

## When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

I Corinthians 1:18-31

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Do you ever look at the cross? By that I mean: Do you ever meditate upon the cross and what took place on it nearly 2,000 years ago?
2. Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was an Englishman and one of the most prolific hymn writers of all time.
  - A. Watts is credited with writing over 750 hymns; many of which are in our hymnals.
  - B. He wrote *Joy to the World, Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*, and *We're Marching to Zion*.
3. He also wrote *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*:

*When I survey the wondrous Cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*
4. These words will serve as the introduction to the remarks I want to make this morning.
5. What do I see when I survey the cross? Historical perspective: Historians tell us that crucifixion was first used in 519 B.C. by Darius I, king of Persia, when he crucified 3,000 political opponents in Babylon (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).
  - A. Crucifixion became a popular method of execution in the ancient world and was used by many societies (e.g., Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Egyptians).
  - B. The Romans borrowed crucifixion from the Carthaginians and used it on slaves and non-citizens; a Roman citizen could only be crucified if convicted of treason.
  - C. The Romans used crucifixion especially in times of war as a method of terrorizing their enemies.
    - (1) In the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. thousands upon thousands were crucified.
    - (2) Historians report that so many Jews were crucified that the Romans ran out of wood!

“Josephus reports that the Romans crucified many before the walls of Jerusalem during the siege of 70 C.E. The idea was to terrorize the population and force a surrender. The number reached 500 a day at one point until there was no wood left in the area for this purpose!” (*The Jewish Roman World of Jesus*, Dr. James Tabor)
6. From a physical perspective:
  - A. When I survey the history of the physical cross I see two pieces of wood so attached to each other as to support the full weight of a living human body with outstretched arms attached by iron spikes driven through the hands and feet of that body.
  - B. I see an instrument of death much more cruel to its victims than death by the sword or burning-at-the-stake because its pain continued unabated much, much longer.
  - C. I see the dread of this instrument of death coming to symbolize the cares and burdens of life.
7. The gospel writers all tell us:
  - A. Jesus was scourged before He was crucified (explain; the victims of scourging sometimes died before crucifixion).

- B. All four gospels tell us he carried His own cross (at least part of the way) to the site where he was crucified, "*Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.*" (Mk. 15:22)
  - C. They also tell us it took about six hours for Jesus to die on the cross.
    - (1) But, it was not unusual for the victims of crucifixion to linger for two or three days.
    - (2) The breaking of the victim's legs was used by the Romans to hasten death but "*when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs*" (Jn. 19:33).
8. **3** This morning, let us look deeper and find what we can see *When [we] Survey the Wondrous Cross.*

## II. DISCUSSION:

### ***When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...***

#### I. **4** *The Jewish leaders' hatred:*

- A. Pilot asked, "*What shall I do with Jesus?*" the Jewish answer betrayed their deep hatred for Jesus.
  - (1) Their response, "*Crucify him, crucify him!*" reveals the malice which the Scribes and Pharisees, who sought to control the Jewish people, had for Jesus.
  - (2) It reminds us that on numerous occasions they "*sought how they might kill Him,*" but waited for a more opportune time because "*they feared the people*" (Lk. 22:2).
  - (3) Their hatred was so strong they were more than willing to accept the blame for His death: "*And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'*" (Matt. 27:25)
- B. When I survey the wondrous cross I see the symbol of his love for his enemies which contradicted the Jewish leaders' hatred of him.
  - (1) Jesus disappointed their hopes for worldly power and prominence which they mistakenly attached to the Messiah's reign.
    - (a) They looked for an earthly kingdom and king who would vanquish the Romans and release the Jews from their cruel bondage.
    - (b) But Jesus told Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*" (Jn. 18:36)
  - (2) Even though His execution was the worst miscarriage of justice in history, what did Jesus say concerning His accusers? "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" (Lk. 23:34)
- C. The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees saw Jesus as a major threat to their control of the people because "*the common people heard him gladly*" (Mk. 12:37).
  - (1) But, the Jewish leaders were not political dimwits.
  - (2) I have no reason to believe the same "*multitudes*" that so often heard the teaching of Jesus in rural Judea and Galilee constituted the "*multitudes*" controlled by the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees in the early morning hours of the crucifixion day.
  - (3) The leaders knew the longer Jesus was free to teach the masses of Israel in Galilee and Judea the less credence they retained with the Jewish nation overall.
  - (4) These politicians were experts in manipulating the people so they recognized the power and popularity of Jesus was a direct threat to them.
- D. When, therefore, I survey the wondrous cross I see the hatred of the Jewish leaders and it parallels the hatred so many people have today towards Jesus.

- (1) People of the world hate Jesus because: **Jn. 3:19-21**: *“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”*
- (2) Many religious people who proclaim to love Him in fact have a similar hate as the scribes and Pharisees, because like them, they don’t want their followers to know the truth!
  - (a) When we preach the truth of the gospel they do all they can to destroy our influence.
  - (b) They know if their followers learn the truth they will lose their power over them.

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

2. **5** Saul turning into Paul:

- A. When I survey the wondrous cross I discover the story of the brilliant and honest young Saul of Tarsus and his commitment to the person and work of Jesus Christ.
  - (1) This zealous young man had been so firmly attached to the Pharisaic concept of Judaism that he believed the Jewish disciples of Jesus should be imprisoned or killed; gladly he gave his vote to this end.
  - (2) He punished them in the synagogues and strove to force them to blaspheme, persecuting them even to foreign cities until he met the resurrected Jesus on his journey to Damascus (Acts 26:9-20).
  - (3) Thereafter he gave his whole life to knowing nothing “*save Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (1 Cor. 2:2).
 

**1 Cor. 15:1-5**: *“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain.*

*3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”*
- B. The cross of Jesus became to him everything and is reflected in his words: *“Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world”* (Gal. 6:14).
- C. I pray this would be my commitment and yours too.

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

3. **6** The contrast between the cross and worldly wisdom: 1 Cor. 1:18-31

- A. Surveying the wondrous cross I see the inability of worldly wisdom to bring sinful souls to God.
  - (1) Nothing associated with the wisdom and philosophy of men apart from God’s revelation had or can ever have anything to do with man’s salvation from sins.
  - (2) The very thought of a Messiah who suffered at all, much less for others, was repugnant to Jewish thought.
    - (a) That crucifixion would be the means of such suffering for the Savior was even more ridiculous to the Jews, because in their mind crucifixion meant one was guilty as charged.
    - (b) Such an attitude completely ignores such prophecies as Isaiah 53.

- (3) The very thought of a crucified Savior was ridiculous, to the point of foolishness, in the eyes and wisdom of the Greeks.
  - (a) The idea of a crucified hero was a sign of weakness to the Gentile mind.
  - (b) To the Gentile such a person deserved to be mocked rather than worshiped.
- B. No wonder when it came to salvation “*God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame them that are wise,*” that he chose “*weak things*” as opposed to the “*strong*”; that he chose “*base*” and “*despised*” things, as judged by human wisdom, that “*no flesh should glory before God.*”
- C. This helps us understand why “*not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble*” were or are receptive to the simple story of infinite love and wisdom reflected in the gospel.
- D. We all need to carefully consider 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 for Paul’s point of view on God’s plan for conquest of honest hearts.
  - (1) The vast majority of people reject the gospel message because it offends their sensibilities,
  - (2) Or it insults their “sophisticated intelligence” as being “foolish” and below their dignity.

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

**4. 7 God’s grace:**

- A. When I behold the wondrous cross I see God’s grace extended to all sinners willing to accept salvation on the terms of the gospel and not on the merits of their own good works, national/ fleshly origin, material worth or religious inheritance: “*Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world*” (Gal. 6:14); **Titus 2:11**: “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,*”
- B. Unfortunately the vast majority fail to understand the awfulness of sin and the fact that sin separates them from the God who created them.
- C. As we’ve already seen from 1 Corinthians 1; the notion of God’s Son shedding His blood on the cross for them is repugnant or totally foolish; they don’t need it! “I’m doing just fine on my own! Thank you very much!”
- D. They fail to appreciate John Newton’s wonderful words: *Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see!*
  - (1) They don’t realize they are a lost wretch!
  - (2) They don’t realize their bound in spiritual blindness!
  - (3) They don’t realize one day they will hear Jesus say to them: “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt. 25:41).
- E. Therefore, each of us as Christians must develop a deep love for the souls of men!
  - (1) We must appreciate the hopeless and terrible fate awaiting those not obeying the gospel!
 

**2 Thess. 1:7-9:** “*...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,*”
  - (2) When we understand the abject terror of this hopelessness we can agree with Paul:
 

**2 Cor. 5:10-11a:** “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. I I Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;*”

- F. Then and only then, when we survey the wondrous cross and come to a full appreciation of God's grace, can we understand and help others appreciate the true value of Christ!

**Matt. 13:45-46:** *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."*

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

5. **8** Caesar:

- A. I see the principle of the rule of civil government in punishing evil doers which Paul declares when he says, *"But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil"* (Rom. 13:4).
- B. Pilate, as a civil governor, was God's agent to use either sword or cross to punish those whose just punishment deserved either imprisonment or execution.
- C. Jesus didn't deserved to die but this doesn't change the principle that the cross was a legitimate means of punishing evil doers, e.g., the two robbers crucified beside Jesus.
- D. The cross for Jesus was unjust but for those deserving death the cross was a lawful, God-approved option which Pilate was authorized to use in punishing evil men for their crimes (Rom. 13:2-5; Jesus said so! Jn. 19:11).
- (1) This principle is, unfortunately, rejected by our "enlightened" society.
- (2) I wonder in what way we are "enlightened"? We certainly are not "enlightened" when it comes to justice for those harmed by criminals!
- E. Unfortunately civil justice is not always perfect.
- (1) In yielding to the demands of Jesus' critics, the civil power which said, *"I find in him no fault"* (Jn. 18:38) became complicit in His death and yielded to the demands of the mob.
- (2) That should serve as an object lesson to the "powers that be" of today not to subvert justice for the sake of political expediency.

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6. **9** The crown:

- A. As we view the wondrous cross the words of the Hebrew writer come to mind: **Heb. 2:9:** *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone."*
- B. Peter speaks of this coronation as he brings his great sermon in Acts 2 to a conclusion: **Acts 2:36:** *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* (David's throne)
- C. Jesus would not have received the "crown" if not willing to go through the "suffering of death."
- (1) Without the cross there is no crown; without the grave there is no glory.
- (2) By His death on the wondrous cross He paid the price for my redemption.
- (3) By His resurrection He validated His claim to be *"the Christ, the Son of the Living God"* (Matt. 16:16).
- D. We too have a crown awaiting us: **2 Tim. 4:8:** *"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*
- (1) Do you love "His appearing"?

- (2) How do you show that love? Jn. 14:15
- (3) What is at the center of your life?
- (4) Is it Christ or something else?

**Phil. 1:21:** *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

- E. Thank God for the cross of wood by which He enables sinners like me to become saints, to be wearers of the crown of life!

### **When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

#### **7. 10 God's love:**

- A. Many are quick to blame God for all of the evil, suffering, pain and injustice that is in the world.
- B. But such charges are false! **Jn. 3:16:** *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*
- C. To understand and appreciate the depth of God's love for us we need only look at the cross!
  - (1) Losing a child is undoubtedly the worst thing that can happen to a parent.
  - (2) Losing a child to murder is even more painful!
  - (3) But this is exactly what happened to God!

**Rom. 5:6-8:** *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

- (4) People that fail to appreciate the depth of God's love exhibit the height of ingratitude!
 

**2 Cor. 9:15:** *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”*
- D. The love shown on the cross also tells us three more important things about us and our relationship with God. It tells us:

- (1) We don't have to wonder whether God is on our side or not!

**Rom. 8:31:** *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

There's nothing greater God could have done to get that message across than to give “His only begotten Son”! *“God is for us!”*

- (2) We don't ever have to wonder whether or not God will take care of us!

**Rom. 8:32:** *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*

- (3) We don't have to ever worry about God's love for us!

**Rom. 8:33-39:** *“Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:*

*‘For Your sake we are killed all day long;  
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’*

*37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor*



things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

8. **11** The horrific nature of sin:

- A. Whether one talks about people of the world or Christians; I believe one of man’s most egregious faults is failing to appreciate the horrific nature of sin.
- B. When we look at the ugliness in the world today: people being gunned down in the streets, rampant corruption in government and business, broken homes, damaged children, aborted babies by the millions, abused women, abused children, thousands killed in traffic accidents involving alcohol, etc., etc. What is the root cause of all this pain, suffering and waste? SIN!
- C. Yet what is the prevailing attitude toward sin?  
**Jas. 4:4:** “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”
- D. All of the pain and suffering in the world through the ages should be more than adequate to convince us of the horrific nature of sin, but there’s more.
  - (1) As the song says: “On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suffering and shame; And I love that old cross where the dearest and best For a world of lost sinners was slain.”
  - (2) That hill of course was Calvary; upon it the “only begotten Son of God” was crucified; does that not show us the horrific nature of sin?!
  - (3) But there’s more; the one crucified was God Himself! **Jn. 1:1-2:** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.” Does that not show us the horrific nature of sin?!
  - (4) But there’s more; the one crucified was not only God; He was the Creator! **Jn. 1:3:** “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” Does that not show us the horrific nature of sin?!
  - (5) But there’s more; the one crucified was not only God; He was not only the Creator; but He is the source of life and light! **Jn. 1:4:** “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Does that not show us the horrific nature of sin?!
- E. I submit to you that we can only come to a true understanding of the horrific nature of sin when we come to a true understanding of who Jesus is!
  - (1) God gave the greatest sacrifice possible when He gave Jesus on the cross for us!
  - (2) Truly “God so loved the world”!

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

9. **12** My sin:

- A. John writes: **1 Jn. 2:1b-2:** “...we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”
- B. We’ve already considered: **Jn. 3:16:** “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
- C. It is a wonderful thing to contemplate that Jesus died for every man, but there is something each and every one of us needs to realize:

- (1) Even if every man that ever lived never sinned, Jesus would still have had to go to the cross for **my** sins!
- (2) We need to contemplate that fact each and every day and twice on Sunday!
- (3) My sins put Him on that cross!
  - (a) My sins caused Him to be beaten to within an inch of His life!
  - (b) My sins put the crown of thorns on His head!
  - (c) My sins caused Him to be ridiculed, blasphemed by those saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” as “they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.” (Matt. 27:29-30)
  - (d) My sins caused the angry mob to cry out “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” (Lk. 23:21)
  - (e) My sins caused the crowd to angrily react to Pilate’s “Shall I crucify your King?” with the pitiful lie “We have no king but Caesar!” (Jn. 19:15)
  - (f) My sins caused Him to carry the old rugged cross to Calvary’s mountain!
  - (g) My sins drove the nails into His hands and feet!
  - (h) My sins caused those at the foot of the cross to mock Him saying, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may believe.” (Mk. 15:31-32)
  - (i) My sins caused Him to suffer hours of agony as He struggled to take each breath as He was suspended between heaven and earth!
  - (j) My sins shoved the sharp spear into His side!
- D. Unless and until we come to grips with the fact that our personal sins put Jesus on the cross we will never appreciate either the horrific nature of our sin, the enormity of His great sacrifice, nor of the wondrous depth of God’s love for ME!

**When I survey the wondrous cross, I see...**

10. **13** My need for total commitment:

- A. Finally, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died I see an abiding symbol of my personal responsibility as a disciple of Jesus.
- B. Many months before he was nailed to the cross our Lord said, “He that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38).
- C. In similar vein when Jesus had told his apostles about his impending death and resurrection at Jerusalem and was rebuked by Peter for talking about such, he called Peter “Satan” and a “stumbling block” to the fulfilling of his earthly mission.
- D. Then, turning to his disciples, he said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 10:24).
  - (1) This is our duty as His disciple! This is our Lord’s challenge that must be heeded by me each and every day!
  - (2) We sing a song called “The Way of the Cross Leads Home”; the first verse reads:
 

*I must needs go home by the way of the cross,  
There’s no other way but this;  
I shall ne’er get sight of the Gates of Light,  
If the way of the cross I miss.*



- (3) Truly, “*The way of the cross leads home*”! But, if I fail to make the commitment to “*take up [my] cross daily, and follow [Him]*” (Lk. 9:23); I’ll never find that heavenly home for which I so desperately seek!

### III. CONCLUSION: 14

1. The greatest barrier between me and total submission to the Christ of the cross is ME! It is my own self-centered desires which Satan always uses to draw me away from Christ.
2. Always and everywhere Jesus said of his Father, “*I do always the things that are pleasing to him*” (Jn. 8:29) and this is the challenge of the wondrous cross in every facet of my life.
3. There is no crown of glory apart from the cross of duty: Everywhere and every moment of my life! This is complete commitment!

Adapted from an article entitled “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”  
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