

## The Wondrous Cross On Calvary.

Text: 2 Cor 5:19-21

suggested hymns:

54, 84, 66, 68, 48

- 1) Because of the wondrous **Saviour** who died on it for our sins
- 2) Because of the wondrous **salvation** which He prepared there for the whole sin-lost world

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 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, <sup>19</sup> ... *God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* <sup>20</sup> *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.* <sup>21</sup> *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

On this solemn day, known the world over as Good Friday, the whole Christian Church pauses to reflect on the death of Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer.

The death of Christ is historically attested; it is a fact which no one can deny. It occurred nearly 2,000 years ago, in the vicinity of Jerusalem, on a hill called Golgotha or Calvary. There Jesus Christ, who for three years had preached salvation to His people, performed many mighty miracles, and benefited the people around Him in innumerable ways, was nailed to a cross between two criminals.

The names of those two criminals have long been forgotten; but the name of Jesus, who was crucified in their midst, lives on and on, revered by millions. The crimes for which the two companions of Jesus were put to death are no longer remembered; but the reason for Christ's crucifixion on Calvary, constitutes the noblest theme, the most glorious Gospel-message, the central

doctrine of the whole Bible, the exalted topic on which today untold ministers preach and uncounted Christians ponder.

Thousands of great men have lived and died, but the day of their death is not held in reverence. Why, then, should we commemorate the day of Christ's death? Why should there be a Good Friday, a day which is sacred to millions of people in every part of the world?

And why should that lonely cross on Golgotha have a unique power and a profound significance? Why should it occupy the central position in all our Christian preaching and meditation? Why does St. Paul say in Galatians 6:14, ***But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?***

Why should a Christian hymn-writer, Isaac Watts, compose a Lenten hymn, glowing with the fire and faith of devotion, beginning like this:<sup>1</sup>

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?

Why should John Browning immortalise the cross of Calvary in that beautiful verse:<sup>2</sup>

In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime?

Why should we ourselves gather here today, in our house of prayer and thanksgiving, to consider the wondrous story of Calvary?

All these are questions that crowd upon our minds today as we observe this holy day, Good Friday, in commemoration of Christ's death on Calvary. Surely the cross of Christ must be to us a symbol of what is precious and comforting and inspiring. And so indeed it is. Let us consider that *Wondrous in Truth, is the Cross of Christ on Calvary*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

**1. Wondrous In Truth Is The Cross Of Christ On Calvary.  
Because Of The Wondrous Saviour Who Died On It For Our Sins**

Wondrous is the cross of Calvary because of the wondrous Christ who died on it for the sins of the whole sin-lost world. That is the first lesson we learn from our text, in which the inspired apostle speaks of the crucified Christ in clear and unmistakable terms.

Let us hear this amazing text once more. *God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.* As we see, St. Paul here expounds his favourite theme; for the crucified Christ, despised as He was of men, was the foremost, central theme of his preaching both among Jews and Gentiles.

He came to cynical, atheistic Corinth with but one message, <sup>2</sup> *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*<sup>3</sup> And again he witnesses, <sup>23</sup> *but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,* <sup>24</sup> *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* <sup>25</sup> *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*<sup>4</sup>

In such strong and clear terms St. Paul, the great missionary of the Gentiles, announced to the learned and critical men of Corinth the eminent theme of his inspired message — the message of the cross of Calvary, the message of Good Friday, the message of the wonderful Christ, who died for the sins of the whole world.

Wonderful in every way is the Christ of Calvary as pictured to us by Paul. In the first place, He is a human Christ, a true man. St. Paul was not a Gnostic, believing that Christ's body was a sham body, a phantom body, or a mere semblance of a human body.

No, indeed; the Christ of Paul, of our precious text, was a real man who died according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Paul's Christ was the Man of Sorrows, who could be crowned with thorns and nailed to a stake of suffering, whose agony was real, and whose death was a true parting of body and soul, who could cry out in anguish: *"I thirst,"* and complain: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

Had St. Paul stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus died, he would have confirmed the centurion's noble confession: "***Certainly this was a righteous man!***"<sup>5</sup> Had he lived in the days of the Reformation, he would have approved of the well-known words of Luther "***I believe in Jesus Christ, ... true man, born of the Virgin Mary.***"

Everywhere in his sacred writings St. Paul confesses the true humanity of Jesus in unequivocal words. — But that does not mean that the great missionary among the Gentiles was a Modernist. He did not obtain his theology from some rationalistic school of philosophy at Antioch or Alexandria.

Of his doctrine he declares in 1 Corinthians 11:23, <sup>23</sup> ***For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.*** To St. Paul, Christ was indeed a human teacher, but He was also vastly more than a human teacher; He was God's true Son, very God of very God.

That St. Paul believed Christ to be true God is clear from his glorious words, ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.*** What a confession to make of the Holy One who died on Calvary! When Christ died on Calvary, amid the miracles of that awful day, God died on the cross. That is the mystery of the cross: in Christ, God Himself died.

The Roman Caesars crucified thousands of men, some bad and some good, some guilty and some innocent; but only once in Roman history was a person crucified who at the same time was true man and true God.

Men who studied the gospels without bias have always felt that truth as they gazed with wonder at Calvary's unique crucifixion. Jean Jacques Rousseau, an unbeliever though he was, said: "*Socrates died as a man, but Jesus died as God.*"

And so the heathen centurion at the foot of the cross realised that in Christ God died, for seeing the miracles wrought by His death, He cried out in terror and in faith: "***Truly, this was the Son of God!***"

Indeed, as you yourselves today rivet your eyes upon the Holy One hanging between the two criminals; as you hear His astounding prayer: "***Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.***"<sup>6</sup> or His consoling words addressed to the penitent thief: "***Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in***

*Paradise,*”<sup>7</sup> or as you listen to His victorious, triumphant shout: **“It is finished!”**<sup>8</sup> or to His parting prayer: **“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit,’”**<sup>9</sup> you must subscribe to Paul’s sublime confession: **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.”** **“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

That is why the cross of Calvary is so wondrous, so powerful, so mighty to convince and to save: here God died for us and our sins. Of the Jews we are told that after Christ’s death many smote upon their breast and penitently returned to the city. Is it not so today?

At the foot of the cross the voice of unbelief and blasphemy is stopped, for here man enters into the Holy of Holies, God’s own divine presence, and indeed into the presence of His marvellous love. **“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”** Let us ponder this message with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength on this holy day of Christ’s death.

But St. Paul is not alone in witnessing that **“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”** The entire Bible from beginning to end bears testimony to that great salvation fact. Seven hundred years before Christ’s birth Isaiah, the great prophet-evangelist of the Old Testament, said <sup>10</sup> ***The LORD has made bare His holy arm In the eyes of all the nations; And all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God.***<sup>10</sup>

Jesus Himself, in the New Testament, taught Paul’s great message in that paramount Bible-passage which sums up the whole Gospel, <sup>16</sup> **“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.”**<sup>11</sup> John the Baptist, our Lord’s forerunner and way-preparer, said of Jesus, **“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”** All these sublime passages re-echo the glorious Good Friday truth of the wondrous cross with its wondrous Christ, true God and true man, dying for our sins, ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.***

Sadly, unbelieving people have always expressed doubt with regard to the consoling truth of this great statement of St. Paul. They have argued: **“Would God come down from heaven and become a sin-offering for us and bear our sins?”**

*Was there no other way for man to be saved? Must God shed His blood for us that we might be free?"*

Even today people reject the message of the cross as opposed to reason and fairness. But it is not opposed to reason, although it is beyond reason. And it was not unfair for God to be in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Here divine love had its glorious way. Here God came down from heaven to help us.

And should not our Maker become our Redeemer? Would not our dear Father in heaven provide a way by which His erring children might escape damnation? Oh, do not doubt the message of grace "***God was in Christ.***" Only believe and adore the inestimable mercy which has secured so priceless a sacrifice for our iniquities.

**2. Wondrous In Truth Is The Cross Of Christ On Calvary.  
Because Of The Wondrous Salvation Which He Prepared There  
For The Whole Sin-Lost World**

Wondrous indeed is the cross of Calvary because of the wondrous salvation which the wondrous Christ has there prepared for the whole sin-lost world. — As we saw, St. Paul did not spend much time on the proof of the deity of the wondrous Sufferer on Calvary's cross.

The deity of the Christ of Calvary is so clear that we can doubt or deny it, only if we choose to pit our perverted reason against the pure and winsome truth of God's revelation, in other words, if we choose to reject the testimony of God's Word in sheer unbelief.

But St. Paul does spend a good deal of time in telling us of the marvellous salvation which Christ prepared for us by His death on Calvary.

In our text He says, ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.*** Consider this statement in the light of the first, and you will readily understand how great that salvation is which Christ has prepared for us on Calvary.

Christ died on the cross in order that He might remove the trespasses which lay between the world and God, the great, age-old wall of iniquity, the dreadful partition which sin had raised between the holy Creator and the rebellious creature.

That dreadful barrier of separation Christ removed by satisfying the demands of divine justice and atoning for the sins of the world, and by fulfilling the divine Law and bearing the burden of man's sins. When Christ died on Calvary, He therefore did a wonderful thing.

Jesus atoned for, and thus put away, the heaven-high mountain of transgression which barred us from eternal life. That is the meaning of those beautiful, divine words, ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.*** There is peace between God and man now that Christ, our divine Saviour, has shed His blood for our sin, yes, for every man's sin, on that amazing altar of Calvary.

Yes, let us rejoice in the great salvation which our divine Redeemer has effected by His holy sacrifice! The sinner, redeemed by God's own Son, need not fear to come into God's holy presence. God is no longer angry with him because of his transgressions and guilt; but since Christ has died in his place, as his Substitute, God does not impute, does not charge the wrong which guilty man has done.

Indeed, *"where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."* Now the gates of heaven stand open to receive us poor, unworthy sinners. Now our spiritual enemies are conquered: sin, death, hell, Satan, and whatever other foe might seek to destroy us. Now that sweet invitation of our Lord comes to us with irresistible winsomeness: <sup>28</sup> ***"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."***<sup>12</sup> and ***"the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."***<sup>13</sup>

Yes, you can come to Christ and find spiritual and eternal rest. Yes, you can trust Christ for grace now and forever because He has died for you; for since He has died for you, will He not grant you all blessings of time and eternity in fullest measure?

Surely the salvation which Christ has secured for us on Calvary is as wondrous as Christ Himself is wondrous in His divine person. In every way it surpasses our feeble human understanding; we shall understand it fully only after we have reached heaven.

It is also true that there are many people who despise that wondrous reconciliation which Christ has secured for us on Calvary. They say in their

stubborn folly: *“We do not see anything in Christ’s death. Surely God could have forgiven us our few sins even without laying upon His Son the iniquity of us all and punishing Him in our stead.”* But that is not the way God judges.

In His holy Word God tells us that sin is indeed such an awful reality, such an awful crime, such an awful offence, that it must be punished eternally with hell-fire. The very Christ who died for our reconciliation was first and foremost in impressing that appalling truth upon us in words that penetrate to the very marrow of our bones.

It was Jesus who told the stirring story of the rich man in hell. It was Jesus who told us to cut off our right hand rather than let it offend and so cause us to be cast into hell, *“where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’”*<sup>14</sup>

It was Jesus who painted that dreadful picture of the Last Judgement in colours so utterly terrifying. It was Jesus who spoke those condemning words of divine judgement: *“They shall go the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”*<sup>15</sup>

Study the Holy Bible, God’s own perfect Book of truth, in which He speaks to you words of sweetest love, of pardon, of life and salvation, and you will find that it also pictures to us sin as more hideous than words can tell, yes, warns us that the wages of sin is death, spiritual death, the death of the soul, temporal death, and eternal death and separation from God.

People may blaspheme God’s Word and make light of His truth for a while, but their very conscience, the voice of God in their hearts, condemns them even as they oppose God. <sup>31</sup> *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*<sup>16</sup> That is true already in this life when God’s punishment begins; but it is even more true in the life to come, when God’s punishment upon sin will be meted out without mercy.

However, this is Law; and while the Law of God is true, His precious Gospel is likewise true; and it is the precious truth of the Gospel which we hear in the words of our text *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.”*



Hear these blessed words, all of you gathered in this place of worship on this holy day! Let them enter into your hearts to abide there and enlighten and cheer you forever. God has reconciled the world unto Himself.

That means that Christ has died also for your sins, for you are included in the world; you are one of the world's lost sinners. The thief on the cross crucified at Christ's right hand was indeed a great sinner, but he could enter with Christ into paradise because his sins were removed by the blood and death of the world's Christ.

Peter committed a heinous sin when he denied the Lord, but for that offence, too, Christ had atoned when He died on Calvary.

St. Paul persecuted the Church of God, but his sins, too, were included in the great expiation on Calvary. And so every single sinner in the world may look confidently to the cross of Christ, no matter how heavy the burden of his sins may be.

Come to Jesus with all your sins; He will take them all away. Come just as you are, "*without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me.*"<sup>17</sup> He will not cast you out, but by faith make you a child of God and an heir of eternal life. That is the message of the wondrous cross of Calvary and its amazing salvation.

But in that salvation is included also what the apostle writes next: ***and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*** What do these words tell us? As the part of the text which we have considered, so also they tell us the story of God's matchless love.

***"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."*** That is the first proof of His divine love. He does "***not impute their trespasses to them.***" That is the second. Now, the third is that He has "***committed to us the word of reconciliation.***" That means that God has not only redeemed the sinful world through His divine Son, but He has also made provision that this glorious redemption should be made known to men.

God has established His Word of salvation, His saving Gospel, upon earth and now tells His ministers plead with the world, ***be reconciled to God***; that is, accept by faith the reconciliation which Christ has so graciously secured for you.

See, how greatly this appeal proves God's saving love! By nature we are so utterly lost in sin, so blind, so dead in trespasses, so helpless under the curse of our corruption and sin that we cannot understand how God could yet love us. Indeed, had God not revealed to us the glorious fact of the redemption through the blood of Christ shed on Calvary, we could never have found it out.

We would have been lost in spite of the redemption which Jesus has secured for us. But now, in order that we might not be lost, God has revealed to us the precious fact of the reconciliation. He has published it in the Holy Bible, in His divine Gospel. The Bible is God's Book of divine love, telling us that we can only be saved through faith in His Son. Think of this adorable deed of God's love: He has given us His Word, the ministry of His salvation, in order that we may hear the glad tidings of salvation and live eternally.

And now again you hear this surpassing Gospel-message, *be reconciled to God*. The Word that I am now proclaiming to you is not mine, but God's; for I, too, am an ambassador of God and Christ and beseech you in His name. The Gospel that I am bringing you comes from God and is meant to lead you to God. As Christians, you have already been led to Christ by faith and understand what I say. You know why the Cross of Christ is so wondrous: it shows a wondrous Christ and proclaims a wondrous salvation.

Your eyes have been opened, and you see in the Gospel the greatest miracle of divine grace possible. But do not think that this Good Friday message has no meaning for you. Think it over anew and ponder it once again with profound joy and gratitude until the divine light of salvation burns in your heart in all its heavenly brightness.

We are such poor students in spiritual things. To learn the divine truths well, we must study them over and over and study them harder and harder every day of our life. Take your station at the foot of the cross and meditate on that divine-human Christ and His perfect salvation every hour that you live, until in the glorious light of heaven you will see God face to face and understand fully that He has done all things well.

Everyone come to the fountain of divine grace and give to your blessed Redeemer glory and honour, praise and adoration, now and forever! Amen.

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

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- <sup>1</sup> Hymn 54
- <sup>2</sup> Hymn 171
- <sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2
- <sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23-24
- <sup>5</sup> Luke 23:47
- <sup>6</sup> Luke 23:34
- <sup>7</sup> Luke 23:43
- <sup>8</sup> John 19:30
- <sup>9</sup> Luke 23:46
- <sup>10</sup> Isaiah 52:10
- <sup>11</sup> John 3:16
- <sup>12</sup> Matthew 11:28
- <sup>13</sup> John 6:37
- <sup>14</sup> Mark 9:44
- <sup>15</sup> Matthew 25:41
- <sup>16</sup> Hebrews 10:31
- <sup>17</sup> Hymn 335