

Five Views of the Cross

Intro: The cross of Jesus is the centerpiece of Christianity. It is on the banner that is raised above us as we, like an army, go out into the world. We gather in our assemblies and sing about it! We remember it each first day in the Lord's Supper as we eat bread and drink the fruit of vine, proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes. We want to tell others about it; and like Paul we glory in what it means to us, saying with him, "May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. 5:14).

Have you ever stopped to think about how the crucifixion might have been viewed by those who were there, who actually experienced it? Have you considered what the cross meant to all those who looked on the day the Lord was crucified? For a few moments I want you to join with me as we attempt to look through the eyes of those present that day. I would like to give you five views of the cross; and as we do, I hope we can see that the cross meant different things to those who looked on that day!

Let's see first...

The view through the eyes of Jesus' friends

But there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." (John 19:25)

They saw it all up close. Can you imagine what it was like to look at the crucifixion through a mother's eyes?

Perhaps her mind went back to that glorious day when the angel Gabriel first appeared to her with the good news that she would be blessed to bear the child who would save the world, giving him a name that constantly reminded her of that fact. She could remember him as a little boy and then as a young man, the perfect son; never a moments grief, always compliant, always obedient and respectful. He had done so much for people and now this?! Is this what "Jesus" (Savior) meant?

But today Mary has come too realize the full significance of what may have been for her a daunting memory. The prophet Simeon had said to her in the temple the day that Jesus was presented there as a baby:

"and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:35)

It must have been a scene of unbelievable pain for Mary; when the nails were driven into his hands, that sword was thrust into her heart!

To Mary the cross meant the loss of one of most precious things in her life. It meant agonizing questions, "Why did this have to happen to my son?"

"And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee, were standing at a distance, seeing these things." (Luke 23:49)

We'll probably never know how difficult it was for them to watch Jesus die. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be one of those disciples? To have known Jesus intimately, to have traveled with him virtually every day, to have prepared his food, to have heard his teaching, to have known his sincerity and his kindness toward others in the many healings he performed. They had invested everything in his promises! Can you imagine how desperate, fearful, confused, despairing and hopeless they were? They too must have asked the same question we ask in the face of tragedy, "Why," looking for some meaning in it all, and finding none.

Three days after Jesus' death one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus summarized the thinking of those who loved Jesus.

"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."
(Luke 24:21)

For these loyal disciples the cross meant confusion and dashed hopes.

The View through the Eyes of Jesus' Enemies

First there are the religious leaders of Israel who had plotted Jesus' death.

For all those who loved him there were also those who hated him with a passion. They had religious reasons for wanting Him dead. They thought He was a false Christ and that His teaching would lead to the destruction of the nation. Perhaps they were thinking things like "He'll never break our Sabbath again." Perhaps they recalled all of the times he had humiliated them by pointing out the inconsistencies in their arguments and the flaws in their theology. But today they vented all the hatred and animosity they had felt for Jesus for a long time by saying every mean and hateful thing they could think of to him!

"And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. "He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Mt. 27:39-43)

The cross meant a day of vengeance for those who opposed and hated Jesus. They perhaps even thought of it as a victory for the nation.

And then there were those who carried out Jesus' death (The Romans)

For them, it was just another day's work. Since nobody cared much for criminals anyway they felt free to take whatever liberties they felt with them. After all they were the scum of the earth, weren't they? So why not rough them up a bit just for kicks? Why not make fun of them? After watching the Roman lictors tear the flesh from his back, just for fun, they put a scarlet robe on him and a crown of thorns on him in view of the charges made that he claimed to be a king; and

mocked him and spat upon him. And now that the fun was over, they had a job to do. They probably had trained themselves not to feel anything when they drove the nails through hands and feet of their victims. They had learned to turn a deaf ear to the cries of anguish that would erupt. Upon raising the victim on the cross, they would turn their attention to the last remaining earthly belonging of Jesus, his clothes.

“The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. They said therefore to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be”; that the Scripture might be fulfilled, “They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” (John 19:23–25)

To the Romans the crucifixion meant nothing other than that another low life was getting his just payment; and they were getting paid to do a job. In this case, there was a bonus (a little cloth to be used at home in some way and maybe if lucky, an extra tunic to sell or wear).

So this was the view around the cross, a confusing mixture of love and hate and callous indifference. The cross meant different things to the people who stood around the cross.

The View Through the Eyes of Jesus

How you ever considered what the cross meant to the one dying there? Did you wonder how Jesus might have felt on the cross?

Psalm 22 gives us a glimpse at the view from the cross. It is a prophetic picture given by the Spirit through David of how the crucifixion might be seen through the eyes of the one who experiences it. In those first 22 verses we see a poignant picture of the pain of the suffering Christ. From the first disconsolate cry of anguish we sense the Lord's own anguish and yearning.

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.” (Psalm 22:1)

The Psalmist pictures the sufferer as remembering how faithfully God had delivered those who trusted him; yet this time no deliverance has come. He felt he had been left to experience the full meanness of his enemies. He felt worthless and despised.

“But I am a worm, and not a man, A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, “Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.” (Psalm 22:6–8)

Can you imagine how it felt to see the broken hearts of loyal followers? Can you imagine how it felt to see the hatred in the eyes of those you had tried to save?

He felt the full physical pain of crucifixion. We may never understand the pain Jesus went through not only physically but emotionally as he felt his life pass away.

What did the cross mean to Him who suffered there? It meant unfathomable humiliation and suffering. It meant enduring the emotional pain of being the object of hatred, ridicule and scorn. It meant painful spiritual agony in the realization that this time a righteousness man would remain for a time undelivered by God and subjected to death.

The View through the Eyes of Satan

Have you ever considered what the cross meant to Satan and those who serve Him in the spirit world?

For Satan it must have been a moment of seeming great victory. For centuries Satan had worked to prevent the fulfillment of God's plan to bring a Savior into the world. At each step of the way he had worked to corrupt those who played a part in God's plan hoping to bring destruction of the nation from which the Savior was to come. And, he almost succeeded; but then there was that faithful remnant who by means of God's grace were granted forgiveness. Finally the promised deliverer was born. He had tried to kill him at birth and did not succeed. He had tried to lure him with every possible temptation. Finally he thought, if I kill him, then all of it has been in vain. He had tried numerous other times without success to take his life. But now he had infiltrated the heart of a covetous disciple named Judas Iscariot to sell him out and marshaled the political forces of Jerusalem and Rome to do his dirty work.

Jesus had anticipated all this:

"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me;" (John 14:30)

But Satan no doubt thought, "I have won; the Christ is dead. He is in my domain now. I have power over death!"

To Satan the cross meant the final establishment of His rule over the whole world, a seeming check-mate in the ongoing battle against God.

And so the whole picture is one of contradiction and confusion. The true meaning of the cross is not known until we look at:

The View through the Eyes of the Father

The ultimate meaning of the cross is found in God's purpose. God had announced it in the words of Isaiah 700 years before the fulfillment.

It was the only solution to the sin of man.

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." (Isaiah 53:6)

"But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He

will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.” (Isaiah 53:10)

In that single act, as painful as it was to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit there arose a way of redemption for sinful man.

God’s justice was met out against sin.

God’s mercy and grace was offered to sinners.

The cross meant the possibility of the salvation of the whole world!

The view from above clarifies all the confusion and contradiction that we see below!

God saw the rejoicing in the evil spirit world; but he also saw the ultimate defeat of Satan. Did Satan know that God would be willing to go that far to save his sinful creatures? Could he imagine such love and grace? Ironically, the event that he hoped would defeat God's plan made salvation possible forever!

God saw the wicked railing of Jesus' enemies, but he also knew that those who hated Jesus would see their joy short-lived. That day they had used the Romans to kill Jesus, but forty years later (A.D. 70) Jesus would use the Romans to kill them! (that is, those who continued in their rebellion against God.) They would crucify Jews Josephus reports until they ran of trees upon which to nail them!

God saw the grief of Mary and the disciples; but he knew that those who loved Jesus would see their despair turned into joy and hope, when on the third day he arose from the dead.

And Jesus himself would see the results of his death in the many souls given to him by God as the result of his sacrifice. He would be exalted as Lord and Christ.

And so it all worked out just as God had planned it; from the foundation of the world! Out of the confusion, the despair, the anger, the indifference, the chaos, comes God's purpose. There is meaning in it all. The meaning could be simply put in 5 words—“Christ died for our sins.”

Conclusion: When we explore these views we can clearly see the meaning of His sacrifice. We can see in the cross that...

God’s love is manifest to all the world.

Satan’s power over men is vanquished once and for all!

Sin’s power to condemn has been removed for those who believe.

Forgiveness of sins is available to all who unite with His death!

Eternal life is the inheritance of all who are sons of God through Christ!

Conclusion: There is one other view, a sixth view--your view. Will you turn away in a casual indifference saying, "So what if Jesus died?" Or, will you reflect thoughtfully and believe and understand that Jesus died for you?