

The Styrofoam Cross

We enter today the most memorable week in the Christian calendar. As we approach Friday, the traditionally accepted time of our Lord's crucifixion a sense of awe comes over my being ... a stillness, a time of contemplation. According to tradition, it was that day, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. that our Lord was crucified.

He was betrayed by one of His own disciples, rejected by His own people, brought before the Gentile magistrates and led to a hill outside Jerusalem called "The Place of the Skull," Golgatha in Hebrew, Calvary in Greek. He was mocked and beaten by the Sanhedrin, cruelly flogged and mercilessly mocked by the Romans and finally crucified on a rugged cross on top of the hill.

My mind goes to Mary, the precious mother of Lord. I think of the piercing of her very soul as she beholds Christ's suffering. I think of Simon Peter and the awful shame he experiences because as Jesus prophesied, before the cock would crow twice, he would deny the Savior three times. I feel his remorse as he cries his heart out in repentance. I think of John, the beloved disciple, who was perhaps the closest to Christ on earth following the Lord all the way to Calvary and receiving the last request of the dying Lord, i.e. to take care of Mary.

Good Friday is a good day to do some soul searching, especially as we prepare for Resurrection Sunday, also known as Easter.

Nine years ago I observed an event that motivated the writing of this article. The news showed some pilgrims who had gone to the Holy Land, specifically to be there during "Holy Week." The Pilgrims on Good Friday were carrying their crosses up the Via Dolorosa, to Calvary. I noticed one man smiling as he went, carrying his "cross" rather effortlessly up "The Way of The Pain." Although I saw this picture only briefly, many thoughts began to flow through my mind. It appeared the man was not under too heavy a burden; he appeared to come from the west, and he almost seemed pre-occupied.

This mental picture I have lodged in my mind will serve us four speculative points for "The Pastor's Word" today.

I. His cross was made of a convenient material.

It was quite obvious the man was not carrying solid wood. He was not carrying a load of 250-350 pounds of a solid wooden cross like our Lord was carrying. It had the color and to a degree the look and texture of wood. Our Lord was reared in a carpenter's home and appeared to be pretty much of an outdoorsman. Our friend on his pilgrimage looked like an office executive. Carrying a real cross would have definitely been inconvenient for his soft hands. Yes, you could pack up a portable cross and not be charged for extra weight on the airline...much more convenient.

Jesus said, "... *if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me*" (Matthew 16:24).

Christ did not suggest that we follow Him without any inconvenience. He said, "Deny yourself!" The cross Jesus had in mind was not styrofoam. Many of us today miss the thing, most certainly...convenience of culture.

II. He constructed His cross Himself.

I imagine a portable "cross kit." Maybe he came across the advertisement in a religious journal. Perhaps for just a little extra his tour guide company would make it available. By 8 a.m. he has the package open, by 9 a.m., he's ready for his journey, retracing the steps of our Lord.

I am convinced if we choose our own cross it would not be too hard on us. Have you ever constructed your own cross? Some people should be getting along better with their family members, so

instead of working on their problem, they rationalize and say, “Hey, I can’t help it, it’s my cross”. Some don’t like their job or boss, and rather than dig in and work a little harder, they will accept the incompatibility as “their cross.”

Remember, if the cross is the cross that Jesus has asked us to bear, there will be a suffering for righteousness sake, not because of our attitude or mere misunderstandings. The cross that Jesus has assigned for us will bring others to Him. Our meanness can drive others from Him. Don’t pull out your “cross kit” and pretend it’s the one of our Lord’s choosing. Remember His words, “...*not my will, but thine, be done*” (Luke 22:42).

III. His cross will impress others.

The casual observer will not notice the styrofoam imitation. The spectator will be impressed, but please don’t expect God to be moved by our “air-filled plastic” look-alike. “*But all their works they do for to be seen of men...*” (Matthew 23:5).

The warning of the Lord is, “*Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward*” (Matthew 6:2).

IV. When He is through, His cross will become a souvenir.

The cross of our Lord’s choosing is not taken up or put down at our discretion. Too many times cross bearing becomes the trinket around our neck, a picture on the wall, a nice bedtime story.

Listen to the words of A.W. Tozer, “One picture of a Christian is a man carrying a cross ‘*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*’ The man with the cross no longer controls his destiny; he lost control when he picked up his cross. That cross immediately became to him an all absorbing interest, an overwhelming interference.”

This cross bearing is no souvenir mentality, it is “...an overwhelming interference.” Please do not despair, God will provide the grace to carry the cross of His choosing. “*My grace is sufficient for thee...*” II Corinthians 12:9.

- Pastor Pope -

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