

THREE CROSSES

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“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”—Galatians 6:14.

I thought it would be helpful to you if in my sermon today I concentrated on why the cross is so important for the Church and her members. It is not just a bauble of decoration to which Episcopalians have a sentimental attachment.

In the early chapters of Galatians St. Paul had been rebuking those who wished to glory in their human accomplishments. Whenever we rebuke other people we should be sure we are not guilty of the same offense. In denouncing false teachers and their weak-minded followers St. Paul used sharp language. They were proud of their achievements, but he did not shrink from the deepest shame of the Christian profession.

In fact, so far from shrinking, he even counted it an honor to be scorned for Christ’s sake, exclaiming, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Galatians, and all others to whom his name was familiar, well knew how truly he spoke; for the manner of his life as well as the matter of his teaching had supplied evidence of this assertion, which none of his enemies could deny. There had not been in all his ministry any truth that he held more highly than this of “Christ crucified”; nor any experience that he touched on more tenderly than this “fellowship with Christ in his sufferings”; nor any rule of conduct that he counted more safe than this following in the footsteps of him who “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set

down at the right hand of the throne of God.” God grant, of his grace, that there may always be with us the same consistency.

The apostle in the present case warms with emotion at the thought of anybody presuming to set anything ahead of the cross, by wishing to glory in circumcision, baptism, or any other outward institution. The idea of a ceremony being more important than Jesus provoked him, till his heart presently grew hot with indignation, and he thundered, “God forbid!”

Indeed, there is to every true-hearted believer something shocking and revolting in putting anything before Jesus Christ. Do you want new Scriptures to supplement the true sayings of God? Do you want a new Savior who can surpass him whom the Father has sealed? Do you want a new sacrifice that can save you from sins which his atoning blood could not wash away? Do you want a modern song to supersede the song of “Worthy is Lamb that was slain”?

“O foolish Galatians!” said Paul. When a whole group turned the cold shoulder to the cross of Christ it made him burn with indignation. He could not take it. The cross was the center of his hopes; there he had found peace for his troubled conscience. God forbid that he should allow it to be trampled on.

Let us, then, in that spirit approach our text; and we notice at once three crucifixions. These are the summary of the text. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”; that is, *Christ crucified*. “By whom,” or, “by which” (read it whichever way you like), “the world is crucified unto me”; that is, *a crucified world*. “And I unto the world”; that is, *Paul himself, or the believer, crucified with Christ*.

I. First, then, the main part of our subject lies in CHRIST CRUCIFIED, in whom Paul gloried.

I call your attention to the language; “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross.” Some popular authors and public speakers, when they have to state a truth, count it necessary to clothe it in very delicate language. They, perhaps, do not quite intend to conceal its point and edge; but they do not want to be too blunt. The apostle Paul might have done so here, if he had chosen, but he disdains being smooth. He presents the, truth “in the worst possible form,” as his opponents say—“in all its naked hideousness,” as the Jews would put it; for he does not say, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the *death* of Christ”; but in the **CROSS**.

I think we cannot realize how the use of that word “cross” would grate on ears refined in Galatia and elsewhere. In those days it meant the felon’s tree, the hangman’s noose, but worse; and the apostle, therefore, does not hesitate to put it just so: “I will glory in that **CROSS** on which my Master died.”

We have become so accustomed to associate the name of “the cross” with other sentiments that it does not convey to us that sense of disgrace which it would inflict upon those who heard Paul speak. A family sensitively shrinks if one of its members has been hanged, or sent to the electric chair; and much the same would be the natural feeling of one who was told that his leader was crucified. Paul puts it baldly, he lets it jar harshly, though it may prove to some a stumbling block, and to others foolishness; but he will not cloak it, he glories in “**THE CROSS!**”

II. The second cross exhibits THE WORLD CRUCIFIED.

The apostle says that the world was crucified to him. What does he mean by this? He regarded the world as nailed up like a criminal, and hanging upon a cross to die. Well, I suppose he means that its character was condemned. He looked out upon the world which thought so much of itself, and said, “I don’t think much of you, poor world! You are a doomed criminal.” He knew that the world had crucified its Savior: crucified its God. It had gone to such a length of sin that it had hounded perfect innocence through the streets. Eternal truth it had rejected, and preferred a lie; and the Son of God, who was love incarnate, it had put to the death of the cross.

“Now,” says Paul, “I know your character, O world! I know you! and I hold you in no more esteem than the wretch abhorred for his crimes, who is condemned to hang upon the cross and so end his detested life.” This led Paul, since he condemned the world’s character, utterly to despise its judgment. The world said, “This Paul is a fool. His gospel is foolishness and he himself is a mere babbler.” “Yes,” thought Paul, “a great deal you know of it!”

In this we unite with him, What is the world’s judgment worth? You did not know the Son of God, you poor blind world! We are sure that he was perfect, and yet you hunted him to death. Your judgment is a poor thing, O world! You are crucified to us.

Now, there are a great many people who could hardly endure to live if they should happen to be misjudged by the world or what is called “society.”

Paul had a different opinion. What did he care for anything the world might say? How could he wish to please a world so abominable that it had put his Lord to death. He

would sooner have its bad opinion than its good. It would be better to be frowned at than to be smiled upon by a world that crucified Christ. Certainly, its condemnation is more worth having than its approval if it can put Christ to death: so Paul utterly despised its judgment, and it was crucified to him.

Now, we are told to think a great deal about “public opinion,” and “popular belief.” I would like for St. Paul to read some of our newspapers; and yet I could not wish the good man so distasteful a task, for I think he would sooner die in a Roman prison than do so; but, still, I would like to see his expression after he had read some of those statements about the necessity of keeping ourselves abreast with the sentiment of the period. “What,” he would say, “the sentiment of the world! It is crucified to me! What can it matter what its opinion is? We are of God, little children, and the whole world lies in the wicked one; would you care what the world, that is lying in the wicked one, thinks of you or of the truth of your Lord?”

Paul would be indignant with such a proposition. He said, “the world is crucified to me.” He looked upon all the world’s pleasures as so much rottenness, a carcass nailed to a cross.

Can you imagine Paul being taken to the Coliseum at Rome? I try to imagine him forced to sit on one of those benches to watch a combat of gladiators. There is the emperor: there are all the great peers of Rome and the senators; and there are those cruel eyes all gazing down upon men who shed each others’ blood. Can you picture how St. Paul would have felt if he had been forced to occupy a seat at that spectacle? It would have been martyrdom to him. He would have closed his eyes and ears against the sight of what Rome thought to be the choicest pleasure of the day. They poured

in mighty streams into the theater each day to see poor beasts tortured, or men murdering one another: that was the world of Paul’s day; and he rightly judged **IT** to be a crucified felon. If he was compelled to see the popular pleasures of today, would he not be as sick of them as he would have been of the amusements of the amphitheater at Rome?

To Paul, too, all the honors of the age must have been crucified in the same way. Suppose that Paul settled his mind to think of the wretches who were reigning as emperors in his day! I use the word advisedly, for I would not speak evil of dignities; but really I speak too well of them when I call them wretches. They seem to have been inhuman monsters—“tyrants whose capricious folly violated every law of nature and decency,” to whom every kind of lust was a daily habit, and who even sought out new inventions of sensuality, calling them new pleasures. As Paul thought of the iniquities of all the great towns to which the Romans went in their holidays—Pompeii and the like—oh, how he loathed them! And I have no doubt that if the apostle were to come here now, if he knew how often some government officials sink all true dignity in shameful dissipation, he might as justly consider all the poms and dignities and honors of the world to be worth as little as a putrid carcass hanging on a tree and rotting in the sun. He says, “The world is crucified to me: it is hanging on the gallows to me, I think so little of its pleasures and of its poms.”

And similarly did St. Paul judge all the treasures of the world. He never spent as much time as it would take to wink his eye in thinking of how much money he was worth. Having food and raiment, he was content. Sometimes he had scarcely that. He casually thanks the Philippians for ministering to his necessities, but he never sought to store anything, nor did he live with even half a thought of saving gold

and silver. “No,” he said, “this will all perish with the using,” and so he treated the world as a thing crucified to him. Now, can you say as much as this—that the world, in its merchandising, as well as in its vices and its frivolities, is a crucified thing to you?

Now, look what the world says. “Make money, young man, make money! Honestly if you can, but by all means make money. Look around you, for if you are not dishonest sometimes you will not succeed. Don’t worry, your reputation will rise with the balance in your stock portfolio.” Now suppose that you get the money, what is the result? The net result may be a paragraph in one of the newspapers saying that So-and-so’s will left so many millions. Then follows a grand squabble among all his relatives. That is the consummation of a life of toil and care and scheming. He has lived for money, and he has to leave it behind for his relatives to fight over.

It is a poor thing to live for making money and hoarding it. But still the genius of rightly getting money can be consecrated to the glory of God. You can use the wealth of this world in the service of the Master. To gain is not wrong. It is only wrong when grasping becomes the main object of life, and grudging grows into covetousness which is idolatry. To every Christian that and every other form of worldliness ought to be crucified, so that we can say, “For me to live is not myself, but it is Christ; I live that I may honor and glorify him.”

When the apostle said that the world was crucified to him, he meant just this. “I am not enslaved by any of its pursuits. I care nothing for its rules. I am not governed by its spirit. I do not court its smiles. I do not fear its threatenings. It is not my master, nor am I its slave. The whole world cannot force Paul to lie, or to sin, but Paul will tell the world the

truth, come what may.” Oh, yes; the man that fears God and loves the cross has a moral backbone which enables him to stand, and he snaps his fingers at the world. “Dead felon!” says he, “dead felon! Crucifier of Christ! Cosmos you call yourself. By grand names you want to be greeted. Paul is nothing in your esteem; but Paul is a match for you, for he thinks as much of you as you do of him, and no more.” Hear him as he cries, “The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

III. Then he finishes up with the third crucifixion, which is, *I AM CRUCIFIED TO THE WORLD.*

We see the evidence of this crucifixion if we notice how they poured contempt upon him. Once Saul was a great rabbi, a man profoundly versed in Hebrew learning, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and much admired. He was also a classic scholar, a man of great mental powers, and fit to take the lead in learned circles. But when Paul began to preach Christ crucified—“Bah,” they said, “he is an utter fool! Don’t listen to him!” Or else they said, “Down with him! He is an apostate!” They cursed him. His name brought wrath into the face of all Jews that mentioned it, and all intelligent Greeks likewise. “Paul? He is nobody!” He was everybody when he thought their way: he is nobody now that he thinks in God’s way.

And then they put him to open shame by suspecting all his motives, and by misrepresenting all his actions. It did not matter what Paul did, they were quite certain that he was self-seeking. When he acted so that they were forced to admit that he was right, they put it in such a light that they made it out to be wrong. There were some who denied his apostleship, and said that he was never sent of God; and others questioned his ability to preach the gospel.

They went further still. They shunned him. His old friends forsook him. Some got out of the way, others pointed at him the finger of scorn in the streets. His persecutors showed their rancor against him, now stoning him, and then with a semblance of legality dragging him before the magistrates. Paul was crucified to them. As for his teaching, they ridiculed him as a babbler—setting forth strange gods. They often sneered at the cross of Christ and said, “If you but shut the mouths of such men as Paul, it will soon be forgotten.” I have heard it said in modern times, “Your old-fashioned preaching is nearly dead, before long it will be utterly extinct!” But we preach Christ crucified; the same old doctrine as the apostles preached, and for this by the contempt of the worldly wise we are crucified.

Now, dear Christian friends, if you keep to the cross of Christ you must expect to have the same reaction. The world will be crucified to you, and you will be crucified to the world. You will get the cold shoulder. Old friends may become open foes. They will begin to hate you more than they loved you before. At home your foes will be those of your own household. You will hardly be able to do anything right.

Let their dislike be a badge of your discipleship, and say, “Now also the world is crucified to me and I to the world. Whatever the world says against me for Christ’s sake is the blathering of a doomed criminal, and what do I care for that? And, on the other hand, if I be rejected and despised, I am only getting what I always expected—my crucifixion—in my poor, humble way, after the manner of Christ himself, who was despised and rejected by men.”

The lesson of it all is this. Whatever happens in your life, still glory in Christ. Whether you are in honor or in dishonor, in good report or in evil report, whether God multiplies your possessions and makes you rich, or diminishes it

and makes you poor, you will still glory in the cross of Christ. If you have health and strength and vigor to work for him, or if you have to lie on a bed of sickness and bear in patience your heavenly Father’s will, resolve that you will still glory in the cross. Let this be the point of your glorying throughout your lives. Go down the steps of death, and go through death itself, still glorying in the cross, for in the heaven of glory you will find that the blood-bought hosts celebrate the cross as the trophy of their redemption.

May the Lord teach you this blessed privilege. There is no joy like it. There is no strength like it. There is no life like it. There is no peace like it. At the cross we find our heaven. May the Lord lead you there at this very hour; so shall you be pardoned, accepted, and blessed for ever. The Lord grant that you all may be partakers of this grace for Christ’s sake. Amen.