

# THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

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MARSHALL, MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD.  
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

1938

## CHAPTER TWO

### "WE DID NOT FOLLOW CUNNINGLY DEvised FABLES"

"The Christian religion is a matter of living, not of mere intellectual knowledge; and 'the just shall live by faith.' Yet it is not without its value to have the truth of the concomitant circumstances demonstrated. One must remember that Christianity did not originate in a lie, and that we can and ought to demonstrate this, as well as believe it. The account which it gives of its own origin is susceptible of being tested on the principles of historical study, and through the progress of discovery the truth of that account can be, and has been, in great part proved. There is, however, more to do. The evidence is there if we look for it." -- SIR WILLIAM M. RAMSAY in *Recent Discoveries and the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*.

Those who believe the record GOD gave of His Son in the Gospels do not doubt the facts there related. They have the witness of the SPIRIT that the record is true.

They know with Peter that all the incidents given of the passion and death of our Lord and His glorious resurrection are not "cunningly devised fables."

Peter was an eye-witness of the sufferings of CHRIST, and Mark was His disciple.

John tells of what he heard and saw and witnessed and touched with his own hands: "**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life**" (I John 1:1).

Matthew was one of the twelve.

Luke tells us how carefully he sought out eye-witnesses for his account "**It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed**" (Luke 1:3-4).

In an age of doubt and historical criticism, however, we must face those who deny the Gospel records, both their authenticity and their reliability. Some tell us JESUS CHRIST is a myth and the incidents of His life story are literally "cunningly devised fables" which have their origin in the earlier and rival superstitions of Rome and Greece and Egypt.

The early Gnostics denied the actual death of CHRIST for dogmatic reasons.

The Koran categorically states that JESUS was neither killed nor crucified: "**God hath stamped on them (the Jews) their unbelief for their saying, Verily we have killed the MESSIAH JESUS, the Son of Mary, the Apostle of GOD; but they did not kill him, they did not crucify Him but a similitude was made for them**" (4:156). Basing their unbelief on this passage and its interpretation by Moslem theologians and commentators, orthodox Islam has always denied the historicity of the crucifixion of JESUS. The common belief is that it was Judas Iscariot who suffered the penalty and that GOD delivered JESUS from this cruel death by casting a spell over His persecutors. There are many differences of interpretation but all Moslems agree that JESUS did not die on the Cross. He did not die for our sins. He never arose from the dead. His exit from this world to the next was not by the way of the Cross.

The theory of Strauss and other rationalists that JESUS' body was taken from the Cross before actual death took place and He revived from the spices in the tomb was eagerly adopted by the modern sect of Ahmadiyah in the Punjab. Their leader, Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian, found the same theory of a resurrected JESUS the Nazarene, who travels to India and becomes a teacher there, in a book called "*The Unknown Life of CHRIST*," by the Russian novelist Nonovitch. Later he discovered the tomb of JESUS in Kashmir and proclaimed himself the New Messiah! By eager and clever propaganda this sect has filled the whole Moslem world with this new gospel of an Anti-Christ.

The Irish novelist, George Moore, in "*The Brook Kerith*," images that JESUS did not really die on the Cross but only swooned -- to recover and carry on a wider ministry of social service. So these theorists at home, and millions of the followers of Mohammed abroad, the latter indeed on the authority of Allah's revelation, deny that which we believe is primal and supreme in our message. How shall we be prepared to give them an answer for the faith and the hope that is in us? We were not eye-witnesses.

"We did not see Thee lifted high  
Amid that wild and savage crew,  
Nor heard Thy meek imploring cry,  
Forgive, they know not what they do:  
Yet we believe the deed was done  
Which shook the earth and veiled the sun."

Why do we believe it? Faith must rest on evidence; and the evidence is overwhelming. It will strengthen our faith to study this fact.

To begin with, the death of JESUS on the Cross was not unexpected but had been clearly foretold in Jewish prophecy. The fate of such "a righteous man" was even hinted by Plato.

The suffering servant of JEHOVAH in Isaiah,  
the great Messianic Psalm portraying the death of JESUS,  
the details of CHRIST's betrayal and of His death in other prophecies

-- all these are commonplaces to the student of the Scriptures.

The great coming event had cast its shadow long before. "**Behold the Lamb of God,**" said John the Baptist; and in these words he sums up all the significance of the Old Testament teaching that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin and that the Lamb of GOD must be slain for the sin of the world.

The key to the Old Testament is lost when we deny that "**Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**" Nay, the key is lost to the mystery of Blood-sacrifices as a propitiation for human sin among all races and in every age.

**"He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; by His stripes we are healed."** Those words were written earlier than the time of Plato, 429 B.C. In his *Politia* (Vol. IV., p. 74) he tells us of such a sacrificial redeemer as the world needs to restore righteousness: "The perfectly righteous man, who without doing any wrong may assume the appearance of the grossest injustice; yea, who shall be scourged, fettered, tortured, deprived of his eyesight, and after having endured all possible sufferings, fastened to a post, must restore again the beginning and prototype of righteousness."

It is immaterial to ask whence Plato got his idea of a just man suffering for the unjust to bring them back to GOD. The idea is there, almost as distinct as in Isaiah's divine message.

No one could live a perfectly righteous life without being a man of sorrows, despised, rejected, crucified.

The death on the Cross was not an unexpected tragedy to JESUS Himself. It was not a disappointment and an eclipse of His hopes. On the contrary He saw that it was inevitable and repeatedly announced the certainty of the dread event. From the outset of His ministry He saw the approaching shadow.

At His baptism, He who knew no sin, numbered Himself with the transgressors.

He defined discipleship at the outset as cross-bearing.

After the confession of His Messiahship and "**from that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day**" (Matthew 26:21).

**"For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day"** (Mark 9:31).

That which characterised the last months of our Lord's life, according to the synoptic Gospels, was a deliberate and thrice repeated attempt to teach His dull disciples the certainty and the significance of His approaching violent death.

The details of the crucifixion recorded by those who were, in some cases, eye-witnesses, leave no doubt of the actual death. They certify to it in the most solemn way as if to anticipate any future unbelief of the fact. **"And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost . . . And**

**when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:37, 39). John relates how "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34). Then he adds, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (John 19:35).**

These are not the words of one who is credulous or self-deceived. The centurion officially reported the fact and confirmed JESUS' death to Pilate: "**And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead" (Mark 15:44).**

Joseph of Arimathea laid the dead CHRIST in the tomb and there Mary Magdalene and Mary, His own mother, saw Him, dead: "**And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid" (Mark 15:47).**

Not a single writer in the New Testament but tells of the actual death of JESUS; not a single voice is heard in all the record of the Book of Acts raising any doubt that JESUS was crucified. Not until the lapse of centuries had men the audacity to doubt this historic fact and teach their cunningly devised fables. After relentless criticism of the documents, a scholar such as Rabbi Joseph Klausner, in his recent book on JESUS of Nazareth, concludes that the synoptic Gospels are reliable records and that JESUS lived and died as they relate.

Some years ago Samuel E. Stokes collected the evidence of Jewish and Pagan writers to the authenticity of the Christian records and possibly there are those who will give ear to Pliny, Tacitus, Lucian, and Josephus, or even to Celsus, because they are all outsiders, in corroboration of the Gospel which they doubt. Tacitus in recording the burning of Rome (A.D. 64), and of how Nero tried to turn suspicion from himself, says: "So to stifle the report, Nero put in his own place as culprits, and punished with every refinement of cruelty, the men whom the common people hated for their secret crimes. They called them Christians. CHRIST from whom the name was given, had been put to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pestilent superstition checked for a while. Afterwards it began to break out afresh not only in Judea, where the mischief first arose, but also in Rome, where all sorts of murder and filthy shame meet together and become fashionable. In the first place, then, some were seized and made to confess, then on their information a vast multitude were convicted, not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but put to death with insults, in that they were dressed up in the skins of beasts to perish by the worrying of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire, and when the daylight failed, to be burnt for use as lights by night" ("Annales" 15:44).

Lucian of Samosata (born A.D. 100), in his "*The Death of Peregrinus*," states: "The Christians still worship that great man who was crucified in Palestine because He introduced into the world this new religion . . . These wretched people have persuaded themselves that they are absolutely deathless, and will live for ever, for which reason they think slightly of death, and many willingly surrender themselves. And then their first lawgiver has persuaded them that they are all brothers one of another, when once they have transgressed and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worshipped that crucified Sophist of theirs, and live according to His laws."

The two famous passages in the "*Antiquities*" of Josephus are well known and are probably genuine. In any case the whole history of Josephus corroborates the historical setting of the Gospel. "Herod the great, Archelaus his son, Herod Antipas, Herodias, her daughter Salome, John the Baptist, Annas (Ananus), Caiaphas (Caiphas), Pontius Pilate, Felix, and his Jewish wife, Drusilla, Porcius Festus, Herod Agrippa, Bernice, Pharisees and Sadducees, all appear in the history of Josephus, and appear in the same relations to each other as we find them holding in the narrative of the New Testament.

Celsus, the Epicurean, was one of the most bitter opponents of Christianity, about A.D. 170. In his book entitled "*The True Discourse*," as quoted by Origen in his reply, Celsus "scoffingly alludes to the agony of CHRIST, and quotes him as saying: 'Oh Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me'; He calls CHRIST 'the crucified JESUS,' and speaks of those who slew Him as 'those who crucified your GOD.' He attacks the Christian belief that CHRIST 'endured these sufferings for the benefit of mankind' and attempts to disprove the reality of the Resurrection of CHRIST. He refers to the angels who appeared at the tomb of JESUS and speaks of the angel rolling away the stone from the tomb. He tries to show the foolishness of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body and laughs at the Christians for saying, 'The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' " This testimony to the death and resurrection of our Lord from an enemy of the Gospel is very significant ("*The Gospel According to the Jews and Pagans*," by Samuel Stokes, p. 48).

We cannot help conclude that if there is evidence for any event in human history it is for the crucifixion of JESUS CHRIST.

Corroborative testimony is also found in the institution of the Lord's Supper and in the observance of the Lord's Day. The breaking of the bread and the partaking of the cup go back to the night in which JESUS was betrayed. He Himself instituted this sacrament, and its universal observance by the whole Christian Church, in spite of the diversities in liturgies and in interpretations of the rite, is indirect but convincing proof of the death of JESUS. Such an unbroken tradition is a species of historic evidence that cannot be gainsaid. Just as we might use the celebration of the Muharram day tragedy in Islam as proof for the death of Hussain, the martyr of Kerbela, were historic documents absent.

JESUS said He was "**Lord also of the sabbath**," and proved it by the fact that after His death and rising again the Church immediately began to observe the first day of the week instead of the Jewish seventh day; so the Lord's Day itself is proof of the Lord's death and resurrection.

Every one of the great non-Christian religions has its distinctive symbol, the lotus bud, the swastika, the crescent, etc. The Cross is the symbol of Christianity.

How did that which was a sign of degradation, shame, reproach, guilt, and the agony of helplessness, become the symbol of honour, valour, mercy and compassionate helpfulness? There is no explanation except through Him who hung on the Cross for us and redeemed us and it from the curse.

Finally, if there be any who still doubt the historicity of the central fact of the New Testament teaching, we have the witness of the catacombs and of the earliest Christian monuments. These

stones with their symbolism and references to the Cross cry out that JESUS died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

In the correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson we read that the latter on one occasion recalled some words spoken by Carlyle at their first interview: "CHRIST died on the tree: that built Dunscore Kirk yonder: that brought you and me together. Time has only a relative existence."

What need have we of further evidence for faith? The credulity of unbelief could go to no greater length that in the theories it has advanced to deny the historicity of Christian teaching on the life and death of our Lord and His resurrection.

JESUS died and rose again according to the Scriptures.

The prophets foretold His death.

The apostles recorded it.

All Scripture converges upon the Atonement.

To a dying Saviour and a risen Lord bear all the Scriptures witness.

**The fundamental and omnipresent theme that is at the heart of the Bible message is the answer to the question, how shall a sinful man be righteous before GOD? And the answer is, through the atoning death of CHRIST. There is no other way. There is no other Gospel. If this be false, our faith, that is our whole Christianity, is vain: because the only good news we have is that JESUS died for our sins and rose again for our justification.**

"We stood not by the empty tomb  
Where late Thy sacred body lay,  
Nor sat within the upper room,  
Nor met Thee in the open way;  
But we believe the angels said,  
Why seek the living with the dead?"

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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