

The Naked Splendour of the Cross

by Harold Horton

This sermon by Harold Horton emphasizes the importance of focusing solely on the cross of Christ without any additional attractions or embellishments. It highlights the raw, unadorned truth of the cross as the central message of salvation, condemning any attempts to dilute its power with worldly distractions. The sermon warns against imitating the failures of ancient disobedience and calls for a return to the simplicity and glory of the message of the cross, devoid of sentimentality or human additions.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16:21, Exodus 34:13, Malachi 1:10, Matthew 21:12, Isaiah 35:5, Ezekiel 43:11, Deuteronomy 17:1, 1 John 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "The Centrality of the Cross", "Simplicity of Salvation"

Description

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Transcript

On this side we have Harold Horton's celebrated message entitled The Naked Splendor of the Cross first delivered at the Assemblies of God General Conference in 1943 and even more relevant now than it was then. The Naked Splendor of the Cross by Harold Horton. Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the Lord thy God says Deuteronomy 16.

The naked splendor of the cross, no groves around the altar, no decorations. The cross is represented as everybody knows by the ancient altars of Israel. The heathen had their altars too, no doubt corrupted from the true altar.

The modernist has it the other way about. He says that our gospel of the blood of the cross is inspired by pagan blood sacrifices and altars. It is all the other way around.

Pagan sacrifices are corruptions either conscious or unconscious of the authentic sacrifices of the scripture. Because they did not like to look at the ugly spectacle of the blood-soaked altars they planted trees round about them to lessen the severity to hide the crudity by flowering trees and fragrant shrubs. Now we are ever to remember that the cross is an awful thing.

It is not an entertaining spectacle. It is a bloody horror whether you like it or not. It is inartistic, dreadful, repulsive.

We can agree with the modernist in all these expressions. The cross is vulgar indeed. Campbell Morgan has said there are people who look upon the cross of Christ as vulgar.

We agree he says. It is the most vulgar object in the whole of the world's history. But whose is the vulgarity he asks? Not that of the sweet son of God who gave his blood to wash away our sin.

It is the vulgarity of those who nailed him there. Who blasphemously deny his necessity. The vulgarity of those who still by bible criticism make light of sin.

Because God's altar in ancient days was an awful and repulsive thing men planted groves of trees around it. No groves God commands. No groves.

Sacrifice is awful. We are to present to the world and to ourselves the naked splendor the blood-stained glory of the cross. There must be no object of additional appeal beside the cross.

The cross itself must be the only attraction. It is wrong to arrange any kind of bait to entice people into our services. The Holy Ghost will honor faith and the simple proclamation of the naked truth that Jesus saves through the blood of the cross.

In exodus 34 God issued his command to destroy any groves. You shall cut down their groves it says. In our text we have God's command not to plant groves in imitation of the pagan embellished altars.

Thou shalt not plant thee a grove it says. Well in Deuteronomy we get Moses's prophecy of the coming failure and disobedience of God's people. For I know he says that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you.

And evil will befall you in the latter days because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger through the works of your hands. Then we get the record so early as in the book of Judges of their miserable disobedience and failure. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and forget the Lord their God and so on serve Baal and the groves.

In God's ancient if God's ancient people failed we can fail too. It is more than possible for us to imitate them. They soon lost the vision and corrupted the pattern.

I wonder if we are tempted less than half a century after this latter day outpouring of the Holy Ghost to lose the simplicity and glory of Pentecost. There must be no groves, no beautifying, no easing of the severity. We must proclaim in absolute truthfulness what God has given us.

The nearer we get to this splendid glory of the naked cross the more the glory of the Lord surrounds us. We are happy to preach it. The people are gripped as they hear it and sinners are moved by the simplicity of this unadorned gospel.

No natural or earthly beauty must ease the severity or the tragedy of innocent death. Rosalia shows the people still corrupting their holy altars. They sacrifice it says under oaks and poplars and elms because the shadow thereof is good.

Ah that's it. The shadow is good. The shadow is good.

Light is converting. Making sinners feel easy at the cross. Modifying the simple declaration of the full truth of the gospel.

Reducing the severity of the word to make sanctification and responsibility lighter. All this is abhorrent to God. God wants not shadow but light.

The flaming light of naked truth to shine on the glorious cross and on the foulness of the sinner. No bruise. The naked splendor of the cross.

Evil king Ahaz saw an elaborate altar at Damascus. He coveted such a beautiful and decorated altar. He gave instructions to the wicked priest to have such an altar made to remove the blessed blood-stained altar from the east of the temple.

The position God designed for it and to put this miserable Damascus altar in its place. In the place of blood-stained altar. And we read he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offerings and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar.

That altar. He believed in blood sacrifice. He could do no other.

He knew that blood shedding was the only way of remission. His name was associated with the truth that salvation is possible only through the sacrifice of the innocent. But the blood of sacrifice avails nothing if it is not sprinkled in accordance with the pattern.

It is as we walk in the light that we have fellowship one with another. And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Ahaz was deliberately walking in the dark and he knew it.

The blood did not avail him there. He said on the brazen altar that is God's holy altar shall be for me to inquire by. He did not remove the altar altogether.

He dared not. He put the altar of God, Marthus, in the second place. Beware how we today relegate the cross to a secondary place.

Planting attractive introductions to its severity. We cannot use the cross as a kind of talisman, a lucky charm. Some wear a crucifix of gold or ebony.

There is no security in such so-called holy charms. Yet that is what Ahaz and Uriah made of the blood-stained altar. There must be no amusements to entertain and charm people.

The cross is not a spectacle for entertainment. It is a lonely glory that is in itself from a splendid attraction. The people of the Lord must foregather to the blood-stained cross, that only.

That which came nearest the cross at Calvary was sin. Sin, thieves. Only Jesus and sin was there.

Murder, betrayal, mocking rejection, unbelief. And that is the position today. There is nothing in this world but sin and Jesus.

Mark that. Thank God there is Christ. Nothing beside Jesus and sin.

Sin everywhere. It is in Christ, not in ourselves, we hope. There is enough weight of sin upon you and me still to carry us to a lost eternity.

But thank God Christ died for sin. Hallelujah. There were things that seemed to indicate a halfway house between sin and the Savior.

Thank God for the sweet memories of good men like Josiah. They have gone before us, leaving a trail of glory behind them. Thank God for godly men who uplift the banner of the cross with no device save spattered blood.

Josiah destroyed all the ungodly adjuncts, both foul and fair, to worship. He broke down the houses of the sodomites that were by the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove. What evil! Unspeakable foulness follows in the wake of small departures from the pattern.

Sodomites were a sanctuary unthinkable. Every conceivable vileness develops from small departures from the true pattern. We dare not depart one shade from the pattern or so it will be again.

Josiah not only destroyed the foul adjuncts, but the fair ones also. The things which seemed so innocent, attractive, helpful, charming. The places where the women wove hangings and tapestries for the groves.

They might have asked well what harm in beautiful tapestries where the honey of sweet sentiment and outer embellishment. There must be no effeminate sentiment influencing our services and he break in pieces their images and cut down their groves and filled their places with the bones of men. He relegated the whole evil practice to death to its like.

All ungodly adjuncts must follow in its wake. Evil unto evil. Death unto death.

There must be no additions of any sort to aid the work of the cross. The best of the world added to the cross of Christ. How is it? No groves.

No gardens. What is wrong with groves and gardens? They may be beautiful and in their place desirable. They must never be associated with the cross.

The best of earth is no degree of heaven. It cannot lift us one inch above the earth. Flowers, poetry, oratory, music are beautiful but they cannot lift the soul above the earth to which they belong.

Jesus needs and brooks no other person or force uplift at his side to draw all men unto him and bless them to the full. No hopes of any sort. I will draw all men unto me he says.

Myself. Unto myself. Somebody has said we must preach a person.

Not a policy nor a principle but a person. Not a movement but a master. Not a creed but the Christ.

Not a system but a savior. And I add we must consider not what will draw but who will draw. I will draw says Jesus unto me.

Not unto us. Not a building. Not unto a movement.

Not unto an assembly but unto me. Christ may easily draw unto himself by drawing away from us our assembly and our movement. And so we know that we are not proceeding altogether in accordance with the pattern.

Sacrifice and blood only in unaided splendor. Salvation is God's work unaided. He is the center and circumference.

Who are we that we can add one iota to God's marvelous plan of salvation by sacrifice. You remember that the altar which was erected after Sinai was built of earth. Only earth only.

If stone was used it must not be human stone or it would be polluted. Any human touch pollutes the cross. Take heed of that.

At the Passover it was blood on all blood. Salvation nothing else. Even the agent of sprinkling was God's handiwork.

Hyssop not brushes or wisps of human fabrication. There must be no addition of the human to the plan of God. We are to learn that the cross only saves, attracts and sanctifies.

Not the cross and adjuncts, music, recreation, social work, ritual, entertainment. The cross must be all. No grows.

There must be no imitations. No shams. Neither shalt thou set up any image which the Lord thy God hateth.

We do not set up actual images in Pentecost today. They may nevertheless represent some modern folly or profanity. Christ is not only the only savior but his way is the only way of salvation.

We shall destroy their altars, break down their images and cut down their groves. All enemy work. For thou shalt worship no other God.

For the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God. No substitutes. God is jealous.

Attention must be directed to Christ only. No modern sidetracks. No substitutes for salvation or sanctification.

We must exclude things that in themselves seem harmless and unprofitable. Let us present only the cross of Calvary spattered with the holy blood of Christ. Heaven's holy divine cross under which we delight to worship.

Our glory only in the cross we sing. Our only hope the crucified. No reservations.

No reductions of the perfect standard. No halfway measures. Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God any bullock or sheep wherein is blemish or any ill-favoredness.

For that is an abomination unto the Lord thy God says Deuteronomy. Christ is the perfect sacrifice. Perfection is the least that God will accept.

Nothing else. Nothing less. No sentiment.

No sentiment. And this you have done again covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying out in so much that he regardeth not the offering anymore says Malachi. No sentimentality.

Calvary is not sloppiness. It is cold logic and scorching realism. There must be no honey in the offerings remember.

Honey is too pleasant to the natural to be considered as a sacrifice. That which is sweet to us is not sacrifice. It is indulgence.

Sacrificing the things we do not like is indulgence. We must sacrifice the things we indulge in. When the women were weeping following the cross Jesus said weep for yourselves not for the sufferings of Christ.

Let them weep for themselves. That their sins and others were occasioning such a sacrifice. Brightness is not blessing.

Custo is not unction. The music of hearts in tune is what God approves. Singing in the spirit is true music.

Even voiceless sinners can join in there. Let us not be thrilled with music but with Jesus. We must without sentiment destroy every trace of sentiment, worldliness, ritual, decoration, corruption, imitation, furnishing up the cross.

Beware outside carnal helps. Mark well it says the entering in of the house. Show them the comings in thereof says Ezekiel.

It is not only important what we preach when we have got the people into the sanctuary. It is important how we get them there. There must be no appeal to the taste for entertainment.

If the cross does not bring them in they are better outside. Mark well the entering in of the house. Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the Lord thy God.

The nine supernatural gifts of the spirit are the decorations designed by God to enhance the glory of the cross. They are the only decorations permissible. But these are deliberately cut down instead of the natural overshadowing groves because they do not flatter sinners or ingratiate backsliders or saints.

The Lord help us to promote the right sort of groves, supernatural signs accompanying the message of the cross. Hallelujah. How to make our meetings interesting was a topic of discussion among certain of our brethren on one occasion.

I confess when I heard of it I suffered a kind of physical nausea. Insult to heaven. Shameful defeatism.

How to make the cross interesting. How to make the blood of the lamb interesting. How to make fire interesting.

Power interesting. The upper womb interesting. The Holy Ghost interesting.

The cross is dangerous. It will acquit or sentence you. The blood is mighty.

It will cleanse or stain you. Fire is terrible. It will inflame or scorch you.

Risen power is all hallowed. It will resurrect or slay you. The upper womb will drench or drown.

Charm or terrify you. The Holy Ghost will satiate or scatter you. Making meetings interesting is touching the holy ark of God.

No groves, no groves, no entertainments, musical events, stunts, novelties, blood and fire only on the altar. Besides there is nobody in Pentecost clever enough to make meetings interesting. But Christ is.

Let him. For Christ's sake. I can show you dear friends how to make meetings interesting.

They tried to do so by groves in Christ's name. They made a shambles of the temple court. Introducing the affairs, the traffic of the world.

They made a bazaar of the sanctuary. Bringing in oxen, sheep, money, bartering, doves. They added to their sin by pretending a religious complexion in these carnal affairs.

In Matthew 21 we read solemnly and Jesus went into the temple of God and listen cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple and overthrew the tables of the money changers and the seats of them that sold doves. And there's nothing wrong with a bazaar but let it be held in the marketplace not in a temple but on in bulls and goats. Were they not specified as in the Levitical offerings? Had they not introduced them as a as a convenience to the worshippers to make their sacrifice easier, less inconvenient? What harm in doves? Doves, innocent, simple types of guilelessness, miserable queen religious adjuncts to worship.

As such Jesus put them all out. Then when the last bull had gone bellowing out of the outer court, the last sheep bleating, the last dove flapping its wings. When the doves are gone we read these solemn words, these glorious words and the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them.

That is the way to make meetings interesting, exciting. Doves are miracles. You cannot have both, choose.

When we put the axe to the root of every shadowing grove, every carnal help, we shall once more see the lost saved, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the lame leaping as the heart, the sick healed, the dead raised. Is there not brethren a shameful lack of the supernatural in our meetings today? Is there not? The Lord dispose our hearts to cut down the abominable hindering groves and reveal once more the naked glory of the cross. Revival will come out that way.

There is a mighty Pentecostal outpouring around the corner. Listen. It is coming.

It is practically here. Now there are two companies amongst us at present, the half-hearted and the whole-hearted. Where are you? The whole-hearted will be in it.

The revival. The half-hearted, though they may have been praying for it for years, will be out of it. Out of it.

God help us to hasten the day, every one of us, by presenting once more the gospel with our groves showing only, only the naked splendor of the cross of Christ. For Christ's sake we pray. Amen and Amen.

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