

The Cross in Its Deeper Meaning

by A.C. Dixon

The sermon explores the deeper meaning of the Cross, revealing the glory of the sacrificial spirit and the incarnate God who gave up His glory, honor, and reputation for the sake of others.

Scripture: Isaiah 53

Topics: "The Cross", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

A.C. Dixon preaches about the profound meaning of the Cross of Christ, tracing its significance from the Old Testament Scriptures to the sacrificial spirit demonstrated by Jesus. The sermon delves into the deeper layers of the Cross, highlighting the humility, obedience, and sacrificial love embodied by Christ in His journey to the crucifixion. It emphasizes how the Cross brings harmony with God, making believers one with Him, and explores the glory of Christ giving up His divine attributes to redeem humanity through His sacrificial death.

Transcript

IT is interesting to stand on a hill-top and watch the coming dawn: first the grey streaks in the East, and then the brighter light, until the full orb'd sun arises. There is a sunrise with its dawn like that in the Old Testament Scriptures. The fore gleam begins with the promise in the curse upon the serpent, that the seed of the woman should bruise his head. It grows brighter in Abel's altar, with its sacrifice of blood. We see it again in the victim, whether lamb, or bullock or turtle-dove, on the altar of the Tabernacle and the Temple. We see it in the offering of Isaac, and the substitution of the ram that was caught in the thicket. We see it in the uplifted serpent of brass, to which the people were commanded to look and live. We see it in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and kindred prophecies, in which our Lord is held forth as the Messiah, the Sin-bearer, the One who makes atonement for our guilt.

THE MEANING~What is meant by the Cross of Christ? There are several phrases which mean about the same thing. "The death of Christ," "the blood of Christ," "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," "Christ and Him crucified"--each has in the heart of it a definition of what the Cross of Christ means. Then, if you will put together some of the great words which occur in the writings of the Apostle Paul, you find an unfolding of this heart meaning. The word "propitiation," which suggests the justice and holiness of God; His love making propitiation to His justice: not His demanding of another that propitiation shall be made to Him, but love furnishing what justice and holiness demand. "Reconciliation," which is the manward side of it--"Be ye reconciled to God"--comes through the Cross of Christ. "Redemption"--

Redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." "Justification," which has in it the accounting of a man as innocent. He began before the Fall in a state of innocency, and justification is away beyond anything that a human court of justice ever realizes. It is putting the sinner in the condition before God as if he had never sinned at all. It is giving him a standing in the merit of Jesus Christ of absolute innocency before God.

It is all summed up in the word used over eighty times in the Old Testament, and just once in the English version of the New, "ATONEMENT." At-one-ment really defines the fruitage of it. It brings us into harmony with God, makes us one with Him.

THE DEEPER MEANING.--A careful study of our text will give a clearer insight into the deeper meaning of the Cross. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." We have a portrait of "Christ and Him crucified" in the words "Obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Let us look for a moment at that picture. "Who, being in the form of God." That does not mean in the shape of God. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth;" and we do not think of Spirit as having shape. Christ from eternity has been a spiritual God: "Equal with God"--equal in authority, equal in power, in every respect equal with God. Now, though equal with God, and of the very substance of God, "Very God of Very God," as the old Puritans used to say, He empties Himself, gives up for the time this equality, and makes Himself incarnate in a human being. He does not cease to be the spiritual God that He has been from eternity, but He begins now to express Himself in this concrete way, and thus puts Himself within the compass of our comprehension. Our finite minds cannot comprehend a spiritual God filling all eternity and all immensity; so He puts Himself within the compass of our thought, in order that He may make Himself thinkable and approachable to us. He saw fit to give up His authority for the time, this position of authority, without surrendering one whit of His attributes of Deity, in order that He might work out our redemption.

He takes also the form of a servant. The God of the universe not only puts Himself within the limits of a human being, but the narrower limitations of a servant. Christ makes Himself a servant to humanity; puts Himself not only

within the limitations of a perfect human being, but in service to imperfect human beings. How does He do that? By becoming a universal Man.

Now listen to this phrase, for I would not have you forget it. He "took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Not of a man, but in the likeness of all men. "Son of man," this Servant places Himself underneath all men, that He may serve them. He is the universal Man. He is not a Greek, not a Roman, not a Jew, not an Italian, not an American, not a German, not an Englishman. He is bigger than each and all; He is the Son of man. The blood of the whole human race courses in His veins. His heart is big enough to take in its millions, and His arm long enough to reach down to the depths of humanity's greatest need and lift up to the heights of God. "Son of man"--the poorest, the richest, the youngest, the oldest, the most degraded, the most moral, the weakest, the strongest, every man, every woman, every human being in this world is represented by this universal Man.

But though He becomes a universal Man, He does not lose His personality. "And being found in fashion as a man." Having the form of God and "in the likeness of men," He is yet "in fashion as a man." He has His likes and dislikes; He is careful about His mother; He hungers and thirsts; He gets tired and sits by the well-side. This universal Man is an individual. He has a personality that brings Him a little closer to me still.

When I realize that He gets hungry and thirsty and tired, and that He took my infirmities as well as my sins, it makes me feel akin to Him.

Now notice what took place. In the form of a Servant, as a universal Man, and yet with a personality that is distinct, "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The One who hung upon that Roman cross was not simply a servant; He has become a criminal. He hung there because He was regarded guilty; the law passed sentence upon Him. It was a position not only of unutterable agony, but of infinite shame. "Obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." So that this universal Man has not only submitted to the limits of the servant, but He has taken the place of the criminal. Sin is crime before God, and sin must be punished. This universal Man, having become a Servant, goes lower than the servant's place, and takes that of a criminal before God, in order that He may take our guilt upon Himself, and give us freedom from it all.

A DEEPER DEPTH.--This gives us at least a glimpse of the deeper meaning of the Cross. Yet there is a still deeper depth. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." May the Spirit of God help us now to go a little farther into this Holy of Holies, and try to realize the meaning of "Christ and -Him crucified," with the glory of it, the glory of giving up glory, the honour of surrendering honour, the reputation of being of no reputation, for the sake of the glory, honour and reputation of others. Seeking glory and grasping after honour may mean selfishness; but there is a higher glory than seeking glory, and a deeper honour than grasping after honour--the glory of the sacrificial spirit which gives up glory and honour for the sake of others.

Let us imagine, if we can, a man in this world who is truth incarnate. In him is all truth; and I mean by truth, reality without sham--no pretence. There is not a ring of unreality about him. A man like that would be the glory of his nation. Then imagine another man in whom all light centers. I mean by light, knowledge, light on every subject in the universe; and if you could find a man like that he would be the glory of his nation. Then look for another man in whom life is centered--physical life, intellectual life, ethical life, spiritual life, all the life you can think of incarnate in this one man. He would be the glory of his nation. Then find another man in whom all wisdom is centered, not simply knowledge, but how to use it. He never makes a mistake, never acts foolishly. He would be the glory of his nation. Find another man in whom all power is centered, and he would be the glory of his nation. Then another man in whom all love is centered, love that is pure, love that is not flecked with lust; everything that is lovely and of good report centers in him. He would be the glory of his race.

Now find, if you can, a man in whom all of these things are centered--all truth, all light, all life, all wisdom, all power, all holiness, and all love, and you would say that a man in whom all of these were incarnate was not only the glory of earth, but he is the glory of heaven. Find a man in whom all goodness, all virtue, all purity, everything that is good centers, and you have the glory of all worlds. Yet we have just approached the glory of the Cross. I have been describing to you our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only One who ever came into this world of whom it could be said, "In Him is all Truth, all Light, all Life, all Wisdom, all Power, all Holiness and all Love." These things incarnate in Christ make Him not only the glory of earth but the glory of heaven. Yet you have not touche the glory of the Cross. I have just describe this faint, feeble way the glory of the incarnate God.

Let us go a step farther and see what the Cross means. If you can find a man in whom all truth is centered, not contending for the truth, but dying for those in error, you have reached another degree of glory. If you can find a man

in whom all light is centered, light not displaying itself, but dying for those in darkness; if you can find a man in whom all wisdom is centered, not wisdom admiring itself, but dying for the ignorant; if you can find a man in whom all life is centered, not protecting itself, as a coward would, but giving itself for those who are dead; if you can find a man in whom all holiness is centered, holiness not cultivating itself, though that is a good thing, but holiness giving itself on the altar, dying for the unholy and the impure; if you can find a man that has all power, not exerting itself, but willing to be weak, restraining itself, that it

may carry out its noble purpose of sacrifice for sin; if you can find a man that is all love, not simply enjoying itself, but love on the altar, love dying, love giving itself to the Cross in order that the unlovely might be saved; if you can find all these, you have some little conception of what the Cross of Christ means. Now put all into one--O God, help us to realize it!--all Truth, all Light, all Life, all Wisdom, all Power, all Holiness, all Love, incarnate in one Man, who gives Himself for the untruthful, for the darkened, for the dead, for the weak, for the unholy, for the unlovely--and you have some conception of what the Cross of Jesus Christ is in its deeper meaning.

YET DEEPER AND DEEPER.--NOW shall we go through the gate and follow the surging crowd, stand on the hill-top and look up into the marred face, then listen and see if we cannot catch a little deeper note still of the meaning of the Cross. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"--and Jesus could make that prayer only while He died, or after His death, or in virtue of His death. To take righteousness, and justice, and holiness from God would be to dethrone Him. How can God forgive the guilty? How can God be merciful without being unjust? for mercy is a species of injustice. The moment a judge becomes merciful he ceases to be perfectly just, and the moment he begins to be just he ceases to be merciful. There is only one way for a just God to forgive, and that is by the guilt being removed, and while Jesus Christ was bearing the guilt of sin, He said, "Father, forgive, for I am making it possible for My murderers to be forgiven. Father, forgive upon the merit of the atonement I am making just now."

Then listen, and we catch a deeper note still, My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Turn over to another Scripture, He tasted death for every man." What is death? Death to the soul is separation from God. "Depart from Me, ye cursed." That means death. And Jesus is now by His own choice tasting death. What is hell? Whatever else it may mean, it means separation from God; and my Lord is tasting that sort of death for every man.

Then listen. "I thirst." Why, the body is redeemed. There is not only spiritual death, but physical death; and that cry is the appeal of the body through the crucified Christ for the satisfaction of its needs. And this body of ours is redeemed through the Cross of Christ for time and eternity. Now you can listen and know what it means when He says, "It is finished." "Father, forgive them. It is possible, for I am bearing their guilt. I am tasting death for them. This cry of My body in its thirst is the appeal for the satisfaction of the body's needs. Now, Father, It is finished." The great achievement is complete. In the beginning we saw the work of Our hands that it was good. Now, Father, this work of redemption, the fore gleams of which have been coming down the ages since the darkness of man's first guilt, is finished." Death has been tasted, the guilt has been borne, and it is possible now to forgive. "It is finished," and we accept a finished salvation in Christ. Salvation for us is finished; and salvation in us begins when we accept the finished salvation for us.

Now we hear His tender words: "Mother, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother"; and it is in the deeper meaning of the Cross to-day that the son beholds his mother, and the mother beholds her son. Show me a spot on this earth where the Cross has not touched and you have no home, no Christian fatherhood, no Christian motherhood, no Christian wifehood, no Christian childhood. Women are chattels, children are

slaves. It is through the deeper meaning of the Cross that motherhood has been redeemed, fatherhood has been sanctified, and childhood, sisterhood and wifehood have been glorified. All these are gleams of the glories of the Cross. Then listen again. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." "I have tasted death; now all that is left for Me to do is just to commend My spirit." That is where the Christian's dying begins. He does not have to taste death; it has been tasted for him. He does not have to bear the separation from God; it has been borne for him. He has accepted the finished salvation through the merit of Jesus Christ, and when he comes to the end he finds it just the beginning. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." That is not death. Oh, no! Death is separation from God. But the Christian when he dies is departing to be with God. "The time of my departure is at hand," says Paul; and Paul got so enthusiastic over the idea that he was almost extravagant, for you remember that the word "departure" is a nautical term. It carries with it the idea of lifting anchor and spreading sail, and going out of the land-locked harbour into the open sea. Paul was not thinking about contraction, but expansion; and through the gate of Christ I am going to begin to live. I am going to lay aside this garment we call the body, and enter into the spiritual world with a freedom I cannot have in this.

While we are thinking of the glory of the Cross in its deeper meaning, let us read the muster roll of heroes from the time of righteous Abel down to the present moment, and we shall find that the flashes of glory in history have been the gleams of the Cross. In the autumn of 1912 Nonconformists met at Smithfield and recalled the deeds of the martyrs, who were obedient unto death, even the death of the stake. We glorify them, almost canonize them; and the spirit that went to the flames was the spirit of the Cross. In 1662 two thousand preachers left their churches and their livings. Why? They were willing to be "obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." "Christ and Him crucified" was shining out in glory through their characters and their deeds. If you would have glory, do not seek it as Napoleon Bonaparte sought it, when he rang the word out to the French army and filled them with a wild enthusiasm, a will-o'-the-wisp, a thing that was grasped at and never caught, an apple of Sodom that turns to ashes in your mouth. Seek the glory that becomes incarnate in your life, the glory of the Cross in its sacrificial spirit.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 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 men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

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