

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

by

Evangelist Joe Henry Hankins, D. D.

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SERMON SIX

“THE WORD OF THE CROSS”

Text: I Corinthians 1:18. **“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”**

Somebody said, “The heart of Christianity is the Bible, and the heart of the Bible is the cross and the heart of the cross is the heart of God.” It is a heart full of tenderest compassion for sinful man. By the word of the cross is meant the message of the cross.

I. The Word of the Cross Is God’s Word Concerning Holiness and Sin

For at the cross holiness and sin met in deadly combat. Jesus said as he approached the cross, **“For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.”**

I used to wonder about the meaning of those words of the Lord, but I am sure they mean that Jesus had come face to face with the devil, the devil representing the incarnation of sin and the powers of darkness and the forces of hell. You remember back yonder in the Garden of Eden when God made the promise of salvation to Adam and Eve God said, **“The seed of woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,”** but that the serpent would bruise his heel. And when Jesus came to the cross that hour had come when the two met in a life and death battle. Ever since that day in the Garden of Eden the devil had set himself to the task of destroying the **“seed of the woman.”**

The devil has tremendous power. He has supernatural power according to the Word of God. But there is one thing the devil doesn’t know and that is the future.

The devil didn’t know when to expect the coming of the Messiah no more than Adam and Eve knew when to expect Him. When Cain was born Eve thought that God’s promise had been fulfilled, and she said, **“I have gotten a man from the Lord”** — that is, **“I have God’s man.”**

But when **“God had respect unto Abel and his offering”** and rejected Cain immediately the devil put murder into the heart of Cain in an effort to destroy the **“seed of the woman.”**

From that time on to the cross the devil’s supreme effort was to destroy that seed. That is the reason Christian people are persecuted by the world. The devil’s crowd has always persecuted God’s people.

Paul told the truth when he said, **“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”**

You will find this struggle down through the ages from the murder of Abel until the cross of Christ. The minute the word went out that Christ was born the devil started out to destroy Him. He put it into the heart of the wicked Herod to have all the babies slain from two years old and under. But thank God the hand of God was behind that promise and the devil can never defeat the purpose of God. So He goes on and makes His way toward the cross. But when He starts His ministry the devil tries to sidetrack Him. The devil knows what God has promised. He knows that God has said that on the cross He will redeem men from sin because it was written in the Word of God.

If we know as much as the devil knows about the Word of God, we would be better church members.

You remember when the devil met Jesus on the mountain of temptation, every time he approached Him with a temptation; he quoted the Word of God. When Jesus was led up on a high mountain the devil **“shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”**

For the one hour that the devil wanted to escape was that of the Son of God dying on the cross. In that hour the forces of sin, hell, darkness, and evil and holiness, represented in the Son of God Himself, met in deadly combat. No wonder the sun hid its face. No wonder the earth quaked until rocks were rent and tumbled into the valley below. Holiness and sin had met around the cross in deadly combat.

I repeat. The Cross is God’s Word concerning holiness and sin.

Look at the cross tonight and see that conflict—see that midnight darkness gathered around it. See a darkness that has such a horror about it that the Scripture says, **“All the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.”**

That darkness is the darkness of hell. It is God’s Word concerning the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It tells us how the holiness of God hates sin. If God were willing to send His Son to the cross in order to destroy sin, what a hateful thing sin must be in the sight of a holy God. **“For this purpose the Son of Man was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”**

There is nothing we need today so much as a consciousness of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

People think so lightly of sin. People toy and play with sin; temper and flirt with sin as though it were a light thing. Yes, people even imagine they are having a good time in sin. We have come to think so lightly of sin that the average person thinks it is smart, clever, and quite the thing to do—thinking that it is up-to-date to be tough, to tamper and trifle with sin.

- If you would get a conception of how God hates sin and it's exceeding sinfulness in the sight of God, look at the cross on which Jesus died.
- If you would get a conception of the awful crime that the human has committed in sin, remember that it was your sin that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross—that it was my sin and your sin that sent Him there.
- If you would get a conception of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, look at Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

See Him as He is there prostrate on His face in the dust of the garden—the Scriptures say, **“Being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”**

I used to think of the bloody sweat of Christ only as that that dropped from His face, but then remembered that when one's face is dripping with perspiration the whole body is bathed in it as it flows from every pore of the body.

- Then I saw a new picture of Jesus in Gethsemane.
- Then I saw what the prophet Isaiah saw when he said, **“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with garments died red?”**
- Then I saw my Lord rise up from the ground in Gethsemane's garden and His garments were clinging to His body like wet clothes.

But it wasn't water. It wasn't perspiration. It was the blood from his own precious heart. Every pore of His body had been opened, and He was bleeding His life away yonder in Gethsemane's garden because of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

When I saw that picture I said, Yes, we are **“bought with a price.”** What a price! If it took such a price as that to redeem us from sin then, surely the cross speaks to men in thunderous tones that nobody could fail to understand of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

See the Lord with a crown of thorns pressed on His brow. See the blood streaming down His precious face. See Him as they stripped off his garments in Pilate's judgment hall, as if He hadn't suffered enough the night before. They bared **“His back to the smiter”** as a Roman soldier took a scourge and tore His flesh into shreds.

As He wields that scourge you can hear the hissing of the serpent. It is the serpent and the **“seed of woman”** in deadly combat.

Listen and you will hear it tearing its way through the flesh of the bare back of the Son of God. You will hear the blood drip, drip on the marble floor of Pilate's judgment hall.

As you behold that terrible scene you will cry out, **“What a terrible thing sin must be.”**

And yet, we think so lightly and so trivially of sin that even Christian people are drawn away into it and think it a small matter.

My heart was almost broken today when word came to me this afternoon that one of our fine young couples had gone into sin. The young wife is yielding to the call of the world and is going after the things of the world—liquor, beer, cigarettes and the dance. I said, “O my God, how can the redeemed of God think so lightly of sin!” The Word of the cross is God’s Word—the Word of the ages telling us what an awful thing sin is, and telling us how a holy God hates sin.

II. The Word of the Cross Is God’s Last Word Concerning Love and Sacrifice

When I say it is God’s last word, I do not mean it was the last thing God spoke. I mean it was the strongest way God could say it. If you ever doubt for a minute that God loves you, come with me and stand under the cross for a while. Come with me, and let us take a journey through the garden of Gethsemane and look again under the olive tree at that lone figure, the Son of God bathed in His own blood. It is God saying to you and to me, “I love you, I love you.” God is **“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”**

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

If the devil has ever tempted you in the hour of trial or sorrow or disappointment to believe that God doesn’t care, come with me and let us take a little journey to Golgotha’s hill, and hear God say, **“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” “But God commended [proved] His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

The limit to which you could ever hope for human love to go is for one to lay down his life for a dear, dear friend. But God and Christ proved their love **“in that while we were yet sinners”** — enemies to God, with our backs to God, haters of God—**“he died for us.”**

Yes, all lost men hate God, despise and reject God, trample underneath their feet God’s love, His grace, and His heart. Yet He loved us enough to give Christ to die for us, and Christ loved us enough to go to the cross.

O when I remember those words about our Lord, **“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant. And was made in the likeness of man: And being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”**

I say from the depth of my soul, what love!

He loved me enough that He was willing to leave heaven’s glory and empty Himself so completely that He did not have a place to lay His head. He loved me enough that he was willing to travel the way of sorrow,—**“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire him.”**

So completely was He emptied of Himself and rejected by the world for which He had come to die; so completely had He emptied Himself that He didn't have a place to lay His head or a shelter over Him at night. He, who could bless the loaves and fishes and feed others had to be fed by other men's charity. He was clothed by the work of kindly hands. He had to be buried in another man's shroud—the Lord of glory.

Friend, if you have ever doubted God's Love for you, take a look at the cross. It is God's word of love and sacrifice.

But God didn't stop there. It seems to me, if I look at it from a human standpoint, He would say, "***Now I have done all that is necessary and the world of sinners can take it or leave it.***" But God didn't do that.

Jesus formed the church, and God gave His inspired Word, and the Holy Spirit to seek the sinner, knock at his heart's door and call him back to God. God is watching, following, every step of the way to hell day and night.

Yes, God follows, and calls and pleads and seeks and keeps on loving you until the last step in hell. Yes friend, I believe with all my heart that God keeps on loving them after they are in hell. The cross is God's last word of love and sacrifice. He wooed me out of my sin. He washed me in His blood and made me an "**heir of God and joint heir with Jesus Christ.**" He took my feet out of the "**miry clay, and set them upon a rock,**" and turned my face toward glory.

I am a child of God—a child of the king if you please. O such love!

No wonder Paul said it is love that "**passeth knowledge**"—love that will not let me go. No wonder he said, "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

It is love that will not let us go.

It is said of George Mattheson that the way he happened to write that great old song, "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go," that he was engaged to a beautiful girl and the time of their marriage was not far away when he noticed that something was happening to his eyes. As the days came and went it got worse.

One day he went to a specialist for an examination. The Doctor said, "George, I hate to tell you the truth because you are a young man just beginning your life, but George, you are going blind. You have an incurable ailment in your eyes, and in a few months you will be totally blind."

That night he went down to see his sweetheart. He said, "I must see her — I must be man enough to release her from her promise if she wants to be released."

He told her that story that night, and said, “Sweetheart, I have come to release you from your engagement if you so desire.”

He was hoping and praying that she might say, “George, I love you enough that I can’t let you go.” But she said, “George, I could not afford to be married to a blind man, it will have to be all over tonight.”

George went back to his room broken-hearted and disillusioned with human love. There he looked up into the face of Christ and wrote those words, “O love that will not let me go.”

The cross of Jesus Christ speaks of such love that not only redeems a sinner, but keeps him. **“These are my sheep,”** said Jesus, **“I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”**

He will not let us go.

III. The Word Of The Cross Is God’s Last Word Concerning Salvation and Power

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

But what is the gospel? Turn with me to the 15th chapter of First Corinthians and read the opening verses where Paul said,

“Moreover, brethren, I declare the gospel unto you . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

That is the gospel—the simple story of the cross of Jesus Christ—God’s message of salvation and power—**“The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.”** The cross of Jesus Christ and the blood that was spilled there is God’s last word concerning salvation.

Yes, more than that, it is God’s only word. It is God’s only promise. It is God’s way into peace, cleansing and salvation. It is God’s only way. For Jesus said, **“I am the way.”** Not A way—not a GOOD way—not the SAFEST way, but He said, **“I am THE way, and no man cometh to the Father except by me.”**

I believe it so firmly, hear me in this closing word—I believe the truth of that so firmly that I would not place any hope of salvation in anything else on earth—not for all this world. I want you to know that I am saved. I tell you there is too much at stake when my soul is in the balance to merely hope that I am saved or to think maybe I am saved, or like some people say “I am trying to be saved.”

O listen friend, my soul is at stake; my eternal destiny is at stake in the matter of salvation and I want to know that I am saved.

Look back yonder at Israel the night of the Passover. Upon what is their hope fastened that night? Upon what does their safety depend that night? Is it upon their estimate, of that blood on the lintels and door posts? No, it depends upon God's estimate of that blood and God's promise back of it. God had said, "**The blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.**"

God has said that in the cross of Jesus Christ He is satisfied. God has said that in Jesus Christ He has reconciled all things unto himself. So when I come up one day to meet my Lord I am not going to depend on anything good in my life—and I say to you that I am trying my dead level best to live right. I go over my life every day as with a lighted candle and say, "Lord, put your finger on anything wrong and give me the grace to take it out," and I mean it. But listen, friend, I am not depending on that to save me because God hasn't promised that He will save us that way.

It is not by character, good works or morality. There is one hope and one alone and that is the cross of Jesus Christ which says, "**without shedding of blood there is no remission.**" If there had been any other way, God would have taken it. So I am not going to take a way that God wouldn't take to save man. I will take God's way.

I am not going to depend on my church membership, my baptism, nor my faithfulness to the church. God knows that I love my church and that I would give my life for it, and God forbid that I should ever bring reproach upon its name. I am not going to depend on my church membership, even to help save me.

When I come to meet God one day, and He asks me about my sins I am not going to deny a single one of them. I am not going to try to excuse myself for a single one, but I am going to stand before God and say, "I am guilty of every one, but look into my heart and you will find the blood of Jesus Christ."

For from the time I was eleven years of age I have put all my hope and trust for time and eternity in the blood of Jesus Christ, and if the blood of Jesus Christ will save a sinner, I am saved. I know I am saved because I am depending upon it with all my heart and soul. And God has said it will save me. God has said, "**It is the power of God.**" God has said, "**Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, his Son cleanses from all sin.**" And listen, it isn't in my estimate of the blood, it is in God's estimate of it. God is satisfied with it, and I am going to depend on it. "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus." Will you trust Him? The word of the cross is God's last word concerning salvation and power.

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