

## Calvary-The Place Called a Skull

By  
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*“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him” (Luke 1:28).*

[Editor’s note: Sermon preached at Holmes Theological Seminary in 1958.]

There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall  
Where the dear lord was crucified, who died to save us all.

This is a verse of a favorite hymn that gives the impression of Calvary as a beautiful garden, a green hill. Calvary was not like that. The hymn is a pleasant song and the music is sweet. But Calvary was not beautiful, sentimental, or sweet.

We get the word Calvary from the Latin translation of the Greek word Golgotha, which means the place of a skull. Some witnesses say it was a pile of barren rocks bleached white by rain and sun that had the appearance of a skull. What with all the artists brushes and the poets genius in trying to make Calvary a thing of beauty, the fact still remains that it was a place of a skull, a place of pain, agony, sweat, blood, and horrible death. An old preacher from Illinois gave a true picture of Calvary when he wrote:

On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame.  
And I love that old cross, where the dearest and best,  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

How hard men have tried to take this element out of the cross and out of our holy religion! They have substituted a rose for the bread and wine at the Lord’s Table. They have substituted the word reformation for regeneration, the pledge card for repentance, and baptism for conversion. But after two thousand years, Calvary remains a place of

pain, suffering, shame, and death. The cross is still the very heart of our holy religion and if men follow Christ, they must take up their cross daily.

Will you pitch your mental tent with me for awhile around that gory, ghastly, painful place called a skull? And like Luke tells us, may we observe: "Sitting down, they watched him there." I think that it is well that we review the scenes of Calvary lest we forget. May we ever sing the song:

I remember how my Savior died for me  
On the cruel cross of dark Mt. Calvary.  
I remember how he cried,  
How he bowed his head and died.  
I remember dark Calvary.

The combined evidence of the historians' record gives us a good picture of what those people saw who sat down in the shadow of the cross:

- At about 9:00 in the morning, they nailed him to the cross and for six hours, he hung there in the hot oriental sun.
- The taunting cries of the mob rose and fell.
- They heard the Savior's gracious words on seven different occasions.
- The sun went into total eclipse at noon.
- The blood coagulated on his brow, face, back, hands, and feet.
- The black flies, peculiar to that area, swarmed around him and bit at the wounds of the Lord.
- The stench and smell of human blood drove the crowd further back.
- Then he died.
- The veil of the temple was rent in two; the earth trembled.
- The crowd left, but two men lingered there to take down the body for burial.

Why all this? Was it necessary? Yes! This was the drama of the ages; God at work, talking a language that humanity could understand. This was necessary that the scripture might be fulfilled: “And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.”

From this gory spectacle of blood, carnage, and death, we have been give revelation, redemption, and reconciliation.

### I. Revelation

For long ages past, men longed and sought for the answer to questions such as “Who is God?” and “What is he like?” Is he like Moses or Job or Paul? Men looked at the creation and got some idea of God. They saw the power of wind, rain, and flood. They questioned, “Why would God use his power to destroy? Why does he send the tornado or the flood?” But then they looked at the sunset, stars, flowers, rainbows, and placid lakes and at the multi-colored landscape in spring and said, “God must be an artist; the lover of the beautiful.”

Men created different representations of the gods, often looking at nature for inspiration. The Egyptians had many gods, but the cow was venerated as holy. There was Dagon, the Philistine god or the fish god, represented as half fish, half man. Diana of the Ephesians was represented by the moon and Apollo her sister by the sun. Some were manlike and others were monsters.

Out of that long night of ignorance and rebellion, Jesus came into the world and stood on the Horn of Hatten crying out, “The Father and I are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” Jesus said to his audience, if you would know who God is and what he is like, come to me.

See him with little children on his knee.

See him at the wedding feast in Galilee.

See him feeding the five thousand.

See him forgiving the sinner.

See him weeping at Lazarus' tomb.

See him walking on the angry sea.

See him praying for his enemies.

See him forgive a dying thief.

Jesus revealed the moral and spiritual nature of God so that we could all understand. On the cross he pulled back the curtain and let the world look at the heart of God. The veil was torn. The way was opened. The keynote of that hour was the revelation of God to man. Up until that time, there was a holy secrecy about the Holy of Holies and the high priest could go behind the veil only once each year to make atonement for the sins of the people. But on this day, the veil was torn asunder. Here, God revealed himself. No longer would there be secrecy and privileged worship by the few, but all men may now come boldly to a rich throne of grace.

Jesus stripped himself of his princely dignity and hanged on the cross like a criminal, his humanity and his divinity bared to a wicked world. This is God, loving you so much that he died, revealing the great love of God and redemption by his blood.

## II. Redemption

What does redemption mean? To purchase out of slavery for a price. We were slaves sold under sin. In bondage! But we have a kinsman redeemer who went into the slave market and bought us. He didn't pay with silver and gold, but with his precious blood.

Some say we don't need to be redeemed. That sin is only indiscretion or the absence of good. Some say just forget about it; instead, do good works and live. But only by the cross are we redeemed. Man is a moral being. He has a conscience and nothing can erase the stain from a guilty conscience but the blood of that sinless victim of Calvary. The nature of sin and the holiness of God demanded that a representative offer himself without spot or blemish to God. This alone could satisfy divine justice and set sinful man free. Jesus was that representative, a holy man.

All men from righteous Abel to those gathered around the cross on Golgotha were saved by the cross. All men on this side of Calvary are saved by the cross. The cross is the symbol of redemption. Its shadow fell over Abel's holy sacrifice and over Abraham's altar on Mt. Moriah. It fell across the doors in Egypt and across the serpent raised on the pole in the wilderness. Why? That men might be redeemed and reconciled to God.

### III. Reconciliation

Sin has estranged man from God. Adam and Eve went out of the garden and at the gate God placed a flaming sword. Calvary took down that sword and hung there the gates of peace. Jesus lifted up his voice and proclaimed, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

The man on that cross reached up to the very throne of God with one hand and took hold of the hand of God. Then, he reached with the other hand to the lowest depths of sin and took hold of the hand of vile humanity and drew a lost world and an offended God together across the broken body of Jesus, reconciling the world to God.

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.

In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering over the wrecks of time.  
All the sacred lights of story  
Gathering round its head sublime.