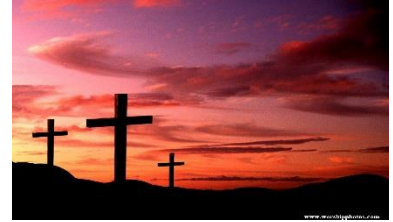


The Cross

By Leon King



Now, it's empty. The shameful stake upon which the only begotten Son of God died has no bleeding form. Believers serve a risen savior - because He lives, they live also. But, let's go back to that awful scene once more and remember. Let us contemplate what took place there. There were three crosses that day, but the one in the center must be the focus of our attention. Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the son of David, hang there on that day. It was the day when the Passover Lamb was to be killed, the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jews year, Abib. The city must have been buzzing with activity. People were in Jerusalem from all over Israel. That is why the sellers had set up their selling tables in the temple place. Jesus had driven them away with a scourge. He overturned their tables with anger because they had turned the Father's house of prayer into a den of thieves!

It was the following day. Pilate had found no fault in him. The witnesses could not agree together. Jesus did not reply to the accusations they threw in his face. As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He delivered himself by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God to die for the sins of His people. He had prayed, *"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."* He knew this was His hour. For three and a half years, he had walked among the people in His earthly ministry. Now the hour for which He had come was present. In eternity past with the Father, they had planned for this day.

So, He had stood as a lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. The names of His elect were written in the book of life, and He was

now going to wash them from their sins in His own blood, and make them unto their God, both kings and priests destined to reign on the earth. Jesus had walked about performing miracles - feeding the thousands, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, healing the sick, and giving sight to the blind. As He did these things, he was pressing toward this day. He had come into the world to save sinners. Sinners must have a substitute to die and pay for their sins!

We tend often to beautify the scene; but let us look at it as it really was. The soldiers had beaten Jesus with whips so that his back was striped, bruised, and bleeding. They had struck him in the face leaving his face bruised and swollen. They had pulled his beard. They had crowned Jesus, the last Adam, with a thorny-crown made with the piercing barbs of the earth - barbs brought forth because of the sin of the first Adam. Jesus of Nazareth was not a pretty sight. There was no beauty in Him that we should desire Him. There was nothing about this scene that would draw a natural man to him. Indeed, his appearance was enough to make a man turn away from the gruesome sight!. How could the onlookers love such a one so repulsive to behold? How He loved us! He was bearing our reproach - by His stripes we are healed. It is no wonder the Bible says, *"We love Him because He first loved us."*

The Bible says that the soldiers took off his clothes. He was stripped naked to hang shamefully between two thieves and be numbered with them - that is, to hang there between as if he were a thief himself. Look, dear friend - there He hangs. Look now at the testimony of Scripture and see his buffeted, bleeding form. The soldiers cruelly drove nails through His hands and feet. Blood ran from His brow and His back. His face was marred and swollen from the beating. There He hangs with a sign over him in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, *"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."* He is a curse - for cursed is every one who hangs on a tree. There is the one who is made a curse for us! He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for

our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him. The LORD hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all!

Nearby was His mother who bare Him in her body. Like a sword, the sorrow of the moment pierced her own heart. At this moment, she undoubtedly remembered the words of Simeon who had taken Jesus up in his arms while Jesus was just a babe. He had told Mary, *"a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also."* She knew He was the blessed Son of God. She had known from before her conception. She understood this was something of the Father's business, but perhaps didn't know the fullness until after. Here hangs the Son of God bearing her sins for she too was a child of the first Adam. She too had been conceived in iniquity and in sin did her mother bear her.

Jesus thirsts, so they offer Him the stupefying drink which He tasted and refused. The soldiers gambled for his garment. They had performed their awful duty. Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* The people wagged their heads and spewed their accusations at him. Not a word came in response to their venom. The thieves railed on Him - but one recanted. God let that miserable wretch see his own plight - and let him see who this person was who hang beside Him. Knowing he was receiving the due reward of his evil deeds, and that Jesus was innocent of any wrongdoing, he recognized the Lord. He humbly implored Jesus, *"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."* Amazing isn't it? This malefactor was at the end. He had nothing to offer. He was a dying thief. He could do no good works. He could not be baptized. He could not join the church. He could not make restitution for his evil. Blessed words came from the lips of the son of God. *"Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."*

About noon the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst from top to bottom. Yes, the way to the holiest of all was opened by the body of God's dear Son. About the ninth hour Jesus cried, *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God,*

why hast thou forsaken me?" The Father saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied. Holy God was propitiated. As Jesus hang on that wretched stake, He became the mercy seat and its offering. Yes, He was the mercy seat and His own precious blood was sprinkled on it!

Then he cried, *"It is finished."* What was finished? The work He came to do. *"This is a faithful, saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;..."* -- 1 Timothy 1:15. At last He said, *"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."* Yes, he was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God into the hands of sinful men. But, no man took His life. He gave it. *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."* -- John 10:17,18.

The work was done. He lay down His life that He might take it again. On the cross, He bore the sins of many. He dismissed His spirit and died. That very day - later, the believing thief died. Jesus met that believing malefactor in paradise. How do I know. He said He would. How was it possible? Because, on that infamous stake - the cross - Jesus was bearing that repentant thief's sins in His own body. He had become the substitute for the believing thief. God was pleased that payment was made in full for his sins. Jesus Christ was the *"lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."*

He died on that cross to save sinners! Do you believe in Him?