

# (Trees in the Christian Experience) 3. the Man on the Tree

by Roy Hession

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeing our sins as exposed and judged, and believing that they are buried with Jesus, in order to experience peace and revival.*

**Duration:** 45:27

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 21:22

**Topics:** "Christian Experience"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of revival in the lives of believers. He emphasizes that revival is not just about conviction and repentance, but also about rejoicing in the Lord. The preacher uses the example of King David inquiring of the Lord during a three-year famine to illustrate the path to revival. He highlights the importance of recognizing and repenting for our sins, just as David did when he realized the famine was a consequence of Saul's actions. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the need for true repentance and rejoicing in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

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## Transcript

And now this morning, most important of all, we want to look at the man on the tree. Not the man behind the tree, nor the man up the tree, but that other man on the tree, which of course is none other than the Lord Jesus. And I want to read to you a selection of scriptures that bear on the subject of the man on the tree.

Will you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 21, Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 22 and 23. Maybe you've never contemplated these verses, but may I tell you, they are basic scriptures, and much in the New Testament is based on these two verses. And you won't understand those New Testament references until we've seen and got some understanding of what we have here.

Deuteronomy 21, 22. If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on the tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day. For he that is hanged is accursed of God, that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

And then turning over to the New Testament, the epistle to the Galatians, we find that there is scripture quoted and applied to Jesus, who was hanged on a tree. Galatians chapter 3, verse 10. As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Verse 13. Christ, however, praise God, has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, and here he quotes from Deuteronomy 21, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. And then Acts chapter 5, verse 30.

Acts chapter 5, verse 30. And here Peter is preaching to the Jews, the God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree. When Paul was preaching in chapter 10, he put it the same way.

There's a special significance in this. Every single phrase in scripture is pregnant with tremendous meaning. You can't pass over anything.

You may not understand everything. You say, well, there's something there I don't understand, I'll come back to it one day. And Paul now is preaching, and he says, verse 39 of chapter 10, and we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree.

And then in chapter 13, now that was Peter, surely, yes, that was Peter. Now we come to Paul, and this is chapter 13, verse 29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree.

They hanged him on the, didn't only slay him, but they slew him and hanged him on the tree. But they didn't only hang him on the tree, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead.

And then, not only in the Acts, and not only in the Galatians, but in Paul's letter, Peter's letter, he has the same thing to say. 1 Peter 2, verse 24. Who his own self, bear our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed.

And a more literal rendering, as I get from the margin of the old revised version, it says, who his own self carried up our sins to the tree in his own body. Now it's very interesting to note that in the New Testament, the cross upon which Jesus died is not referred to as a cross, but rather as a tree. And there's a deep significance in that fact.

A cross was a Roman form of execution, of punishment. That's what they did to criminals. They put them on crosses.

And it was Romans who erected that cross. And it was Romans that nailed him there. But the Jews, steeped as they were in the law of Moses, didn't see it as a cross.

They saw it as a tree. And they had in their minds this basic scripture in the law of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 21. They had in their minds that the Old Testament said, cursed is he that hangeth upon a tree.

If a man committed a thing worthy of death, it was their custom to hang that body on a tree as a sign that such a deed and such a man was accursed of God, and as a warning to others. And so when it's the Hebrews preaching, sometimes Peter and Paul refer to the cross not as the cross, but as a tree. It was a

terrible thing to be cast as a criminal and die as such, as was signified by the cross.

But it was a far dreadful thing for a man to die and to be shown to be accursed of God. Oh, said a Roman, he's dying on a cross. No, he isn't, said a Hebrew.

That's a tree. That's a more dreadful thing. For cursed by God is everyone that hangeth on a tree.

And so they make the point, they slew him, and then, as a sign that such a one was accursed of God, they hanged him on a tree. That was how the Hebrew preachers put it that way. Because the tree, to be hung on a tree, always signified that the one hanging there was accursed of God.

Which was far worse, far dreadful. Indeed, that is what our sin is, and what our sin deserves. It is something utterly abhorrent to God.

It's not only breaking the laws of the state. There are many sins which do not break the laws of the state, but they break the laws of God. But it's not only something which as such deserves eternal death, but it is something which renders us accursed of God.

And it needs to be exposed as such, if it is to be atoned for. The Old Testament, the Old Covenant said, curse it is everyone that continueth not in all the things that are written in the book of the law to do them. Not in their intent to do them, but you've got to do them, but we don't.

And we incur the curse. And it isn't only keeping some of the things, curse it is everyone that continueth not in all the things. God says you've got to do them all.

Failure to do that renders you subject to the curse. And it says you've got to continue to do them. Curse it is he that continueth not right to his dying day in all the things of the book of the law to actually do them.

And failure on any one of those three things involves us as being subject to the divine curse. So holy is God, his attitude to the infringement of his holy law cannot be anything else than to impose a divine curse on sin and the one who will not repent. And as I've said, for it to be atoned for, it's got to be exposed in that light.

And the curse must be imposed upon the one atoning for it. And that is exactly what Jesus did. If you look again at 1 Peter 2 24, here we have it told to us what Jesus did, the man on the tree.

And using that phrase, that little more accurate phrase, it reads who his own self. And it's important to me this, the authorised versions of the special emphasis, the special cadence, which some other versions miss, who his own self carried up our sins in his own body to the tree. Sin has to be carried up to the place of the curse, the place where God's judgment is imposed upon it.

And this task was not given to some angel to be the heavenly dustman, to take this foul stinking thing to the place which it deserved. No, it says who his own self did it. It wasn't delegated to anybody else than Jesus.

His own self carried up our sins to the tree, the place of the curse. And he didn't only do it as something apart from himself, holding the stinking thing as far away as he could from himself and casting it at the place of the curse. No, it says it wasn't only his own self, but he did it in his own body.

He identified himself with this thing. Romans 8 says he died in the likeness of sinful flesh. He didn't only die for us, but he died as us, in our likeness, in the likeness of the sinner.

And that's what happened. He carried up his own self, our sins, in his own body to the tree. And it says Jesus was made a curse for us, to exhaust for us the curse of the broken law of God, that we might be beautifully and gloriously redeemed from all that curse.

And you know it isn't just a theoretical thing, that curse gives you a bad conscience, you never feel you've made it, you're never really bold with God, you're never quite free with your brothers, you always have a sense of falling short, always the thought that some of your past failures are going to catch up with you. Oh, the curse. But Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse.

Not only in one place is he said to have been made sin, but he'd been made a curse for us. We sang last night, thou hast fulfilled the law, and we are justified. Ours is the blessing, thine the curse.

We live, thou hast died. Oh, this story of the man on the tree, bearing my likeness, being made the curse for the things that I am and have done, dying not only for me, but as me, and exhausting all that was due for me. And this isn't something merely to relegate to your first coming to Christ, you are what you are.

The old man doesn't improve after you're saved. There's a new man, thank God, but there's an old man lurking around and he expresses himself all too often. And that's what he took, the likeness of that in his body on the tree.

But listen, the real point of this great basic text in Deuteronomy chapter 21 is not hanging the body on the tree, but taking it down. I want you to look again at it. Deuteronomy chapter 21 verse 22.

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, it's just an if. These are preliminary clauses. Here's the main sentence.

His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day. And so the great emphasis of this very important scripture is, as I say, not hanging up the body, but taking it down. Yes, that body is to be exposed, that man is to be exposed, is justly exposed, but the exposure shall not outlast the day.

Because, strange, cursed is everyone that hangeth upon the tree, and that's a sign that he was a curse. Well, it's only a sign, it's done, it's you've made the sign. Now, don't let my land be littered about with corpses hanging from trees.

Their exposure is to end with the setting of the sun, and you won't bury him that day. And this is the reason why the Jews were so particular to have Jesus buried that day. Did you know that? Oh, they stood and hanged on a tree, they said, wait a minute, we know what we're doing.

We hanged him on a tree because of Deuteronomy 21, but he's got to be taken down this day because of Deuteronomy 21. John 19, there it is, here they are, John 19, verse 31. The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation that the body should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, for that Sabbath day was an high day.

You see, they put him to death on Friday, and Saturday was the Jews' Sabbath. They besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. They didn't want the body up there.

And if they were alive and had their legs broken, then they couldn't escape. But when they came to Jesus, he was dead already. Died long before his time, voluntarily, he dismissed his spirit.

And that fulfilled that extraordinary scripture in the Old Testament about the Passover lamb, a bone of him shall not be broken. I tell you, you've got something in your Bible. You won't get to the bottom of it all in your lifetime.

I want to get as much of it as I can before I go. And that old Passover lamb that they ate, whose blood assured their safety, they were not to break a bone. And here it's quoted as being fulfilled in Jesus.

But it wasn't only because it was the Sabbath that they didn't want him to remain upon the cross, but whatever the following day was, he was to be buried the day before. Quite extraordinary how these people who were doing such a dastardly deed were nonetheless so particular about scrupulously following the laws of Moses. There's a story told of a Spaniard who got into an altercation with another and drew a knife and killed him.

And his knife was covered with blood. And somehow when he was handing it, he got a bit of that blood on his mouth. And he was so convicted, he tasted flesh, meat, on the Sabbath day, and he went to confess that sin to the priest.

And that's how it was with these Jews. So scrupulous about observing the law of Moses and yet at the same time doing the most dastardly deed. And you know, you can be the same.

So scrupulous about certain things. And others, my friend, what infringements of the divine law in other matters. Well, that's how it was.

And they were so particular to take that body down. You say, what have I got to do to get right with God? And no, I'm not really, really right with God. There's still some things yet to be settled.

Have I got to expose my sin? Have I got to hang it up on some tree? No, you haven't got to do that because it's already done. Your sins have already been given the exposure they deserved. They've been seen and shown up to be what they are in all the hideous light, in Jesus.

And that exposure of sin does not need to be done again. It's already been done. And God ordered it in accordance with his own Old Testament law that that body should be taken down in the evening.

They not only slew him and hanged him on the tree, but they took him down from the tree and buried him. All by divine appointment to show my friend that that exposure was enough. And all the more dreadful that the one in whom our sins were exposed was the innocent one, the very opposite of the shape and form that he voluntarily took for us on the tree.

Well, you say, what have I got to do to get right with God? Just two simple things. You must judge that sin, whatever it may be, as something accursed of God as shown by Calvary's cross. He was there in your likeness, and the curse imposed on him is what you deserved, what I deserved.

And that thing is something accursed. And if I want to get right with God, I must treat it like that. There's a story told of a fellow being called up for the army in the war, and the sergeant said, well, are your parents alive? No, my mother's dead.

Well, what did she die of? Not quite sure. Nothing very serious. And the sergeant said, if it's serious enough to kill your mother.

And you know, you may not think what's happened, those infringements, very serious, serious enough to kill the Lamb of God. And I must account to them as such. And sometimes we're so bothered about should we confess, should we tell, should we stand up and say this and that publicly, hang the whole thing up on a tree.

So we haven't really repented. There's one thing you've got to do, run around, no, repent. And when you really repent it and judge that thing as God sees it, he'll show you what to do if something does need to be done.

But you're going to get peace apart from doing that thing, but sometimes, yes. But don't start pre-empting, don't start anticipating. You could be wondering, oh, should I do this, should I do that, should I give this something back? Please turn the cassette over now, do not fast wind it in either direction.

Should I do this, should I do that, should I give this something back? Get it repented of between you and God at the cross and see it deserved the curse that Jesus bore for it. Pam and I were over in Germany some little time ago, and we were talking a little bit along this line, and the wife of the superintendent of this beautiful conference center, a woman who had been a missionary, and even involved in revival, asked Pam to have a little chat with her. And she disclosed the fact to Pam that she was a secret drinker, that she'd take bottles of wine to her room and drink it, and then drink some more.

And she was either an alcoholic or on the very verge of it. She said, I want to tell you what I saw today. I saw I'd made Jesus a drunk.

She saw Jesus died as her. I tell you, it did something to her. It finished her.

And that's what we got to see. I made Jesus, someone might have to say, nothing more than a fornicator. That's what he was up on that cross.

I made Jesus an adulterer. That's what he became on that cross. I made Jesus, to use the phrases in the authorized version, an abuser of himself with mankind, a homosexual.

I made Jesus a thief. I made Jesus a liar. I haven't been honest about things, and he became that for me.

Cursing is every one that keepeth not the things of the Lord. And I haven't, not on those matters, but he was made a curse for me. I made Jesus a spiteful, resentful person.

Only so could this sin be exposed and be properly and rightly judged and put away. But I've got to do something else. I've got to see it as buried.

I've got to see that body on the tree, but I've got to see, and it's very important that I should, it taken down. Indeed, to see that body taken down is almost more important to you than seeing him up there. It's only then that peace comes.

It's only then that revival begins. If there's one thing more important than seeing the body on the tree, is to see it taken down. That exposure for that sins enough.

And God gives us this beautiful sign, an order that this Old Testament scripture should be fulfilled in this way in Jesus. Of course, there are other things too. He was raised from the dead, but this thing is saying, don't let that exposure outlast the day.

And that day has come, and that day is gone, and he was that day taken down from the tree, and all the curse finished for you and for me. I have heard sometimes people speak as if, you know, you've got to hang your sins up there. Well, what is really meant is, I must judge my sins as having already been hung up there, worthy of that sort of verdict placed upon them.

And then, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought. So valuable, so sufficient is the blood of the Lord Jesus that there's nothing more coming, and you can take it. Indeed, you've got to.

You've got to believe. It's all over. It's all finished.

I tell you, that's when revival comes. Revival comes, doesn't come when the saints are merely mourning and repenting. It comes when they see he's done it all.

It's finished. It's buried. And then you've got a testimony.

Maybe your testimony may involve some reference to what has really been the trouble. Sometimes it's very important, sometimes not always necessarily, if you were to go into details. And I'm not talking about public testimonies, it's all right, public, I mean, you know, to one and another.

No, no, this is where I've got to get to, boy, I think, if anything like that. Dying, he saved me. Buried.

Buried! And my sins with him, he carried my sins far away. The man on the tree. Blessed man of Calvary.

Now, I now want to turn to an extraordinary and wonderful illustration of all this, and a way in which we can see how it applies to us. I want you to turn over to 2 Samuel 21. Now, here's a very little-known incident, and I don't think often preached upon, and yet it is a passage which shows the way of revival, as few others do.

2 Samuel 21. Then there was a famine in the days of David, three years, year after year. And David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered, it is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonite.

One year's famine, and that failure in rain was bad, but still, can't always have it good, said David. And he didn't take it very seriously. And when it happened the second year, he said, well, that's just too bad.

We just have to tighten our belts. But when it happened the third year running, he said, it's God. And he did something which is beautifully characteristic of dear David.

He had inquired of the Lord, and quick as knife he got his answer, the reason for the famine. It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonite. His predecessor Saul had broken a contract with that minority group, the Gibeonites, which they'd given them, that they would not, that they would spare them.

They made them hewers of wood, and drawers of water. You know the story, but you can go into it. And Saul, in his zeal for the children of Israel, it says, slew them.

Not all of them, but a great number of them. Doubtless appropriated their farms, and gave them to Israel. And God didn't act on behalf of that great wrong that had been perpetrated.

Because he knew the man who was on the throne would never listen to him. But here was David, a man who would. And although David didn't perpetrate the act, now he was king, he could put it right.

And sometimes you may be called upon to accept responsibility for not something you've done, but something your family's done. And there might be something you need to put right with another family, that someone else, that your dad did. He never listened to God, but you do.

Well that was more or less how it was. But a famine in the days of David. Normally Israel was a land of milk and honey, that never was to know famine.

And God had said, if however I shut up heaven, that there be no rain, inquire of me, and I'll show you, and then you can humble yourself, and repent, and turn from your wicked ways, and then I will open heaven again. So here's a real illustration of it. And David recognised the wrong, never thought of it before.

And here God was still remembering the cry of those innocent people, that had been put to the sword, by Saul, his predecessor. And so David in verse three goes to the Gibeonites and asks what he shall do, wherewith shall I make an atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord. And the Gibeonites said unto him, we will have no silver, nor gold of Saul, nor of his house.

Neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, what ye shall say, that what I do for you. And they answered, the man that consumed us, and that devised against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose.

Pretty gruesome. But nothing for it. And the king said, I will give them.

And he had to go through the descendants of Saul, children of some of his concubines, and so on. And he was able to assemble seven of the descendants of Saul. By the way, notice, he specially spared Bephibosheth, because of the special oath between him and his father Jonathan.

But he was a descendant of Saul, but he was spared. And these seven men were taken, and handed over to the Gibeonites, and they slew them, and they hanged those seven bodies up before the Lord. And cursed is he that hangeth upon a tree.

And they were left there. And the mother of one of them, she came and she camped beside those trees, and day and night she watched over those bodies, frightening away the birds of the air, the vultures, and the beasts of prey, who might come and consume those dangling corpses on the tree. But although they had done it, the famine wasn't lifted.

Still no rain, still no revival. It seemed they had done the right thing. No, they hadn't quite.

They never took them down. They didn't take them down. And it didn't, the revival didn't come, until David heard of the pathetic action of the mother of one of those.

And then he realised. He'd not fulfilled the word of the Lord. And he proceeded immediately to do it.

And he took those bones, and he had them buried, and while he was doing it, he recovered the bones of Saul and Jonathan, and had them given a decent burial in their own homeland. And when they performed all that the king commanded, after that, God was entreated for the land. Verse 14.

The clouds came, and the rain came, and the people rejoiced again. The famine was over. Not merely when they'd hung up those bodies before the Lord, but when they saw one exposure was enough.

And they were taken down and buried. Now, that's when revival begins, in a human, a single heart, in a group. I tell you, when the saints see the bodies taken down, already done so in Jesus, when the Spirit gives them a new sight of the power of the blood of Jesus, the sufficient, that finished work, for that thing that's dogged their steps, then the song of the Lord begins.

And I tell you, that's revival. Revival isn't the saints being convicted, merely. Revival is not merely the saints repenting and being broken, merely.

Revival is, at last, the saints rejoicing again. And they shall sing there as in the days of their youth. No words of yours can express your thankfulness.

That's revival. And you don't get it anywhere but at sea. That man on the tree, yes, but he's not on it, barely carried your sins far away.

And so I say, if there's one thing more important than seeing our sins on the tree, it is seeing them taken down. I know, I know, we know this theoretically. And that old chorus about, buried, he carried my sins far away, it never did anything for me because I didn't see it in this, quite in this light.

They're things that are haunting you. Oh, maybe you have confessed. Yes, yes, there it is.

And there are those wretched corpses dangling over you, spoiling your joy. But you've got to see that exposure given to them was enough for Calvary. And you can gratefully accept that shameful thing.

Well, what happens? Well, I don't know. You're through. The blood of Jesus on the grounds of no other than that you recognize what you are and who you are and acknowledge it at the cross.

Makes you as right with God as you can be. Now, such a man is going to be so released and full of joy that if there's something else to be put right with another, it's done by way of testimony. And it's done as God shows.

There isn't a legal compulsion in the matter. I tell you, we could be anticipating these issues and never really judging the sin itself. And therefore never really getting the beautiful release that Jesus has got for us, that he has got it for us.

What it cost him to lay aside his reputation, be willing to take the lowest station in order to come and stand by us. But he's done it. You know, sometimes, I don't get on very well, I must confess, you'll think they're terrible here, I don't get on very well at communion services.

Very seldom do I get very blessed. Sometimes it's an awesome silence and you see everybody screwing up their faces. And they're trying to go through the agonies of Calvary all over again.

The Lord says, don't do it, I've done it. No need for you to get into the joy of it. Get into the joy of it.

That's it. Praise! Take down that body. It has been done.

And you can be free. This is really what is meant by that phrase you might hear people give in a testimony, say, what is this phrase, the power of the blood of Jesus? Just this, it's all finished. It speaks of something beautiful.

The answer that puts you as actually right with God and makes you a free person indeed, blessed man, that blessed man who's been on the tree, no longer there. And of course, having risen from the dead, he's come to live in us. Lord Jesus, thou hast died for me and I have died in thee.

Thou art risen, my bands are unloosed and now thou livest in me. Amen. So praise God for this beautiful picture, very special, the tree.

There was an early song of Beverly Shea, whether he still sings it now, I don't know, but some of those early records, didn't they sweep us when they first came over? I never heard them like that. They were beautifully recorded too. And I remember one.

Each time I see a tree, I think of him. On one, he died for me. On Calvary, on a tree, a tree, the shameful tree, the tree of disgrace.

On one, he died for me. On Calvary. Amen.

Let us pray. As we bow and worship, let's sing that chorus. He laid aside his reputation.

He laid aside his reputation. That's why I love him. That's why I love him.

He laid aside his reputation when he came and stood by me. Lord Jesus, this is an extraordinary story you tell us of your love for people who failed and point after point. It's a wonderful thing you tell us, how you make peace and liberty available to us on street level, by means of those wounds, by means of that dark thing you went through.

And Lord, we ask that thou would give the vision, the revelation by the Spirit, of the body already taken down. Lord, you know some of us have been haunted by dangling corpses. May this be the day of our liberation.

We pray thee, and may we rejoice in thee as we have never done before. And may there be wonderful visions of grace and glory opening up to us, just because of thee. He laid aside his reputation when he came and stood by me.

He laid aside his reputation when he came and stood by me. That's why I love him. That's why I love him.

The grace together, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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