

The Attraction of the Cross

John 12:20-43

Introduction

“Papa, is the cross a bad thing or a good thing?” That was the question asked of me by my 6-yr.-old granddaughter, Emily, when I explained why we cover the cross with a black shroud during Lent. Stop and think about it. That’s a very good question. And when I told her that, she replied, “You don’t know, do you?” That’s an especially good question for this first day of the Passion Week. And one I’d like to explore.

The Cross—a Bad Thing

At first glance, the cross is a bad thing. Now, I’m not talking about the gold crosses we wear as jewelry. I’m talking about the roughhewn wooden beams that make up a real cross.

Tool of Execution

First, the cross is a tool of execution. It was used by many different civilizations, but it is connected mostly with the Romans. It wasn’t used for all death sentences, either. It was such a terrible way to die that there was a law preventing a Roman citizen from being crucified.

Torture

It was such a horrible way to die because it was pure torture. One didn’t bleed to death on a cross but died of suffocation. The weight of the body hanging from nails in the hands made it almost impossible for a person to breathe. To draw a decent breath, one must push up on the nails in the feet. Some victims of crucifixion have been known to hang in this state for three days. In His weakened condition, Jesus only lasted six hours.

Curse (Galatians 3:13)

Crucifixion was such a horrible death that St. Paul says in *Galatians: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13)*. While hanging on a cross, a person was held up for public ridicule. A sign was usually nailed above him with his name and crime. This was a warning to others of what would happen to them if they too crossed the line.

The Cross—a Good Thing

But, as we said, Jesus was tortured and executed on a cross. He became a curse for us. That brings us to the cross being a good thing.

“Good” Friday

To answer her question, I asked Emily, “What happened on Good Friday?”

The answer: “Jesus died on the cross.”

“If Jesus died, why do we call it ‘Good’ Friday?”

“Because Jesus died to take away our sins.”

Jesus died on a cross, so the cross is where we find forgiveness of sins. Paul says of Jesus in *Ephesians*: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7)*. This means our salvation was won by the blood of Jesus, His blood that was spilled on the cross. The cross is where we find salvation.

The Suffering of Man

And we need salvation because sin has caused so much damage. Sickness and disease came into the world through sin. Death came into the world through sin. Think of all the things going on in the world around us today. All the evil that abounds in the world is here because of the first sin of Adam and Eve. We are a mess; we are sick and dying because of sin. It seems so hopeless today.

“When I Am Lifted Up” (John 12:32)

Jesus said, *“When I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto Myself” (John 12:32)*. This reminds us of a passage of Scripture two weeks ago, where Jesus said: *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15)*. The people were dying from poisonous snake bites. When they looked at the bronze serpent on the pole in the middle of the camp, they were healed. We are dying in our sin. When we look at Jesus lifted up on the cross of Calvary, we are forgiven and have eternal life. Christ is the remedy for our sin.

Christ is the Attraction

That’s why the cross is the focal point of our preaching and worship. Some churches play down the cross because it’s too offensive. They would rather talk about the victory of the resurrection and the glory of the Second Coming. They see the resurrection as the victory that validates the crucifixion. But the resurrection cannot stand alone, just as the Incarnation cannot stand alone. All three must come together. That is why Jesus being lifted up on the cross is not just about being physically lifted up, but exalted and glorified. The cross is His throne. The King reigns from the cross. Jesus Christ, our Savior and King is the **ATTRACTION OF THE CROSS**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
