

Three Crosses

by Leon King

An exposition and commentary on Matthew 27:35-44

Bringing the scene of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ before our eyes of faith will reveal blessed truths about Him, about us, and about the unbelieving world. The three crosses tell a story of wonder and amazement. In the following narrative of the crucifixion, let your mind's eye go back to the scene. Behold our Lord and the two thieves who were crucified with him.

35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

In precise fulfillment of Psalms 22, we watch as our Lord was lifted up. As he hung naked, bearing the sins and shame of His people, the soldiers divided his clothing and gambled for his robe.

Psalms 22:16-18 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

36 And sitting down they watched him there; 37 And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

There hung the blessed Son of God, a curse for us, with a sign, which read, *"This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."* The testimony of all the gospel writers gives us a complete picture of the accusation which was written. Mark simply says 15:26 *"THE KING OF THE JEWS."* (15:26); Luke writes, *"THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."* (23:38); while John records the writing as *"JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS."* (19:19).

38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

Again, in precise fulfillment of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, our Lord was *"numbered with the transgressors:"* So much more was the shame of being named among transgressors, when he was without sin. Can we gain just a small understanding of what He endured when we are placed in a position to be named among felons? If we, being totally depraved and fallen in every faculty, are ashamed when named with transgressors - how great the shame the sinless, impeccable Son of God endured in our behalf.

Isaiah 53:12 *Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

***39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,
40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.***

Proof concrete shows itself in this passage that the unbelieving had indeed heard the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet *"hearing, did not hear."* He had told them the wondrous truth of His death and resurrection, yet they

were blinded to the real meaning of that statement. They were recalling the word of Christ, which John recorded in the second chapter.

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. -- John 2:18-21.

41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

Mockery of the religious leaders of the day was just that - mockery. They did not actually believe he "saved others," but meant this as a mock of His holy name. John Gill's analysis of this verse is powerful and true.

"This was not so much a concession of theirs, that he had done many saving works, as healing the sick, cleansing lepers, causing the blind to see, and the lame to walk, and raising the dead; but rather a suggestion, that these were only pretensions and illusions; that either they were not really done, or done by the help of the devil; since now he himself was in the utmost extremity, he could not save himself: ... but of this they might have been convinced by his striking many of them to the ground, that came to apprehend him in the garden, and of which these men were eyewitnesses; and he, as man, could easily have obtained of his Father more than twelve legions of angels that would have rescued him out of their hands: but so it must not be; he came not to save himself, but others, and to save them spiritually and eternally by dying himself."

For them to say, *"let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him,"* was an absurd statement on their part. They had already seen miraculous things, which pointed to the great power of the Christ who hang there, yet they were steadfast in their rejection and unbelief. Jesus could have come down from the cross, but that was not his purpose in being there. His face was set toward the purpose for which he had come. A manifestation of His divine power in coming down from the cross would not have convinced these unregenerate men any more than the miracles which they had already witnessed.

43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

Here is a signal truth - Jesus had clearly declared Himself to be the Son of God. How is it now that liberals and infidels want to say the Bible does not teach that Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God?

The jeering crowd of infidels continued their mockery by saying, *He trusted in God.* It was a way of saying that Jesus had pretended to trust in the Almighty Father - in their innuendos and suggestions, they were scoffing at His "pretended trust in God."

It was their way of saying that His "pretended trust in God would never ***"deliver him now;"*** that is, from the death that he was surely facing. To these blasphemous statements, they added, ***"if he will have him;"*** again showing the precise and detailed fulfillment of the Scriptures. Notice Psalms 22:6-8 where these very words were recorded:

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would

deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. -- Psalms 22:6-8.

They consented that *"he said, I am the Son of God;"* which He had done throughout His earthly ministry.

44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

It is apparent that both of the men who were crucified with the Lord initially scoffed at Him for Matthew uses "thieves" in the plural. As we know by continued reading of the account, one persisted in His scoffing and rejection while the other repented.

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. -- Luke 23:39-43.

On these three crosses, we see a picture of the whole world and its responses to the death of the cross in the crucifixion of these two thieves. One is dead in sin and dying ***in sin***; one is dead in sin and dying ***to sin***; while the Lord Jesus is without sin and dying ***for sin***.

- **One dead in sin dying in sins**

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

Jesus had told the Pharisees that they would "*die in your sins*"... "*if ye believe not that I am he*" (the Christ). This is what was taking place for the man who continued in his hardness of heart toward the Son of God. He, being dead in trespasses and sin, was now dying in his sins. He would not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God: therefore, he died in his sins. His sins, he would face in judgment. He would be ushered into hell at his death, and there he would be tormented in the flames until the day of judgment, then be cast into the lake of fire forever.

Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. 22 Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. 23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. -- John 8:21-24.

- **One dead in sins dying to sin.**

On the other side of the cross another hang dying. Like the other thief, he was a thief - a sinner. He, too, was dead in trespasses and in sins, but there is an amazing difference in his death. Somehow, he comes to realize the truth about himself and is given repentance - to admit it forthrightly. With that repentance, he sent a stinging rebuke to the other man, while turning in faith to the Son of God on the middle cross. This man had nothing to offer - no good works, no retribution, no works of religion, yet He turned in faith to the Lord on the cross. That day, with the Savior, the man dead in trespasses and sins, **died to sin**. That is, sin would no longer have dominion. Sin would no longer be charged to his account. His sin had been borne by the one on the middle cross. So it is with all those who believe. They died with Him, but now with Christ, live unto God. Jesus set

them free from the law of sin and death by becoming sin for them. Jesus told the repentant thief *"To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* Blessed promise. Blessed forgiveness of sins! This man's sins were expiated - removed, never to be remembered again.

But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. -- Luke 23:40-43.

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are **dead to sin**, live any longer therein? -- Romans 6:1,2.*

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; -- Colossians 2:13.

*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being **dead to sins**, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. -- 1 Peter 2:24.*

• One with no sin dying for sin

The just one hang in the midst dying for the unjust. What was the purpose? That He might bring "us" to God. He was saving His people from their sins by **dying for sins**. So, Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. That is, He came in full agreement to what was prophesied and taught in the Old Testament scriptures. He came to finish the work the Father gave Him to do. He came to save those the Father had "given

him." These were the ones who were "foreknown" by Him. They are the same ones whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world, seeing that He stood as a lamb slain from that same time. He secured their salvation when He became sin for them. No wonder Paul said, *"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live."*

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:...Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: -- 1 Peter 3:18,22

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. -- Matthew 1:21.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: -- Romans 8:3.

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; -- Hebrews 10:12.