

THE PARABLE OF THE CROSS

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln, a man who stands as a giant in the pages of American History, was shot to death at Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865. In taking the body back to Illinois for burial, the funeral procession passed through the town of Albany, NY. Thousands thronged the streets to catch a glimpse of the body of their beloved "Honest Abe". And in the pressing crowd stood a young black mother with a small child in her arms. As the casket of President Lincoln went by, she held her child high in the air, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, she cried, "Take a look, honey; Take a long look; that man died for you."

A. We want to take a long or intent look at the one who died voluntarily for all mankind in order to provide spiritual freedom from the bondage of sin.

B. *Time Magazine* article— "Why did Jesus have to die?" He did not deserve to die. He was innocent. As the robes of Jesus were without seams, His life was without sin.

I. Jesus' death was a necessary payment for the penalty for man's sin.

A. In the beginning God place a penalty on sin... Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23

1. No man could pay that debt and meet demands of justice, Romans 3:23.

Song - "Rock of Ages" – "*In my hand no price I bring...*"

2. We are worthy of "death" (eternal separation) but He, without sin, was willing to take our place; to die in our stead; to pay the penalty due upon sin.

B. And like the OT scapegoat on whose head the sins of the people were laid, He went out into the land of forsakenness; separated from God, for the only time in all eternity; so we hear Him cry, "My God, My God..." He bore it all!

C. But Why did it have to be on such an instrument of torture? We must understand what was involved in death by crucifixion.

II. Three Things Involved In Death By Roman Crucifixion:

A. As Much Physical Pain and Suffering as Humanely Possible

1. The Romans tried other methods of execution, but none compared to the agony and suffering experienced in crucifixion.

2. It's hard for us to comprehend the suffering that took place in Roman crucifixion. This is what has impressed people in Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion".

a) Jesus was beaten with the Roman scourge or "halfway death". The Jewish law was forty stripes save one, but the Romans had no such custom. The victim was tied to a whipping post and beaten with a "flagellum" or whip, composed of a number of leather thongs weighted with pieces of lead, iron, sharp metal and jagged bone that would tear into the flesh of the victim with every lash.

b) Jesus has spent a sleepless night, bound with ropes, dragged around throughout the night before the Jewish council, then the next morning, He is mocked, spat upon and beaten with blows. He's exhausted, dehydrated, and compelled to carry His own cross, he falls under the weight of the patibulum.

c) Then when they come to Golgotha, "the place of the skull", they strip him of his garments and crucify his hands and feet that old rugged tree.

3. The ISBE description: "The suffering of death by crucifixion was intense, esp. in hot climates. Severe local inflammation, coupled with an insignificant bleeding of the jagged wounds, produced traumatic fever, which was aggravated by the

exposure to the heat of the sun, the strained position of the body and insufferable thirst. The wounds swelled about the rough nails and the torn and lacerated tendons and nerves causing excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood and a terrific throbbing headache ensued. The mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread. The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths..." Read PSALMS 22:14-18

B. As much suffering for As Long As Possible

1. Most of those who were crucified would spend days hanging on the cross before finally dying. Then their bodies would be left there to rot and decay. But in accordance with the requests of the Jews, they decided to speed up the death process by "breaking the legs". John 19:31-34
2. Finding Jesus dead already, they break not his legs, but pierced his side, and there came out blood and water. Most scholars and medical authorities tell us this is an indication of the fluids in the pericardium which suggests that Jesus died of a "ruptured heart" brought on by his agony.

C. As much Shame and Humiliation As Possible

1. Man tends to glorify the cross (make it into gold or silver; expensive jewelry), but death by crucifixion was the most barbaric mode of execution known to man.
2. Death by crucifixion was the ultimate degradation that Roman society could inflict. It wasn't just a matter of excruciating physical pain, but it was a matter of being labeled "trash"; of being labeled the dung and filth of the world. It was the ultimate shame and humiliation that an individual could endure.
3. Hebrews 12:2 – they stripped him of his garments and placed Him between two thieves and He hung on that cross in shame as a public spectacle to the world.

D. But again WHY the death on THE CROSS?

1. How could a loving, righteous God and Father send His only Son to die such a horrible and agonizing death?
2. Why couldn't He have just drank some poison (strychnine, hemlock - Socrates) Or why not an instantaneous death, like a beheading? Or falling upon a sword? Why the death in the most horrible and shameful way the world has ever known?
3. The Death of Christ on the Cross is a Parable (an active parable) - "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning"....(spiritual meaning)
4. The physical act of the crucifixion was an "active parable". There are many active parables in the Bible: Jeremiah – smash the potter's vessel; or "go bury a garment in a river bank." Ezekiel - "lay on your side for months" And when you do those things, people are supposed to say, "WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"
5. God took one of the most cruel and horrible ways for a man to die; He nailed His only Son to a tree and said, "Now look at it - and understand."

III. What's the Message of the Cross?

A. THE AWFULNESS OF SIN

1. We see in the cross a vivid and graphic picture of just how ugly and horrible sin really is. The ugliness of the sacrifice illustrates the ugliness of sin.
2. I Peter 2:24 - He did not take one sin of His own to Calvary. 2 Corinthians 5:21 - We need to see how repulsive, and how horrible sin really is. Isaiah 53:4-6

3. We make fun of sin; we laugh and tell jokes about those engaged things like drunkenness, adultery, homosexuality, prejudice, dishonesty. But how funny is sin? It's as funny as Jesus on the cross, because that's what put Him there.
4. If we ever fully recognize just how horrible and ugly Calvary was, then we'll no longer make fun of sin or try to excuse or justify it, but we'll be ashamed of it, knowing it was those very sins that put Him there. Zecahriah 12:10

B. The MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S LOVE

1. How can we know that God loves us? He proves His love to us! Romans 5:6-10
2. Could there be any greater way for God to show His love for us? He could have written His love across the skies or had the rocks cry out and proclaim it; or had the angelic hosts to sing from the heavens; but - John 3:16
3. We should never question if God loves us or how much. He proves it, right there in the greatest sacrifice ever given; not of a mere man, but of the Son of God.

C. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

1. Galatians 6:14; 2:20; 5:14 - Death by crucifixion involved SUFFERING as MUCH as possible; for as LONG as possible and with as MUCH SHAME as possible.
2. Luke 14:26-27; 9:23 - We must die to sin and be crucified with Christ.
3. I must be willing to take up MY CROSS, whatever it may be. If I suffer the loss of friends, family, job, persecution, or my own life!
4. Taking up my cross and following Jesus is more than just being present at every service and giving liberally of our money, etc., It's a willingness to sacrifice; to suffer whatever is necessary to follow Him.

Conclusion

The message of the cross is the GOSPEL - it's the GOOD NEWS for fallen man. Have you obeyed the gospel? Acts 2:36-38; Romans 6:1-4, Revelation 1:5 and Acts 22:16