

The Cross: Life's Most Powerful Symbol

The cross is the most radical symbol in this world. It knows no compromise; it never makes concessions.

Our association with the cross is of course through the Christ who died on this awful instrument of death. Crucifixion was a form of execution devised by the Phoenicians and was described by Cicero as the most cruel and shameful of all punishments.

"Let it never," he says, "come near the body of a Roman citizen; Nay, not even near his thoughts or eyes, or ears." Yet our Lord hung on that cruel cross.

The death of Christ is a mystery. But it is the Christian's glory. For at the cross God shows us not only the awfulness and depth of our sin, but also the length to which eternal love will go to save us. On the cross Christ died as our substitute. He died in our stead. His death set all who believe in Him - FREE.

The cross is the symbol of victory. Satan appeared to be the victor. The triumph of evil seemed to be final. But this proved not to be true. Satan was defeated "Non victus sed Victor". These ancient words thrill the hearts as they declare that Christ is not vanquished but victorious.

The cross of Christ is the deathblow to evil in every form and kind. The cross stands in the centre of history and has been placed on Calvary not as God's afterthought but as His forethought. The ancient prophecy after the fall of Adam, "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15), was fulfilled on that first Good Friday. The victory of Christ was confirmed on Easter when death was conquered. Life, not death, had the last word. Light not darkness, God and not Satan were triumphant.

Jesus lives! thy terrors now
Can, O death, no more appal us;
Jesus lives! by this we know
Thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us.

Jesus lives! for us He died;
Then, alone to Jesus living,
Pure in heart may we abide,
Glory to our Saviour giving.

Jesus lives! our hearts know well
Nought from us His love shall sever;
Life nor death, nor power of hell
Tear us from His keeping ever.

The cross has universal significance. John Cordelier, the Roman Catholic mystic, writes in *The Path of Eternal Wisdom*: "If the Cross be anything at all it is the ground-plan of the universe.

It stretches from nebula to nebula linking the farthest limits of the worlds, holding out to them the wounded hands of love." This is the word we must remember. From everlasting to everlasting – Christ is Victor.

The cross of Christ demands a response. We must do something with it, and one of the two things only can we do – flee it or die upon it. The Lord calls us to follow Him and to share even in His suffering. "Take up I the cross and follow Me," He said so plainly.

And when we follow this clear teaching we find that the cross will cut our lives where it hurts most, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputation. It will defeat our ego and bring to end our feeling of selfimportance.

The followers of the cross must be persistent and enduring. They can never ask for the easy way out, but must share the consequences of their faith. Through dying to self you will become the first in the kingdom; through being crucified with Christ can you be effective. The demands of Christ have not eased up. The standards of the faith have not changed, but the response seems to have changed.

So far have many removed themselves from this teaching of our Lord that to restore the cross in its full meaning and to its proper place in the church will take nothing short of a new Reformation. One of the beloved hymns written by Isaac Watts so often sung should also be practised:

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Where the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small!
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

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