

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Truth leaves its mark: The Truth of the Cross**

I well remember relating to a Christian friend, Mr A., how much I appreciated the help and ministry of a mutual friend Mr B. "I'm not surprised", said Mr A. "Mr B. chews the cud, and he has a cloven hoof." My immediate reaction was, "Poor chap!" "How dreadful!" I thought. I had heard that some people react very well to long term disabilities, but this case seemed a bit too much to bear. The digestive system of a cow, and a hoof instead of a human foot! How inexpressibly terrible! However, knowing Mr A. very well, and how everything he said and did was Bible based, my next thought was, "I guess he's applying something the Bible says. I would be well advised to do some research on the matter before I say something silly."

Sure enough, I was soon able to track down the reference he was applying. In Leviticus 11, we learn that God classified some animals as clean, good for food, and suitable for making ceremonial sacrifices in the worship of God. Others were declared to be unclean, unsuitable for such purposes. Those beasts which were considered clean, were those which ruminated; they chewed the cud repeatedly, again and again, as part of their digestive process. Also, they had cloven hooves. Their hoof marks on the ground showed a definite split, or cleavage, every step that they took.

The application for the Christian is very clear. Regular, steady, systematic, daily study of the scriptures has a very definite, unmistakable effect on the lives that we live. Note that both features were necessary. It was not good enough to be a ruminant, if there wasn't also the cloven hoof. Similarly, having a cloven hoof without chewing the cud meant that animal was not acceptable. The message is plain. The figure of chewing the cud is suggestive of the way in which we are to meditate on the word of God constantly, consistently, on a regular basis, not only reading it, but chewing it, turning it over in our minds again and again till we really understand what it is saying to us. But there must also be the outward evidence that it has produced a suitable answer in our lives, affecting the way we live towards God, in ourselves and in our relationships with others. This is achieved by being obedient to what we understand the scriptures clearly say. Both features are necessary. The study of scripture and living a consistent life that pleases God. This encourages other people to notice that our lives are changed for the better because of the effect of the word of God upon us. Study without godly living is not enough. Good living unless it is the result of the word of God being applied in our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit, will not last.

The truth of God, properly assimilated, does indeed have a decided, positive, practical effect on the believer's life. It is absolutely fundamental that if the truth we seek to minister to others does not first of all make its mark on you and me, ourselves, there is little likelihood that it will affect anyone else to whom we present it. Today, we are going to think about the practical effect of meditating on a major, primary truth of Christianity, revealed in scripture. The truth of the Cross, the Cross of Calvary, where Jesus our Lord was crucified!

The Bible itself is its own best advocate. So it is to the scriptures that we shall turn to regulate our thoughts about the effect on the Christian's life of the Truth of the Cross. That is, the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by crucifixion! This truth is so important that it has been written into the Bible, the word of God, from the earliest pages, right through to the last.

In Luke 24:25 to 27, we read that, after His resurrection, it was necessary for the Lord Jesus to say to some of His disciples, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself."

When the Lord Jesus lived here on earth, He stated that the Cross would be proven to be the crisis point in the history of the world. Looking forward to it, He said, "Now is the crisis of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31).

This was demonstrated in the fact that as the moment drew closer to that inevitable crisis, all the various elements of the world came together in opposition to Him. These included:

1. Pilate representing the Political world.
2. Herod representing the Social world.
3. Chief Priests and Rulers representing the Ecclesiastical world.
4. Pharisees and Sadducees representing the Theological world.
5. Soldiers representing of the Military world
6. and also a Multitude of the Common People.
7. Lastly, Judas the Traitor, one of His own disciples.

Confirmation of this is easily established by reading the four Gospels, Matthew 26-27, Mark 14-15, Luke 22-23 and John 18-19. When we come to the teaching Epistles of the New Testament the issues are made plain beyond doubt. In particular, we shall need to look at what we read about the Cross of Christ in the Epistle to the Galatians.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia because some dreadful things were being said there. They had already received and believed the pure Gospel of the grace of God. They had believed that in themselves they were sinners, without any remedy to offer to a Holy God. They had believed that 'Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that He was raised the third day, according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). They had been happy to know that because they believed that Christ had died for them and risen again, their sins were all forgiven, and they were ready for heaven while living on earth.

Sadly, some so-called teachers had been pressing on them the theory, unknown to scripture, that while faith in the work of Jesus upon the cross was essential, for full, complete salvation it was also necessary for each believer to supplement the work of Christ by what they themselves could do to please God. Certainly, it is incumbent on each believer to live a godly life. No one would dispute that. However, scripture makes it very plain that this is not to earn salvation. That could never be. Good living, and good deeds, are to demonstrate that salvation has indeed been received by faith in Christ alone. Good works are the result of salvation, not the means of procuring it. If that terrible Galatian theory were true, it would mean that the work of Christ on the Cross was not sufficient in itself to satisfy the claims of God upon us. Dreadful thought! The very idea that we could possibly add, by anything we could do, to the value to God of the work of Christ upon the cross, is totally abhorrent to any Christian who is at all well versed in scripture. This error was so serious that the Apostle Paul used the strongest possible language in his letter to them. He uses the word curse seven times, crucified four times, the word cross itself three times, and stigmata once.

Why this emphasis on the significance of the Cross of Christ? Jews had been brought up for over a thousand years on the understanding that the way to receive blessing from God was to keep His commandments, the detailed commandments of the Law of Moses. They had never understood that the Law was merely a moral mirror. It could tell them how dirty their faces were, but it could never make them clean. The nation of Israel was God's way of demonstrating to the whole world that 'all have sinned, and come very far short of God's absolute standards of behaviour'. Because of that, all that the Law could do was to condemn them. As the old poem says:

*Run, John, run, the Law demands,  
But gives me neither feet nor hands.  
Grace brings me to better things,  
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.*

The Law of Moses was never offered to Gentiles anyway. And here were the Gentile Galatians getting bogged down with something that never applied to them in the first place. Paul was understandably and rightly furious, and used the strongest language possible in setting the matter right. In doing so, he expounds the teaching of the Cross, and its proper effect upon those who believe it.

John 19:17-18 record the significance of Golgotha, where they crucified Him. Golgotha means the place of the skull. This in itself is highly suggestive that it was a place where death and corruption were known. Consider the Lord Jesus wending His way to the hill of Calvary, Golgotha, carrying His own cross. He had been wrongly sentenced to be crucified after a false so-called trial by wicked men. There could be no doubt at all that His personal life on earth was finished. The cross He was obliged to carry was itself the evidence that His history on earth was being brought to a precipitate end. The onlookers would be in doubt at all that this man was finished as far as his personal life on earth was concerned.

Death by crucifixion had always been an extremely cruel, wicked, painful, drawn-out form of execution. In the Roman Empire, whose laws applied to the Jews when the Lord Jesus lived upon earth, it was reserved for those of the lowest social orders, and for the most despicable of crimes. It was a most shameful death, a total disgrace, and in Jewish terms, death under a curse. Crucifixion was certainly a most shameful end to the history of a life upon earth.

There are two dramatically relevant verses in Galatians. Both merit our sober consideration.

In 2:20, the Apostle Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

What does Paul mean? He had already written to the Christians at Rome telling them, 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for every one who believes' (Romans 10:4). That is, the law of Moses was no longer available as a way even to attempt to please God. The Law applied to the old Saul of Tarsus, who before conversion to Christ had been a very strict Jew. But that old life had been brought to an end before God in the Cross of Christ, in the death of Christ on his behalf. So, in Romans 10:4, he says that the cross of Christ is the end of the Law as a way of approach to God. Here in Galatians 2:20 he says, "The Cross of Christ is the end of me". There was no doubt that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross His personal history on earth was finished, brought to a precipitate end at the cross of Calvary. Likewise, and because of that, says Paul, the name by which he became known after being brought to Christ, "My history as an unforgiven sinner is finished before God at the Cross. I have been condemned to death. The sentence has been carried out, not on me personally, but on my substitute, the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. The old I, the old me, is gone, and gone forever in God's eyes. However, I am still me, I am the same person. The old I has gone forever, gone in the cross of Christ. But, says Paul, there is a new I, with a new God-given nature, which has the capacity to please God in the new life I now live, living not for me but for God, because Christ lives in me. How? This new life is a life of faith, faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. What a marvel, says Paul. My old life was brought to an end because Christ died for me on the Cross. Now Christ, Who is now alive in heaven, can still be seen on earth, this time in me, because He liveth in me."

Now let us consider also that other deeply significant verse in 6:14. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." He is referring to his present position and lifestyle. Now, there are some things Paul could only say for himself. They give his intensely personal assessment of his own position before God, and the practical implications of this for him as an individual. Galatians 6:14 is really the grand climax of the Epistle. It is not an assessment one can make for another. What is Paul saying? Briefly, this!

The world in which I live made it very plain that they wanted nothing to do with the Son of God. They cast Him out of their world by giving Him a most shameful death. By wicked hands, they crucified and slew Him (Acts 2:23). Paul's conclusion is this. If that is the expression of their opinion of my Saviour, who died for my sins, and Whom I love so dearly, I want as little as possible to do with them. I will meet my commitments and responsibilities. I will pay my bills, and do all I can to help others as the Lord enables me. I will certainly preach the gospel of the love of God, shown at Calvary. But, as far as throwing my lot in with them, "No, thanks!" If that is what they think of my Saviour, and it certainly is, I want as little as possible to do with them. Graphically, he says, the world is crucified to me. I am as finished with it as much as they were finished with Him when they crucified Him at Calvary. Paul says, that is the real teaching of the Cross to me. He goes on. I realise, he says, if that is my attitude to the world that crucified my Saviour, it won't be long before they say to me, "Fair enough, if you want as little as possible to do with us, we want nothing to do with you either. If you are finished with us, that's quite alright with us. We are quite happy to be finished with you." In the graphic words Paul uses, 'The world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.' As the Lord, said, the cross is the crisis point. All things are judged relative to our estimation of the significance of the Cross of Christ. It is the crucial issue. For the committed Christian, it is the teaching of the Cross that brings about this crisis. Surely, the teaching of the cross makes and leaves its mark.

The Lord Himself summed up the importance of the issue when He said, on more than one occasion, "Come, take up the cross, and follow Me". "Apply the truth of the Cross to yourself, learn the significance of what it tells you about the world which crucified Me, and follow Me."

Let us, like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, receive the word with all readiness of mind, and search the scriptures daily, to establish that these things are so. As we meditate on the scriptures, particularly those concerning the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and put them into practice, the better we shall be able to serve our Lord and Master, the more devoted we shall be to Him, and the cleaner and more useful our lives will be.

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