

The Observers of the Cross

by Peter Brandon

The cross is still relevant today because Jesus is alive and the preaching of the cross has power to save people.

Duration: 48:07

Scripture: Matthew 27:33

Topics: "The Cross", "Responses to Christ"

Description

Peter Brandon speaks on 'The Observers of the Cross,' emphasizing the various responses to Jesus' crucifixion. He highlights the indifference of the soldiers, the mockery of the passersby, the nervousness of the women, and the adoration of Mary, illustrating how these reactions mirror modern attitudes towards the cross. Brandon asserts that the cross remains relevant today because of Christ's resurrection, which offers hope and salvation. He urges listeners to confront their own responses to the cross, encouraging them to move from indifference or mockery to a place of adoration and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice.

Transcript

Tonight I want to speak about the observers of the cross. And again, trust that this might be a blessing to everyone that's present. The reading is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 27, and we shall commence reading at verse 33.

And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say a place of a skull, they gave him vinegared drink mingled with gall, and when he hath tasted thereof he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

And sitting down they watched him there, and set up over his head his accusation written, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself.

If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him with the scribes and elders said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him. For he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, I am the Son of God. And he said, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood there when they heard that said, This man calleth for Elijah.

And straightway one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let thee, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. Jesus when he had cried again with a loud voice yielded up the ghost.

And behold the veil of the temple was run in twain from the top to the bottom. And the earth did quake and the rocks rent. And the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.

Now when the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus saw the earthquake and those things that were done they feared greatly saying, Truly this was the Son of God. And many women were there beholding afar off which followed Jesus from Galilee ministering unto him. Among which was Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of Zebedee's children.

And the Lord will bless that precious section of his word. A question was once put to me that caused some alarm and I believe it was a man who was perfectly sincere. And he said something like this, How can you expect people to believe in the cross? It's two thousand years old and how can an event that's two thousand years old have any bearing upon modern people? And I could see that that man was deeply disturbed because of the historicity of the cross.

My dear friends may I say this as clearly as I can. If Jesus be dead the cross has no relevance. Can I repeat that because I believe it's very important.

If Jesus Christ be dead the cross has no relevance. But you see the Bible explains very carefully that he did die, he was buried but on the third day supernaturally by the power of God he was raised from the dead. And we have explained that the resurrection isn't a fairy story but we have textual evidence, historical evidence, critical evidence, legal evidence and experimental evidence.

In fact Lord Denning has recently said there's more historical evidence for the resurrection than for the battle of Waterloo. Think of that. So because the Lord Jesus, the son of God who hung on that Roman gibbet has been raised from the dead then the cross has relevance for modern people.

Because the one who died there is very much alive. In fact it's so very much alive we believe that very shortly he's going to come again. And the second coming of Christ is the only secure hope for this poor lost world.

There is one thing I must say tonight about the cross and that is if you forget everything that I say please remember this one thing. The central fact of the cross is this that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. John the Baptist put the whole meaning of the Lord's coming in a very beautiful but simple way and he said behold the Lamb of God which bareth away the sin of the world.

And therefore the main point about the cross is that which happened from the sixth to the ninth hour when the Lord Jesus bare his back and allowed God to make him the great mighty infinite massive sin bearer.

And at that moment he exhausted in his own body the whole matter of the wrath of God and when that work was complete he was able to say with mighty victory it is finished. And the scripture says once in the end of the age hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Now that is the very hub of Calvary's message. But it is a very strange thing that the observers of the cross although of course they are historic and different men are the same kind of people that hear the cross when it is preached in a modern day. For instance the way in which the cross comes to us is not by mere intellectual revelation it doesn't come to us through drama it doesn't come to us through dreams it doesn't come to us through mystical manifestations.

The cross comes to us through the medium of preaching. God has put upon preaching a tremendous amount of importance. And so the apostle put it in a very beautiful way when he says the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness but unto us which are saved it is the power of God unto salvation.

And therefore there comes a time when God raises up a preacher and he puts the message on his heart and he preaches the cross and the cross comes to us in great power. Now let me explain that. When the Lord Jesus died upon the cross as far as we know there were only two converts.

One was the penitent malefactor and the other was the Roman centurion. When the apostle Peter preached the cross on the day of Pentecost three thousand people were converted. Again a few days later he preached the cross again and five thousand men were converted.

Not long after that Philip went down to Samaria and he preached the cross and the whole city believed. And then the apostle Peter went into the large household of Cornelius and preached the same cross and the whole family believed. And ever since then God has been raising up men and they have preached the cross.

The apostle Paul preached the cross to the Europeans and thousands trusted Christ. Then men like Martin Luther have preached the cross in the middle ages and thousands and millions were saved through the preaching of the cross. And all the way down through the ages God has raised up these men who preach the cross and thousands are being saved.

And isn't it remarkable? Here in this simple hall in the heart of Sydney God raises up a simple cockney preacher from London and here you are listening again to the preaching of the cross and it has never lost its power. Empires have fallen and have been wrecked and have vanished away but the preaching of the cross is as powerful today as when the apostles preached the message for the first time. Now who were these people that surrounded the cross? First of all there were the soldiers that sat down indifferently.

Secondly there were the religious people that passed by revilingly. Thirdly there were some women that stood afar off nervously. And then lastly there was the mother of Jesus that stood and watched at the cross adoringly.

And they will be our four simple points tonight. The soldiers that sat down indifferently. They had taken the Lord Jesus and if I may use crude language they had used that lovely face as a punch bag.

There would be approximately thirty nine of them and one by one all weighing over fourteen and a half stone would step forward and heap upon him their heaviest blow until his face was marred more than any man's. Think of that. Secondly he was not only buffeted by these men but he was scourged.

That was a leather whip with cruel pieces of lead studded in the leather and each man would step forward and thrash his back until it was like a ploughed field. Then they would take the Lord Jesus and use him as the object of mockery. They would strip off his clothing and put a purple garment on him and then again they would actually spit into his face.

In fact the very wounds that they had made became the objects of their bile spittle. Think of that. And then just as a farmer would pluck a chicken they actually plucked the very beard from his chin.

And then they took this heavy crown of thorns and plunged it on his head and they put a reed in his hand and mocked him and said hail king of the Jews and they made him the object of their sport. But he was dignified and silent. There wasn't one word of rebuke.

Then they took him with his cross making another man its bearer and when they came to the brow of a hill they threw him to the ground, laid him cruelly on the cross and they now hammered nails into his hand and a spike into his feet and they lifted up the cross and they let it drop into its socket and then they gambled with his gun. Not one word of rebuke. Blasphemy.

Not one word of rebuke ever came from the lips of the Lord Jesus. There was that majestic silence. If only those soldiers had lifted up their eyes like their leader did the centurion and watched carefully they would have been entirely different.

You see these men were more concerned with his garments than a souvenir of the gun. They were more concerned with gambling and sport and all they were doing was watching the ground. If only they had elevated their eyes and looked at that majestic quietness and that glorious manhood hanging on that cross what a difference.

Dear friends I believe this that if those men had put aside the garment and threw aside the dice and started to look at that silent sufferer revelation would have been given to them. They would have seen that that man was perfect. They would probably have seen that that man was the son of God.

They probably would have seen that that man was the mighty creator the sustainer of the earth. But you see they were so blinded by the dice and they were so blinded by the raiment that they had no vision. Isn't that a picture of the world? You see the modern man is so materialistic he doesn't even think what Easter is about.

Do you know I believe this if the average person took the bible especially the four gospels and just on Thursday before Good Friday they would read through that very carefully with an honest heart there would be a transformation. But you see dear friends they have been blinded by the material blinded by sportive motives and therefore they see nothing. How true is the scripture is it nothing to all you that pass by blinded by materialism.

And yet I want you to think of the brutality when they had buffeted the face of the Lord until it was beyond recognition. When they had scourged him so that his back was like a ploughed field. How can I say this? When they had crucified those healing hands and feet.

When they had squirted their vulgarity upon that lovely face. He turned round and he prayed a prayer for them saying, Father forgive them they know not what they do. And it was like water on a ducks back.

They couldn't care less. They were as hard as iron and as brittle as steel. And dear friends I want to say this that was the unkindest cut of all.

That hurt the Lord more than anything their complete indifference. You say how do you know? There was a church in Laodicea and they used to gather around the Lord's table and celebrate his death. And when they took the bread and wine heated symbols of his red hot love.

They did it with total indifference. Neither hot nor cold and the almighty God says I cannot stand it. Thou art neither hot nor cold and I am about to spew thee out of my mouth.

Can you see it? He hates indifference. And let me show you now the drama of indifference. I was knocking at the doors in order shop when I first went into the Lord's work.

And I came to a particular door it was a council house and the lady opened the door and I would say she would be about 55. And I could see she was deeply concerned and worried. So after telling her my business about coming to the mission I said you seem very disturbed my dear.

She says I am come in. So I came into the home and it was very impoverished but very clean. And there on the mantelpiece was a picture of a boy in cap and gown.

And I could see by the colours of his gown that he had an Oxford degree. And she said this looking at that boy. You see that lad? Then look at my hands and they were worn and scratched and laboured.

She said I have literally worked myself to death to give him an education. And last year he got his first class honours degree and I went to Oxford to see him receive that degree. And then she burst into tears she said this.

He wouldn't own me. And I went up to him to embrace him. He pushed me away.

And then I was so downcast and broken. I was walking the streets of Oxford and I didn't know what I was doing. And there I saw him coming with four of his colleagues.

And then I said to him Tom. And he completely disowned me and gave me the look of ice. And then she broke down again and she said I'd spent everything on him.

And that's what he thinks of me. The son of God. The eternal creator.

Hung upon a cross of wood because of your sins and for your judgement. Dear friends don't be indifferent. That's a sin that God detests more than any other.

Test your temperature as the cross is being preached tonight. Then there were those who passed by revilingly. They moved out of the east gate.

They went down the slopes of a little hill. They came almost to a magical little brook called Kidron that was full of history. They crossed over a very primitive bridge.

And then they climbed the slopes of Golgotha. Sometimes called Calvary. And as they were climbing the slopes they could see the skulls of crucified men.

They were getting nearer and nearer to the cross. And may I say this. They were getting nearer to the centre of God's universe.

They were getting nearer and nearer to the very heart of God. In the economy of God, may I say this in passing, there's nothing greater than the cross. It's the hub of all God's dealings with us.

And these men were moving toward the cross. And when they came face to face with the cross, I can hardly dear friends tell you what they did. They saw the suffering Lord Jesus.

They heard that great prayer of pathos. Father forgive them. They know not what they do.

And yet they were filled with anger and bitterness. And looking at him they were wagging their heads with heated wrath. And then they threw this penetrating challenge right into his lips.

Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days. If you are the son of God come down from the cross and we will believe you. And they passed by reviling that.

Do you know dear friends I saw a lady do that on I think it was Tuesday afternoon. I was speaking to the ladies and nearly everyone was giving me their complete attention. And then I watched one woman that obviously was very moral and very religious.

And when I came to that point Christ died for our sins and it was our sins that put him there. She frowned. I saw her and she wagged her head.

She hated it. Loathed it. Said it was a stumbling block.

And immediately the meeting was over. She shut out. You see my dear friends she saw that her sins put him there.

But she wasn't prepared to accept it. And they passed by reviling that. Do you know at the cross there is a secretive gateway.

And from this gateway there are two roads. One is called the broad road. The other is called the narrow road.

And if you reject the cross then my dear friends you are treading on that broad road that leads to destruction. Now may I say this, hell is a reality but it's hard to go there. If ever you hear a preacher giving you the impression that God loves to throw people in hell, please, please say this to yourself, he's talking nonsense.

It's the last thing on earth that God ever wants a person to be in and that is impetition. In fact dear friends it's a very difficult thing for a person to go to hell. And God's made it difficult.

Because hell is an awful, awful place. It's a place of an indescribable tragedy. And before a person can go to hell he has to pass the white hot love of Calvary.

He has to see Jesus Christ dying there upon the cross for his sin. And when Christ died on that cross for our sin he bared his own heart to show us how infinitely he loved us. And if someone can pass that cross and reject that love then dear friends he is on the broad road that leads to destruction.

A man will never be in hell, a woman will never be in hell because they have sinned. They will neither be in hell because of their sinful nature. They will be in hell because of their rejection of the love of Christ.

And oh dear friends could I say this to you tonight, don't leave the building with a heated spirit. Don't leave may the cross break your heart tonight and may you accept that forgiveness. Thirdly there were those that stood far off nervously.

They were women. They had been with the Lord Jesus. Probably some of them had been healed.

May have been some of these women were blind and he had given them sight. Perhaps one or two of the women may have had an issue of blood or some blood disease and they had been healed. They were people who were very much attached to the Lord Jesus but there was a problem.

They were standing afar off and there on that hill they could see the cross. On that hill perhaps they could even hear that glorious prayer of forgiveness. Father forgive them they know not what they do.

They had a profound love for the one that was suffering. Again I repeat perhaps they had the touch of healing upon their body which the master had given them. They were people that loved the Lord.

But there was a fear. If we come and stand by that cross then what will the Pharisees and the Sadducees say? We shall be identifying ourselves with him in death. Then there were those cruel wicked soldiers that were gambling with their garments.

If they stood by that cross would they be mugged, ravished by those soldiers. And therefore there was that magnetic love that was drawing them to the cross and yet at the same time there was this fear afraid to come near. Now dear friends could I say this.

If those ladies had come near. If the magnetism of that divine love had induced them and they stood with the Lord Jesus in his rejection. If anyone would have touched them then he would have intervened.

But there was no power in hell that would ever bring him from the cross. He was there for a reason as we shall see in a moment. But unfortunately these ladies were defeated.

There was the cross. There was a barrier between the cross, the soldiers and the religious leaders. And instead of coming to the cross they stood afar off nervously.

Lots of people like that. When you hear the story of the cross and it really grips your heart. All kinds of excuses can come to the mind.

If tonight I receive the forgiveness of sins that God wants to give to me through the cross. What will my husband say? He is not a believer. And if I take my stand at the cross with him it may break our marriage.

Can I do it? Or. If I come and associate myself with the Lord Jesus Christ. If I come and associate myself with the cross.

What about those people in the office? If they hear that I am a Christian they will make me an object of support. Probably will. And therefore you stand afar off.

Perhaps a man might be here tonight and you are saying something like this. I would love to come and stand at that cross and receive the forgiveness of sins. But what about my Mary? What would happen there? I knew a business man and he was sitting hearing an address similar to this.

And he had a very large business. But there were certain things in that business that he was doing that did not correspond with Christianity. And it came before him.

Money. Wealth. And it was wealth that defeated him.

These women stood. They stood before him afar off. And they missed the joy of standing with Jesus in his rejection.

Would there be someone like that tonight? You know you should come. You feel the tug of the love of Christ. You know that you should receive the forgiveness of sins.

But there is a barrier between you and the Lord. Someone is holding you back. My own mother was like that.

She was afraid of my father. But when mother got saved at the age of 42 she led five of her boys to Christ. And then she had the joy of seeing my dad gloriously saved.

How glad she came. And she stood by the cross. Let there be no barriers.

And now we turn to a scene that I believe is exquisitely beautiful. Listen to how John puts it. There stood by the cross his mother.

His mother. Any mothers here? You know how you feel? When Mary was watching her son dying on that cross there was agony in her heart. Perhaps she was almost there when she saw them buffeting his face and she would say my son look what they have done to him.

Then she saw those same men the Syrian Roman soldiers lacerating his back and she felt every mark that was falling on him. And then she was watching when they threw him to the ground and pierced his hands and probably she was saying those healing hands that healed thousands they are crucified. Then she watched them push the spike through his face and it was almost too much for her.

And there she was at the cross breathing with him agonizing with him. Remember she was a great woman but she wasn't divine she was human. And all the feelings of motherhood were there.

When all of a sudden he said this. Woman that's a beautiful word. It means out of man of a high degree.

What dignity the Lord conferred upon her. There she is smashed, broken, crushed to the very dust. All the emotional nerves working overtime in that poor body.

And there she is watching her son suffering. But she needed another revelation. Dear friends it's possible to preach the cross and to create such emotion that people weep at the physical sufferings of Christ.

But may I say this with great care and prayer for us. The physical sufferings of Christ will not save you. They are a part of the atonement but not the major point.

Mary was broken because of her dignified motherhood. Come now mother. You know what it is to sit by the bed of a child that's dying.

You feel it more than the child. What must Mary have felt when she saw her son suffering. Then from the cross there came this great cry.

May I say it in a loud voice. Woman behold thy son. Now that word behold.

It means to look with intensity until the mind interprets the object of the vision. It means to look and look and look until you say I understand. It's a beautiful word.

And here was a woman broken and then suddenly she is told to look. And as she looks it all clings. And she hears this.

His name shall be called Emmanuel. God with us. It was not God who died she would say.

But he who died was God. God with us. God.

There hanging on a Roman gibbet was the creator of the world. It's a spinner. And there she saw his immaculate glory and his essential divinity.

Emmanuel. But then she heard Mary thou shalt call his name Jesus. Jesus.

For he shall be called Emmanuel. Emmanuel. Go save his people from their sins.

And then it clings. He's there saving his people from their sins. He's hanging on that tree in order to bear the sin of the world.

He's there on that tree dying that he might taste death for every man and destroy him who had the power of death. The devil. I see.

I'm understanding. And then this would take place. So he's dying there for my sins.

Yes. And he's showing his love for me. And Mary looked not with agony.

How can I say this? With adoration. Son of God. Immaculate saviour.

That crowns you with thorns but God is going to crown you with glory. Woman. Behold thy son.

Dear friends in a gospel meeting like this there comes a time when you switch off from the preacher and the spirit of God reveals the cross and you get a real shock. You quietly say something like this. Lord Jesus are you dying for my bad temper? Yes.

You dying for that private lust? Yes. You dying for my gossiping tongue? Yes. You dying for all the deceit? Yes.

Every single one of my sins? Yes. You dying for my evil nature that's the root of all sin? Yes. All that agony, all that suffering, all that darkness, all that distance? Yes.

And you drop your head and you say something like this. Lord I never knew my sins were so serious. Never knew I was so guilty.

That cross reveals the measure of my sin and guilt. But thank you Lord for dying for me. Friends you can never, never, never love sin once you've seen the cross.

Once you get a vision of Calvary all your hypocrisy will go. When you see him bearing the judgment of God but he won't leave you there. The moment you see the cross he bears his heart and he reveals his infinite burning love for you and you'll be able to say he loved me and gave himself for me.

And immediately that takes place you've had the revelation God the Holy Spirit has revealed the true meaning of Calvary. You've seen the awfulness of your sins that caused him to die. You've seen the infinite love of God for you.

And then you'll look again and you will see that they crowned him with thorns. But you will say this I'm taking the sovereignty of my life and I'm giving it to him. I'm going to make him my Lord and my Savior.

I love to tell this story and then I'll close. My father was a pantheist. I think I've mentioned this before he was one of the last barefisted fighters in Britain.

I think he won the middleweight championship in the 19th round and was mutilated in that one fight. But he was always interested in oratory. He wasn't a Christian.

He was right against Christianity. But he took me one night to hear a man called Philip Mills because he was an outstanding orator. And Philip Mills was a Christian and he preached the cross.

Now that message was just a giggle to my father. In fact I heard him laugh. But as I was sitting listening to that message I realized two things.

The seriousness of my sins as a boy that caused his death. And the deep sincerity of God's love for me. And I was broken in my seat.

And I wept aloud. After the message I said to my father would you take me to see the preacher. He said you're seeing no preacher and dragged me all the way home.

It was the longest walk in my life. And then in a little while I found myself in a little box room. I fell across the bed.

I thanked the Lord Jesus for dying for me. I told him I was dreadfully sorry that my sins caused his death. And I asked the Lord to save me and forgive me.

And I was doing that for about a quarter of an hour. My brother Sam who had just been converted came home from the meeting. And mother said I believe Peter's upset.

Would you go up in the room because she was afraid of my father. And Sam went up into the bedroom and saw me praying across the bed. He said what's wrong Peter.

I said Sam I'm asking the Lord to save me and forgive me. But I don't know if I'm through. And he read me this verse.

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And I remember saying that's it. I'm through.

And I got up and all I can say is this. The peace of God filled my heart. And that moment I have never forgotten.

The cross that I saw in that tent over 60 years ago. The little bedroom 45 Theobalds Road is as fresh now as when it happened. It was the day when the Lord found me.

Would you mind if I point it. Has the Lord found you tonight? Has he found you? Have you been in his house? Are you sitting there indifferently? Are you passing by revilingly? Are you standing afar up

nervously? Have you come to the point of looking adoringly?

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