

Martin White. Sunday 16th March 2008.

The victory of the Cross.

There are lots of different aspects to what Jesus did in dying on the Cross.

There is the example of the Courtroom - Jesus was punished in order to take the blame for what we have done, so we are declared "not guilty" - "Justified."

There is the example of the slave market - He has purchased us with His Blood, so that we are no longer slaves to sin, but now belong to and have been redeemed by Him.

There is the example of the Jewish sacrifice system - Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - and gave up His life just at the time that Passover lambs were being killed all over Israel.

There is the echo of God providing a substitute - at exactly the same place that Abraham had been told to sacrifice Isaac - and where God Himself had provided the ram to die in Isaac's place.

And there is Jesus' perfect example to us of obedience and worship to God His Father - "Yet not my will, but Yours be done" - "He became obedient to death - even death on a cross."

Each of these pictures is true and accurate and explains part of the single most amazing, powerful, awesome event in the whole of history - God's wrath at our sin, being spent on His Son, Jesus instead of us, and the righteousness of Jesus being credited to us instead.

It was such an awesome event that no one picture will do it justice - and actually we, together with all of creation will spend the rest of eternity trying to gaze deeper and deeper into it.

"In vain the firstborn Seraph tries to fathom depths of Love Divine"

One writer - P.T. Forsyth (The work of Christ) says that at different times we tend to gravitate towards one or other of these aspects

"Some souls will gravitate towards the *Great Deliverance*, some to the *Great Atonement*, and some to the *Great Regeneration*...yet all are part of the Saviour's total accomplishment, "the destruction of evil, the satisfaction of God and the sanctification of men" (quoted in John Stott, *the Cross of Christ*, po.230)

What this is saying is that at different times in our lives, different aspects of the Cross comfort and help us in different ways; if we are feeling guilty; to know that God declares us "Not guilty" because of the Cross is life-changing.

If we have made a total mess of our lives, to know that God has bought us out of the mess we have got trapped in is wonderful Good News.

If we are struggling with rejection, then to meditate on the truth that God loved the world so much that He sent His Son, helps us to realise just how precious and loved and chosen we are by God.

If we are going through times of suffering or temptation, it is comforting to know that Jesus, our *Great High Priest*, has been tempted and suffered in every way we have, and so knows and understands us like no-one else can.

If we are coming to worship God, to remind ourselves of the attitude and humility of Jesus, can cause us to come to humbly worship God, following His example

All of these things are wonderful, life-changing truths that many of us know well, and probably over the last 40 or so years, these aspects of the Cross have been the ones people have focused on most - especially in the West, because they describe some of the personal and individual applications of the Gospel

What I want to look at this morning is another picture that the Bible uses to explain another aspect of Jesus' death on the Cross that was often remembered by Christians in the Early Church.

And that is the picture of the Cross as a battlefield, where Jesus won a wonderful victory.

Colossians 2 says:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the

written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15 NIV)

This verse borrows the example of something that Paul may have witnessed - a Roman Triumph.

A Triumph was the highest Roman military honour. A victorious general entered Rome through the "Triumphal arch" There was a vast parade celebrating the glory of the returning general, who rode in a gilded chariot led by white horses, his prisoners, in chains walked in front of him. He was crowned with a laurel wreath and wore a purple tunic. A slave stood behind the conqueror, holding a golden crown over his head, and whispering in his ear a warning that all glory's fleeting.

Andrew Wilson:

Through the whole of history, there has only been one definitive, permanent victory.

Assyrians 8th C → Babylonians 7th → Persians 6th → Greeks 4th

Romans won for 3 centuries until their empire fell.

Since then there have been Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Spanish, Dutch and British

True victory is unheard of, with one exception in AD 30 when there was a 3 day battle on a rubbish dump outside Jerusalem where God the Son met Satan, Sin & Death head on. Within 6 hours the one-sided battle was over and victory was triumphantly announced with the words "It is finished!" ...Then, on the third day, the victory parade began.

Col 2 - "God obliterated His enemies, took away their armour and made a public spectacle of them, parading their corpses through the streets.

It appears to be total defeat. If there is victory, it is the victory of pride, prejudice, jealousy, hatred, cowardice and brutality. Yet the Christian claim is

that the reality is the opposite of the appearance. What looks like (and was) the defeat of goodness by evil is also, and more certainly the defeat of evil by goodness. Overcome there, He was Himself overcoming. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, He was Himself crushing the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The victim was the victor and the cross is still the throne from which He rules the world. (John Stott, p.228)

The Early Church was very familiar with persecution and hardship, so you might think "why was this so important to them?"

But this was a Truth that they clung to - not in a falsely triumphalistic way, saying "Jesus won the victory, so everything is fine in my life!" But rather to hold on to the truth that, although we may be going through difficulties, there is a bigger picture.

- It's not that we don't sin any more, but we can know that our sin is now nailed to the Cross (like the Titulus) - its power in our lives has been broken.
- It's not that we don't get sick or die; but the bigger picture is that now death is a defeated enemy - there's no power in it any more.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:54-58 NIV)

Paul's point in writing to the Colossians is that they are encouraged:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, (Colossians 2:2 NIV)