

A Tale of Three Crosses

By Dave Bunnell

If you were to ask some people why Jesus was crucified, they might say, "Because the people rejected Him."

While it is true that Jesus was rejected by the people, I have to think that isn't the reason He died. Because the Bible says that He came into the world for the sole purpose of dying. The people had rejected Him long before His crucifixion. When He taught in the temple and proclaimed Himself the Messiah some time earlier, the Bible says that they sought to kill Him. But God's power was with Him and it was not His time to die. So, it says, He walked untouched through the mob. This Jesus was not a helpless man at the mercy of the people.

His life wasn't taken on the cross -- it was given. It would have been no difficult task for Him to escape, but He voluntarily walked the narrow road to Calvary to die. As Michael Card put it, it wasn't the nails that held Jesus to the cross; it was His love for you and me. The reason Jesus died is that we were helpless to find a way to join Him in heaven one day, unless He came from heaven to die for us.

If baptism, good living, praying, fasting, reading the Bible, taking communion, and obedience to the church were all that was necessary to get us to heaven, then God could have stayed home. He wouldn't have needed to come to Earth as a man to die. Because the prophet John was already baptizing before Jesus' ministry began. Jesus came into a world that already had baptism, but it needed a savior. Communion had been a part of the Passover Seder feast for thousands of years before the time of Christ. Jesus came into a world that already had Communion, but it needed a savior. He came into a world that already had temples and altars and anointing with oil and sacrifices offered up, but it needed a savior. He came into a world that already had fasting, prayers, and acts of mercy and kindness, but it needed a savior. He came into a world that already had the commands of the Scriptures to follow, but it needed a savior.

Perhaps you, too, already have all of the things this world can offer you in an attempt to become right with God. But you need a savior. We all need a savior. That's the lesson of the *Tale of Three Crosses*.

You see, the Bible tells us that Jesus wasn't the only man crucified that day. There were two other men, one on each side of Him, who were thieves and murderers being put to death for their crimes. They both needed a savior, too. And, the Bible tells us, one of them found one.

While hanging on the cross to bleed and die next to Jesus, he said that he was receiving the punishment he deserved. He recognized that he had been nothing but bad since the day he was born. But he believed that Jesus was the Son of God, and turned to Christ, with nothing to offer but faith, and said, "Remember me when your kingdom comes."

Jesus answered, "I assure you, today you will be with me in Paradise." And that was it. Enough said. No purgatory necessary. No acts of penance. No baptism. No giving to the poor. Nothing is required of you. "This very day, you're going to heaven"

was Christ's message for this thief. All he had done was admit his guilt and ask Jesus for forgiveness, and that forgiveness was granted. Because Jesus, who was innocent, was paying for his sins.

The other thief wasn't quite so fortunate. Because he treated God in the two ways many misguided people still do today. First, he denied his guilt and that he deserved punishment for his crimes. All too often, people refuse to believe they are bad enough to deserve God's judgment for sin. Second, he said to Jesus, "If you really are who you say you are, prove it by getting us down off these crosses." Still today, many people demand that God do something for them to prove Himself before they will believe, as if God owed us something.

We all have one thing in common with these two thieves: we have sinned, and we need Jesus to save us, because there is nothing we can do to take our sins away and make ourselves worthy of heaven. So my question for you today is this: What kind of thief are you? The kind who thinks he or she is good enough to make it on his or her own and won't believe God unless God jumps through hoops to prove Himself? The kind of thief who depends on religiousness to save him? That kind of thief is eternally condemned.

Or are you the kind of thief who recognizes that God's word is true and that you have sinned, but He will save you if you come to Him in faith in nothing that you have done, but in what He has done for you? That kind of thief is forgiven.

Today Jesus still stands before the world. And just as it was for Him on the cross that day, on one side of Him are the thieves who believe and are forgiven. And on the other side are those who are condemned for disbelief. What kind of thief are you? You can be eternally saved today, if you call upon Him as the first thief did. Right now, wherever you are, tell Him you have sinned and deserve His judgment. Then tell Him you believe He died for you so that you could be saved, and rose again. Then ask Him to forgive your sins, just as He promised. And you will be saved.

"Greater love has no one than this: that He lay down His life for His friends." (John 15:13)

"But God showed His love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"Assuredly I say to you, he that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24)

If you don't know where you will spend eternity, you're not going to like it when you get there. Don't delay. Be sure today. Settle the issue once and for all, by receiving God's gift of eternal life.

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