

A Strange Symbol of Hope

The choice of a cross as the symbol of faith is remarkable when we consider the horror with which it was regarded in the ancient world. Crucifixion was a cruel method of death as it deliberately delayed it until the maximum of pain had been inflicted. The Romans used it to execute criminals convicted of murder, rebellion and armed robbery, provided that they were also slaves, foreigners, or other non-persons. No wonder that for many the "message of the cross" was "foolishness," even "madness" (1 Cor. 1: 18, 23). And yet the cross is central to the Christian gospel. We preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The cross embraces the doctrines of sin and God's wrath, salvation and gratitude. Through the cross we find peace with God and comfort for both life and death. The cross destroys the myth that mankind can reach perfection. It proclaims that a brave new world can never be built by human hands. The cross preaches reconciliation with God and liberation from sin-man's total inability to save himself. God can only be reached via the cross. The boundary line between the church and the world is marked by the cross. If we remove the cross, the Christian faith will have lost all meaning. Without the cross, the church has no message. But with the cross the church will continue to conquer the powers of evil.

We are right in the midst of a fierce spiritual warfare (Eph. 6: 12). And one of the great dominant pictures of the work of Jesus Christ is the picture of Jesus Christ the Victor. The very demons of hell fought to keep Christ away from the cross. But they did not succeed. Note the triumphant claim of what Christ did on the cross. "Having disarmed the powers and authorities he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Col. 2: 15). The power of demons was broken forever. When we look around our world, we question whether or not this is true. The demonic, the forces of evil are so cleverly at work. And yet-the devil and his cohorts are defeated enemies. Through the weakness of the cross they were slain. If the demons had known what they were doing to themselves, they would not have crucified Christ (1 Cor. 2: 8). And the cross also defeated death. This victory was clearly demonstrated through Christ's resurrection. "Through this resurrection," wrote the church father Origen, "he destroyed the kingdom of death, whence it is written that he freed captivity."

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