

J.C. Ryle:

You probably know that Calvary was a place close to Jerusalem, where the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified. We know nothing else about Calvary beside this. I call this tract "Calvary," because I am going to speak to you about the sufferings and crucifixion of Christ.

I am afraid that much ignorance prevails among people on the subject of Jesus Christ's sufferings. I suspect that many see no peculiar glory and beauty in the history of the crucifixion: on the contrary; they think it painful, humbling, and degrading. They do not see much profit in the story of Christ's death and sufferings: they rather turn from it as an unpleasant thing.

Now I believe that such persons are quite wrong. I cannot agree with them. I believe it is an excellent thing for us all to be continually dwelling on the crucifixion of Christ. That is a good thing to be often reminded how Jesus was betrayed into the hands of wicked men,-how they condemned Him with most unjust judgment,-how they spit on Him, scourged Him, beat Him, and crowned Him with thorns,-how they led Him forth as a lamb to the slaughter, without His murmuring or resisting, -how they drove the nails through His hands and feet, and set Him on Calvary between two thieves, how they pierced His side with a spear, mocked Him in His suffering, and let Him hang there naked and bleeding till He died. Of all these things, I say, it is good to be reminded. It is not for nothing that the crucifixion is described four times over in the New Testament. There are very few things that all the four writers of the Gospel describe: generally speaking, if Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell a thing in our Lord's history, John does not tell it; but there is one thing that all the four give us most fully, and that one thing is the story of the cross. This is a telling fact, and not to be overlooked.

People seem to me to forget that all Christ's sufferings at Calvary were fore-ordained. They did not come on Him by chance or accident: they were all planned, counselled, and determined from all eternity; the cross was foreseen, in all the provisions of the everlasting Trinity for the salvation of sinners. In the purposes of God the cross was set up from everlasting. Not one throb of pain did Jesus feel, not one precious drop of blood did Jesus shed, which had not been appointed long ago. Infinite wisdom planned that redemption should be by the cross: infinite wisdom brought Jesus to the cross in due time. He was crucified by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

People seem to me to forget that all Christ's sufferings at Calvary were necessary for man's salvation. He had to bear our sins, if ever they were to be borne at all: with His stripes alone could we be healed. This was the one payment of our debts that God would accept; this was the great sacrifice on which our eternal life depended. If Christ had not gone to the cross and suffered in our stead, the just for the unjust, there would not have been a spark of hope for us; there would have been a mighty gulf between ourselves and God, which no man ever could have passed. The cross was necessary, in order that there might be an atonement for sin.

People seem to me to forget that all Christ's sufferings were endured voluntary and of His own free will. He was under no compulsion: of His own choice He laid down His life: of His own choice He went to Calvary to finish the work He came to do. He might easily have summoned legions of angels with a word, and scattered Pilate and Herod, and all their armies, like chaff before the wind; but He was a willing sufferer: His heart was set on the salvation of sinners. He was resolved to open a fountain for all sin and uncleanness, by shedding His own blood.

Reader, when I think of all this, I see nothing painful or disagreeable in the subject of Christ's crucifixion; on the contrary, I see in it wisdom and power, peace and hope, joy and gladness, comfort and consolation. The more I keep the cross in my mind's eye, the more fulness I seem to discern in it; the longer I dwell on the crucifixion in my thoughts, the more I am satisfied that there is more to be learned at Calvary than anywhere else in the world.

Would I know the length and breadth of God the Father's love towards a sinful world? Where shall I see it most displayed? Shall I look at His glorious sun, shining down daily on the unthankful and evil? Shall I look at the seed time and harvest, returning in regular yearly succession? Oh, no! I can find a stronger proof of love than anything of this sort. I look at the cross of Christ: I see in it not the cause of the Father's love, but the effect. There I see that God so loved this wicked world, that He gave His only begotten Son,-gave Him to suffer and die-that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. I know that the Father loves us, because He did not withhold from us His Son, His only Son. Ah, reader, I might sometimes fancy that God the Father is too high and holy to care for such miserable, corrupt creatures as we are: but I cannot, must not, dare not think it, when I look at Christ's sufferings on Calvary.

Would I know how exceedingly sinful and abominable sin is in the sight of God? Where shall I see that most fully brought out? Shall I turn to the history of the flood, and read how sin drowned the world? Shall I go to the shore of the Dead Sea, and mark what sin brought on Sodom and Gomorrah? Shall I turn to the wandering Jews, and observe how sin has scattered them over the face of the earth? No: I can find a clearer proof still, I look at what happened on Calvary. There I see that sin is so black and damnable that nothing but the blood of God's own Son can wash it away; there I see that sin has so separated me from my holy Maker that all the angels in heaven could never have made peace between us: nothing could reconcile us, short of the death of Christ. Ah, if I listened to the wretched talk of proud men I might sometimes fancy sin was not so very sinful; but I cannot think little of sin when I look at Calvary.

Would I know the fullness and completeness of the salvation God has provided for sinners? Where shall I see it most distinctly? Shall I go to the general declarations in the Bible about God's mercy? Shall I rest in the general truth that God is a God of love? Oh, no! I will look at the crucifixion at Calvary. I find no evidence like that: I find no balm for a sore conscience and a troubled heart like the sight of Jesus dying for me on the accursed tree. There I see that a full payment has been made for all my enormous debts. The curse of that law which I have broken, has come down on One who there suffered in my stead; the demands of that law are all satisfied: payment has been made for me even to the uttermost farthing. It will not be required twice over. Ah, I might sometimes imagine I was too bad to be forgiven; my own heart sometimes whispers that I am too wicked to be saved. But I know in my better moments this is all my foolish unbelief; I read an answer to my doubts in the blood shed on Calvary. I feel sure that there is a way to heaven for the very vilest of men, when I look at the cross.

Would I find strong reasons for being a holy man? Whither shall I turn for them? Shall I listen to the ten commandments merely? Shall I study the examples given me in the Bible of what grace can do? Shall I meditate on the rewards of heaven, and the punishments of hell? Is there no stronger motive still? Yes: I will look at Calvary and the crucifixion. There I see the love of Christ constraining me to live not unto myself, but unto Him: there I see that I am not my own now, -I am bought with a price: I am bound by the most solemn obligations to glorify Jesus with body and spirit, which are His. There I see that Jesus gave Himself for me, not only to redeem me from iniquity, but also to purify me, and make me one of a peculiar people, zealous of good works. He bore my sins in His own body on the tree, that I being dead unto sin should live unto righteousness. Ah, reader, there is nothing so sanctifying as a clear view of the cross of Christ! It crucifies the world unto us, and us unto the world. How can we love sin when we remember that because of our sins Jesus died? Surely none ought to be so holy as the disciples of a crucified Lord.

Would I learn how to be contented and cheerful under all the cares and anxieties of life? What school shall I go to? How shall I attain this state of mind most easily? Shall I look at the sovereignty of God, the wisdom of God, the providence of God, the love of God? It is well to do so: but I have a better argument still. I will look at Calvary and the crucifixion. I feel that He who spared not His only begotten Son but delivered Him up to die for me, will surely with Him give me all things that I really need: He that endured that pain for my soul, will surely not withhold from me anything that is really good: He that has done the greater things for me, will doubtless do the lesser things also. He that gave His own blood to procure me a home, will unquestionably supply me with all that is really profitable for me by the way. Ah, reader, there is no school for learning contentment that can be compared with Calvary and the foot of the cross.

Would I gather arguments for hoping that I shall never be cast away? Where shall I go to find them? Shall I look at my own graces and gifts? Shall I take comfort in my own faith and love, and penitence and zeal, and prayer? Shall I turn to my own heart, and say, "This same heart will never be false and cold"? Oh, no! God forbid! I will look at Calvary and the crucifixion. This is my grand argument: this is my mainstay. I cannot think that He who went through such sufferings to redeem my soul, will let that soul perish after all, when it has once cast itself on Him. Oh, no! What Jesus paid for Jesus will surely keep. He paid dearly for it: He will not let it easily be lost. He died for me when I was yet a dark sinner: He will never forsake me after I have believed. Ah, reader, when Satan tempts you to doubt whether Christ's people will be kept from falling, you should tell Satan that you cannot despair when you look at the cross. And now, reader, will you marvel when I say that all Christians ought to make much of the crucifixion? Will you not rather wonder that any can hear of Christ's sufferings on Calvary and remain unmoved? I declare I know no greater proof of man's depravity than the fact that thousands of so-called Christians see nothing lovely in the cross. Well may our hearts be called stony, well may the eyes of our mind be called blind, well may our whole nature be called diseased, well may we all be called dead, -when the cross of Christ is heard of, and yet neglected. Surely we may take up the words of the prophet, and say, "Hear, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth: a wonderful and horrible thing is done," -Christ was crucified for sinners, and yet many Christians live as if He was never crucified at all!

Calvary

Reader, if you never thought much about Calvary and the crucifixion before,-I trust you will have learned something today.