

NAILED TO THE CROSS

In Galatians 6:14 Paul writes of three crucifixions: 'But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.' Then in Colossians 2:14 Paul says that the law was set aside as God nailed it to the cross. So we find that Christ was crucified, and so too is the Christian, the world, and the law. What does all this mean?

Jesus was crucified between two criminals, probably in the year A.D. 30. This is an historical event that was prophesied back in the Old Testament. Jesus' crucifixion was terrible indeed. He was forsaken by God (Ps.22:1-2), and despised by people who mocked Him (Ps.22:6-8). He was helpless indeed before the crowd who behaved like wild animals (Ps.22:12-18). Finally, He committed His spirit into His Father's hands, and breathed His last (Luke 23:46). To be condemned and then crucified on a cross was the worst imaginable fate that anyone could suffer in the days of the Roman Empire. Cicero declared that 'the very word "cross" should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things but the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.' Yet the Lord Jesus Christ surrendered Himself up to be nailed to a cross. Christians worship a condemned criminal.

Here too the law of God was, in effect, crucified. The law by its legal demands has left us all with a record of debt (Col.2:14; Rom.7:1-6). It pronounces its curse on all who do not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them (Deut.27:26; Gal.3:10). But Christ has met all its demands in His sinless life, and then in paying the penalty for those who have broken the law. By becoming a curse for His people, Christ satisfied the justice of God the Father (Gal.3:13). For the believer, it is as Augustus Toplady put it:

*The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.*

The law's demands were all met and exhausted at the cross.

This means that the world too is crucified to the Christian. This is the City of Destruction, and its chief attractions belong to Vanity Fair. The world promises so much and delivers so little. Do not love the world, says 1 John 2:15. Amy Carmichael wrote: 'If the praise of man elates me and his blame depresses me; if I cannot rest under misunderstanding without defending myself; if I love to be loved more than to love, to be served more than to serve, then I know nothing of Calvary love.' To win the applause and approval of the world is the goal of pop and movie stars, not those who looked to the One who was despised and rejected by men. The world declared Jesus to be an impostor and blasphemer, but God reversed the world's verdict, and declared Him to be Lord and Christ.

Finally, the Christian is crucified at the cross. We have died to sin that we might live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Rom.6:2; Gal.2:19-20). At the other end of the spectrum we have the modern - and ancient - gospel of self-esteem, of seeing ourselves as the centre of the universe. In the less than inspiring words of the actress Shirley

MacLaine: 'The most pleasurable journey you take is through yourself ... The only sustaining love involvement is with yourself ... When you look back on your life and try to figure out where you've been and where you are going, when you look at your work, your love affairs, your marriages, your children, your pain, your happiness - when you examine all that closely, what you really find out is that the only person you really go to bed with is yourself. The only person you really dress is yourself. The only thing you have is working to the consummation of your own identity.'

Jesus prophesied His own going to the cross (Matt.16:21-23) and also spoke of the need for His disciples to walk the same way: 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take his cross and follow Me' (Matt.16:24). The cross condemned Christ, but it put to death the law and the world. In embracing the cross of Christ, the Christian dies in order to live.

- Peter Barnes