What seemed to be a time of anguish and travail resulted in unimaginable blessing and victory.

One more story, if you don't mind: It was on a spring day on an apple orchard in Michigan, some men who had been pruning an orchard made a great pile of branches about 100 yards from the farmer's barn. One morning the farmer saw a bird carrying to that pile of pruned materials for a nest. So he marked the spot with a stick. At sundown, with the bird flying about and chirping wildly, the man reached into the pile and tore the nest apart. If the bird were thinking, she was saying to herself, "How cruel this man is!" Next day the man saw the bird again trying to build at another place in the same pile. Again he marked it with a stick, and at night he destroyed all the work that the bird had done. No doubt the bird's wild fluttering and chirpings were bird language for "This evil man! How terrible he is to destroy my nest!" On the third day the farmer noticed that the bird was building in a rose bush near the house. He smiled and let the bird alone. The farmer had intended to burn the branch pile, and he knew if the bird were allowed to build among those branches, the nest and its little fledglings would have been destroyed. So in great kindness he had torn the two earlier nests apart.

This night again, as we are prompted by the Holy Spirit of God to take another very close look at the cross of Calvary we see that what took place there on that Friday many years ago, indeed was no accident! As Jesus hung there,

"the just for the unjust," it looked as though there had been an accident; that God had made a mistake. But on the third day after, when *"God raised him for our justification,"* all believers knew that *"the cross was for our good"* and so the previous Friday was called "Good." Out of that seeming tragedy, Christ paid the eternal price demanded by God for our sins. *"The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

As we remain in contact with the resurrected Christ, operative through his church and through the means of grace, we have the fullest confidence provided to every one of us that dealing with every great tragedy in life that may come our way, we shall be ultimately victorious. *"For, if Christ be for us, who can be against us? For he who spared not his own Son, how shall he not then, together with Christ, give us all good things?"* (Romans 8:31-32) Amen