

Viewing the Cross.

Text: Mat 16:21-23

Suggested Hymns:

299, 171, 330, 85t264, 347

1) How The Eyes Of Flesh View The Cross

2) How The Eyes Of Faith View The Cross

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 16:21-23, ²¹ *From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.* ²² *Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"* ²³ *But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Every one of you has seen a cross. We cannot help but see it — on church-steeple, on tombstones, and on altars. The pastor makes the sign of the cross. Many people wear a cross. It is the most common emblem that we know of.

But thousands of people do not view it correctly. Some have a superstitious awe of it. To some it means nothing more than a religious symbol. How shall we view it? Our text will teach us. Let us consider *Viewing the Cross*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How The Eyes Of Flesh View The Cross.

By revelation of the Father in heaven, Peter, in the name of the disciples, had made a magnificent confession of Jesus as the Christ, and the Son of the living God. We read in Matthew 16:16-17, ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* ¹⁷ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

The disciples recognised the divine character of the Son of Man and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah who was to come. Jesus thought the time was now appropriate to tell His friends of the approaching and final crisis in His life.

The disciples should now be able to bear it, and the information could not be delayed much longer. It was the first time that Christ so explicitly and plainly told them of the impending climax of His life. Several communications of the same type followed later.

Jesus was going to Jerusalem to suffer much and many things. His enemies, the elders, priests, scribes, the Sanhedrin, in their fierce and bitter and determined enmity against the Galilean Prophet, would prevail. They would not only wound, but kill the Lamb of God. The cross was looming into sight. But it was to be illumined in Easter brightness of triumph and victory.

Death was to be followed by resurrection. Good Friday's gloom was to be dispelled by the light of immortality and life. Sombre misere was to be changed to joyful hallelujahs. Seeming failure and dismal defeat was to be transformed into smiling victory.

Peter, this impetuous character, had heard the words *“suffer many things ... and be killed,”* but he had not paid attention to these words *“and be raised again on the third day.”* Therefore his soul was stirred, and his heart enraged. He was confounded and horrified. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God, killed! What a horrible thought, what an obnoxious prospect, what an impossible future!

Therefore Peter took hold of Jesus, perhaps seized His garment, and began emphatically to chide and admonish Jesus. With emphasis and vehemence Peter exclaimed *“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”* This cruel death and murder will not, and cannot, be!

He began. But he did not get far. As soon as his meaning became apparent, poor Peter encountered a prompt, abrupt, harsh rebuke.

Peter was perfectly honest when, by inspiration of the heavenly Father, he had called Jesus the Christ and the Son of the living God. But why the Son of God and the Messiah needs to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief Peter did not yet understand.

He did not see the necessity of the cross in the plan of the Messiah's life. With eyes of flesh he viewed the cross as a mere symbol of unjust torture and shame. The rugged cross did not fit into his scheme of the imminent coming of the kingdom of the Messiah in outward splendour and earthly glory.

In a vision of the flesh he saw the Messiah, a heroic prince and mighty warrior, as Joshua of old making the walls of opposition crumble and fall and with mighty signs and wonders driving the Romans from the land and setting up an earthly kingdom in David's royal city which far outshone the kingdom of Solomon in magnificence and power.

He imagined the Christ going to Jerusalem to reign, and now he heard that the end of the journey meant death for the Son of God. His throne was to be the cross! Peter thought that God would avert such a calamity and catastrophe.

Christ turned around and gave well-meaning Peter a tremendously crushing reply and stinging rebuke, *He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

Jesus calls Peter "Satan." In the words of Peter, Jesus recognised the old evil foe, the wily serpent, using a friend of Jesus to tempt Jesus from the path of duty, from the things of God, from the realisation of God's plans. Satan desperately and at all costs tried to save Jesus' life, seek His safety and comfort, a purpose in keeping with the will of men and of the flesh.

Peter's choice was man's choice. Christ's choice was God's choice. The cross was God's way. Avoiding the cross was man's way, the devil's temptation to do wrong. Peter himself did not see that these were the alternatives.

As in this approaching solemn season of Lent the cross comes into view, will you see it with the eyes of the flesh or with the Spirit-enlightened eyes of faith ?

Many people still look at it with the eyes of the flesh. They give to the crisis of Christ's life a very human explanation. Their heart's sentiment is, *"Oh, that God would have averted the tragedy of the death of this innocent and good Man at the hands of jealous and fiendish men!"*

They explain the happening of Calvary by the fact of unhappy circumstances. A corrupt Jewish Sanhedrin, envious of the popularity of the Galilean Teacher

and enraged because of its own dwindling influence. Then there was an unprincipled Roman judge, who sought the good will of the Jewish leaders more than righteous judgment — this to the eyes of the flesh is the full and complete explanation of the slaughter and murder of the innocent Jesus.

That Holy innocence must often suffer unjustly, perfect love is often the prey of hate — to the eyes of the flesh this is the only lesson to be learned from Calvary's sacrifice.

Oh, the blindness of the human heart! Oh, the emptiness, shallowness, of such a view of the cross! Where is there comfort for a sin-weary, curse-laden, death-facing mankind in such a view?

Come, let us with the vision of faith fix our eyes upon the cross coming into view.

2. How The Eyes Of Faith View The Cross.

As Christ unfolds the coming crisis of His life, note the word must. Of Jesus whom Peter had confessed to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus says that He must suffer and die and be raised again on the third day.

A divine obligation was resting upon Jesus. The Messiah must be a Man of Sorrows. Divine Majesty must die on the cross. The plan of God came to fruition at Calvary's cross and the empty tomb.

All Scripture gives us the explanation of this must. Good Friday and Easter must come because the Scriptures must be fulfilled. We read in Luke 24:6-7, *Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, ⁷ "saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"*

And in Luke 24:44-48, *⁴⁴ Then [Jesus] said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."*

⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ "and

that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ *“And you are witnesses of these things.*

The necessity of the death of Jesus is rooted in human need as we read in Isaiah 53:6, ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.* God’s plan of redemption of a sin-oppressed, curse-ridden, death-choked world necessitated the cross, *And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

We read in Isaiah chapter 53, ⁴ *Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.* ⁵ *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*

.... ¹⁰ *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. For He shall bear their iniquities.*

... ¹² *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.*

The Son of Man, as the incarnate Son of God, must suffer many things and be killed because our sin, our curse, our condemnation, our death, rested upon Him and because by His cross He was to make peace. We read in Ephesians 2:16, ¹⁶ *and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*

By His suffering on the tree of the curse Jesus delivered us from the scathing curse of the Law. We read in Galatians 3:13, ¹³ *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).*

By His being made sin for us Jesus won for us the righteousness which avails before the judgment throne of God.¹

By His death Jesus conquered our death. Christ, the Substitute, explains the “must suffer and die.” The vicarious atonement of sin necessitated the drama of Golgotha. We read in Hebrews 2:14-15, ¹⁴ *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,* ¹⁵ *and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

The word “must” helps us to know the motive that lay behind the torturing pain of the cross as we read in John 3:16, 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.* An in John 15:13, ¹³ *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*

The divine obligation of love drove the Master into Jerusalem, the den of thieves, into the gaping jaws of the lion, over the yawning jaws of death. Divine love of the Father and the Son would not let us go to perdition.

The word “must” is linked also with the phrase “be raised.” Death could not hold the Prince of Life. Easter must follow Good Friday. God the Father must bring back from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep and the Bishop of souls.

For the blood of Jesus was the blood of the Son of God, which cleanses us from all sin.² The death of Christ was the death of the Son of God, and that reconciles us to God, as we read in Romans 5:10, ¹⁰ *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

God’s plan of redemption included the raising of Jesus from the dead as the Heaven-given proof of the sufficiency of the supreme sacrifice for the atonement of a world’s sin, as the divine seal of the victory of the cross, now the sign of pardon, peace, and everlasting life. We read in Romans 4:25 that Jesus *was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.*³ Jesus says in John 14:19 that *Because I live, you will live also.*

Peter learned to see the cross with the eyes of faith. When Pentecost came with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we hear the apostle preach to the assembled multitude.

²² Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know -- ²³ “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴ “whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. ⁴

Friends, the cross is in view. Do you see it with the eyes of faith? Do you see it in the fulfilment of the prophecies of old, the love-impelled atonement for your sins, your Peace, your “*Death of death and hell’s Destruction*”⁵ the hymnist writes, and your Hope, your All?

Cast aside all confidence in self and human works and goodness, all filthy garments of your own righteousnesses, and as lost sinners cling alone to the victory-crowned cross, the *Rock of Ages cleft for you*.⁶ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

² 1 John 1:7

³ See also 1 Cor. 15:17-22

⁴ Acts 2:22-24

⁵ Hymn 347

⁶ Hymn 330