1 Corinthians 1:23 (T.W.P. Wolston, Editor) 209016

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Christ Crucified. (1:23)

(1 Cor. 1:23.)

CORINTH was a place of great renown in its day. On account of its commerce, its science, its temples, and its schools, the prince of Roman orators called it “the light of all Greece.” But its elegance was even surpassed by its vice, so much so that, in the language of those times, the appellation of “a Corinthian” signified the lose of all that was moral, and chaste, and virtuous. Into this scene of iniquity the chosen Apostle of the Gentiles entered, his great heart bursting, as it were, with love for the salvation of souls. But how did he begin with this dissolute people? Was it by descanting to them on the deformities of vice, or by reading lectures to them in praise of virtue? Nay. Whether Paul stood amid the elegancies of Corinth, the classic beauties of Athens, or the towering grandeur of Rome, it was the same oft-repeated story of the cross of Christ.

When the Jew on the one hand sought a sign, and the Greek on the other asked for wisdom, he replied to both: “We preach Christ crucified.” He used no novel methods, tried no experiments, and made no digressions; and what was the result? The “foolishness of preaching,” unadorned by the wisdom of the philosopher, or the eloquence of the orator, but accompanied by a power they could neither understand nor resist, as it fell on the ears of his hearers, produced an effect so marvelous that the beauty of their temples and their statues—in spite of the fascinations which mythology was calculated to exert on the inhabitants of that city of refined tastes and vicious habits—lost all attraction, and multitudes, to whom the cross must have been otherwise repulsive, actually embraced with ecstasy “Christ crucified” as the Saviour of their souls, and, like their Thessalonian fellow-pagans, “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.”

But let me inquire has the message of redeeming love lost its efficacy now? Is not the gospel still the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth? It is. That there is life in a look at the crucified One is as true as ever it was. Christ held up to sinful man, polished or rude, civilized or savage, is the salvation of God at, this moment, like bread to the hungry, or like water to the thirsty, just as much now as then. The provision is made and offered fully and freely. Why not, dear soul, avail thyself of it? How often has it been pressed upon thy acceptance? If not yours, what is the reason? “Ye would not.” Oh, the folly of refusing! But what, beloved reader, does Christ crucified mean? At the very least it means that

CHRIST DIED.

It speaks of His death. You say, We all know that. Yes, you receive it’ as a matter of course, because you have heard it so often. But is it not a wonderful statement, especially when you ask, Who died? It was the Lord of glory who died. Think of the Prince of Life dying! It was by the grace of God He tasted death for every man. There was nothing inherent in His holy, stainless humanity to render death a necessity, like yours or mine. No man could have taken His life from Him, yet He died. He came to die, not to teach men the arts and the sciences, or instruct them in letters, He never would have left heaven for any such purpose, but to die. What man needed was not teaching, but a new life, and for this the Son of Man must be lifted up. This sight once beheld by faith’s transpiercing eye puts all else into the shade. The death of God’s beloved Son, what is there like it? The One who is God’s gift of infinite love to a world of sinners. There is nothing to compare with it. What needs to be apprehended is the fact itself. There is divine power in that stupendous fact. Christ crucified, when heard for the first time; arrests the careless and indifferent, melts the hearts of the weary and heavy laden, and, believed and trusted in, gives rest and forgiveness.

Go forth and tell sinners that Jesus died, and tear drops glisten in eyes unused to weep, souls become stirred to their depths, and countenances beam with a new found joy, according to the simple principle of faith that grasps what is unseen more really than the seen and more surely makes it its own. And what is faith? It is taking God at His word. It is giving Him credit for speaking the truth.

But notice, “Christ crucified” means more, my dear unsaved friend, than that He died, it also means

CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS.

It intimates the manner of His death—the kind of death He died. Scripture, after it has conducted us to the “place that is called Calvary,” declares with inimitable simplicity and force what transpired in these words, “There they crucified him.” It was no ordinary death. Crucifixion was at once the most agonizing and the most ignominious of deaths. The very sting of Cicero’s indictment, in his impassioned oration against the Praetor Verres, was that he had dared to crucify a Roman citizen. And didst Thou, O Blessed Christ, Image of the invisible God, humble Thyself to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? There is nothing like the cross. It stands alone, and in the suffering proper to the cross He was alone. There God was shown to be above sin, perfect love to the sinner, but absolute righteousness against the sin. There Christ was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

While today the cross is being despised as a Jewish barbarity, and considered unfit for this enlightened age, it is ours to take our stand by the side of Paul, and say, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that cross which is to fill eternity with the development of its wonders, and be the song of the redeemed forever. Dear sinner, on your treatment of the cross rest the untold glories of salvation, or the inexpressible miseries of damnation. To draw thee was the Saviour lifted up. Through His cross, forgiveness, peace, and everlasting glory are freely offered, and you are earnestly urged to accept them as the gift of His grace. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Nor is this all, Christ crucified means not only His death, and His death on the cross, but that

CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS.

It was sacrificial death, it was atoning death. It was as the substitute He died. It was the taking of our place in death and judgment on that cross that we might have His place now in life and glory where He is. It was to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself He died. He died for our sink, according to the Scriptures. He bore our sins, “Yes, his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” It was on the cross God dealt with Him about the question of sin. Thick darkness surrounded Him. Out of the darkness came that awful cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” My reader, did you ever stop to think what could be the meaning of such a cry wrung from the lips of God’s beloved Son? Did God not love His Son? Then why has He forsaken Him? Because there was sin on Him, and God had to turn away His face even from His own Son. But had He any sin of His own? No, He “did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.” Whose sin lay on Him when He cried that terrible cry? It was ours—yours and mine, dear reader, for “all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Behold, how completely He took our place and stood in our stead! Martyrs have gone singing to the stake, but Jesus was forsaken in the hour of His death. Why? Because He died there as the bearer of sin, yours, my reader, and mine. Have you made this your own? I have long since, and, believing, I rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Why have not you?

How blessedly and perfectly the atoning work of Christ shines out in the cross! Without the atonement the fact of the crucifixion is a dark, unintelligible, inexplicable enigma connecting nothing, supporting nothing, explaining nothing. With it the cross is the imperishable foundation of all our hopes, the security of all our joys, and the certainty of all our blessing for time and eternity.

“We preach Christ crucified.” The cross was to Him the midnight of sorrow as there He drank that bitter cup to the dregs. To us it is the noontide of love. Never did love display itself as then. What is it that melts hard and frozen hearts? The love that beams from the cross. There is no attraction like it. Nothing so captivating. It is the exhibition of unparalleled love. Think not then, dear sinner, that God can only look upon you to condemn you. He loves you, loves you as you are, and, as its incontrovertible and eternal proof, He spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up to the death for us all. He wants your confidence. Will you refuse it? Remember the Saviour’s tears as He laments, “How often would I have gathered,... and ye would not!”

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