

♦ CHRIST AT CALVARY ♦

Where, When, How, and Who

by Desmond Ford

The four Gospels are not like ordinary biographies. Strangely, they have often been likened to tadpoles with large heads and long, thin tails. That is, the Passion Story is the great emphasis of the Gospels. Of the rest of our Lord's life, only one day out of every 350 is even referred to in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But his last seven days, the days of his Passion—the days of atonement—take up almost one-third of the Gospel record.

Why is the cross made so prominent? Because it is the clearest depiction of all the realities of the universe: of the heart and mind of God; of the facts of holiness, law, and righteousness; of mercy, forgiveness, peace, and love. It is the cross that tells us about humanity and God, about earth and heaven. It interprets the past, present, and future. It is at Calvary that we learn what true religion is about.

The Place of Calvary

Let's look at the WHERE of Calvary. According to Ezekiel, what we call modern Israel (or ancient Palestine) is the center of the world (5:5). It is a land bridge between the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. In the center was Jerusalem, and in the heart of Jerusalem was the temple. Our Lord was crucified just outside the temple.

Golgotha is a word that in Hebrew and Aramaic

means "cranium" or "skull." (*Calvary* is the Latin term for the same thing.) It occurs twice in the Old Testament, once when Jael pierced the head of Sisera with a nail.

At Calvary the handwriting that was against us—the record of our sins—was pierced through by the nails that crucified our Lord. Our Sisera, our great enemy, was there overcome by the nails of the cross.

The cross is an inverted sword. God's hand is on the hilt. The sword pierces not only the Lamb of God but that great Serpent, the accuser of the brethren. When we know the meaning of the cross, he can accuse us no longer. The handwriting of our indebtedness has been pierced through, and with it the skull of the great accuser.

The Time of Calvary

Now, the WHEN. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law" (Gal 4:4). When the time had fully come. The fullness of time (KJV). Humanity had come to its end sociologically, philosophically, and religiously when Christ came. A poet said of the Roman Empire of that time:

On that hard pagan world,
Disgust and secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Had made of life a hell.

It was the midnight of the world when our Lord died—the darkest hour. Pliny, the philosopher, wrote, “There is nothing certain save that nothing is certain. There is no more wretched yet more arrogant being than man. The best thing that has been given to man amid the many torments of this life is that he can take his own life.” The world of the first century was very much like our own world. It was an age of hopelessness, despair, cruelty, and licentiousness.

Here are some epitaphs from the first century:

“Child be not overly distressed. No man is immortal.”

“I was not. I lived. I am not. That’s all.”

“All we are kept for death, fed like a herd of swine that are butchered without rhyme or reason.”

“Here lie I, Dionysius of Tarsus, Sixty years old, Unwed. Would that my father had been the same.”

It was springtime when our Lord died. Emily Bronte wrote in her diary, “When I awoke this morning the whole world was singing, ‘Springtime,’ ‘Springtime.’” Springtime—representing new life, resurrection, hope, and joy! (Seasons of the year are parables, just as night and day, sleeping and waking, are parables.)

It was Passover. For fifteen centuries, on the fourteenth day of the first month, at about 3:00 p.m., Israel had slain her Passover lambs. The Passover lamb had saved the firstborn. Now the Firstborn of heaven had become the Passover Lamb. The lamb had first been slain when the Israelites had still been in Egypt. Christ died for our sins while we were yet sinners, without strength, still God’s enemies.

[Dr. Ford has written in detail on the prophetic timing of Christ’s death in his book *Daniel*—Ed.]

The Manner of Calvary

Let’s talk now about the HOW of our Lord’s death: the manner, the implement, the method of his death—and its symbolism.

The cross is a symbol of contradiction, thus a symbol of life, for in life we know contradiction. There is light and darkness, good and evil, pleasure and pain, health and sickness. The cross represents the limitations of life, the pain of life, the difficulties of life. God wants us to be honest about the realities of existence. It is both joyous and *painful* to live.

Isn’t it strange that in matters of education and science we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors? We inherit knowledge. But we don’t learn like that emotionally. We can accept the rules of arithmetic, the logarithm tables, the principles of business, and how to make a house. But the lessons about pride and passion and temper—these we learn by our own pain.

Isn’t it strange that when we look at other people, we envy the good things they have, without realizing the bad things that go with them? “I wish I were the boss,” people say without knowing all the burdens of the boss. The king of Samaria had sackcloth under his royal garb, and many a man and woman we see on the silver screen or television also wears sackcloth. There is

no crown without thorns, no Eden without a serpent, no family without cares, no child without problems, no heart without sin and sadness.

So the cross (and the minicross of the crown of thorns) is going to tell us how to deal with pain. Yet it seems so passive. Jesus just hangs there. He’s not wielding a sword, not climbing a hill, not scaling the heavens, just passive.

The hardest thing to do sometimes is to do nothing. The hardest thing to do sometimes is to *trust*. Almost all psychological complexes grow out of nonacceptance. “How can this be happening to me?” we complain. We kick against the pricks. We refuse to accept some of the limitations built into our inheritance or environment. Christ’s passive acceptance of the cross is meant to teach us that, where we cannot change things, we must trust in God who can, and will, in his own good time, turn the crown of thorns into a diadem of glory.

The Person of Calvary

Let us think now on the WHO of the cross.

“Behold the man,” said the Roman judge, thus answering his own earlier question, “What is truth?” Christ is the only man who ever lived whose character and experience were sketched in detail long, long before he was born.

Spurgeon said:

I will give the Old Testament to any wise man living and say, Go home, construct in your imagination an ideal character who shall exactly fit all that which is herein foreshadowed in this book. Remember, he must be a prophet like unto Moses and yet a champion like unto Joshua; he must be an Aaron and a Melchizedec; he must be both David and Solomon, Noah and Jonah, Judah and Joseph. Yea, he must not only be the lamb that was slain . . . the turtle dove and the priest that slew the bird, but he must be the altar, tabernacle, mercy seat, and shewbread. Nay, to puzzle this wise man further, we remind him of prophecies so apparently contradictory that one would think they could never meet in one man. Such as these, “All men shall fall down before Him,” &c., and “He is despised,” &c. He must begin by showing a man born of a virgin mother, He must be a man without spot or blemish, but one upon whom the Lord doth lay the iniquities of us all. He must be a glorious One, a Son of David, yet a root out of dry ground. Now if the greatest intellects could set themselves to invent another key to the types and prophecies they could not do it. These wonderful hieroglyphics must be left unexplained till one comes forth and proclaims, “the Cross of Christ and the Son of God incarnate.” Then the whole is clear, so that he who runs may read, and a child may understand.

Who Is This Jesus?

Who is this man Jesus that we should believe on him? We can say, remembering Spurgeon's fine words, that the WHO of the cross, the man that Pilate herds into the hole, we can say he is the true Adam, the true Moses, the true prophet, priest, and king. We can say that everything in the Old Testament was for him. He is true Israel. That's why we see him being tested forty days in the wilderness just as Israel was tested in the wilderness forty years. That's why we see him giving a sermon on the mount just as God came down to Israel at Sinai and gave a "sermon"—the Ten Commandments. He is Adam, the head of the race, the image of God, the representative of all humanity. He falls asleep on the sixth day and has his side opened that he might have a bride; he is Abel, the good shepherd, who, while young, is murdered by his brother because his works are righteous. He is Noah who builds a refuge from the wrath of God and thus saves his family—all who believe in him. He is Isaac, the beloved child of promise, miraculously born, who carries, upon his back, the wood with which he is to be offered.

He is Joseph, the most beloved son, who, for pieces of silver, is betrayed by his brethren to the Gentiles. These Gentiles carry him down to Egypt. Ultimately he is carried down into a prison. After saving a person there, he rose from the prison to save millions with the bread of life. Joseph is finally made Lord over all the land.

Who is this Man? He is Moses the lawgiver, Moses the prophet, Moses the deliverer who left the palace to redeem his people. He is Moses who controlled the wa-

ters and nourished his people with miraculous food and drink; who was willing to be blotted out for the sins of his people; who died while his eyesight was not dimmed nor his strength diminished; who was resurrected, and ascended to heaven (Jude 9).

Who is this man upon the cross? He is our Aaron, the great High Priest, wearing the names of his people on his heart and on his shoulders. (Remember the jewels on the priestly breastplate along with the names of the tribes? They symbolize our High Priest in heaven carrying our names on his heart. The jewels on the shoulders represent his carrying our burdens. We grow strong under burdens, but we grow strongest as we let him share them.)

He is our Joshua, leading his people into the promised land. He is Boaz, Ruth's kinsman redeemer, giving her rest and fruitfulness. He is our Samson, by his death destroying the enemies of his people.

He is our David, the warrior who never lost a battle when leading God's people. His name means beloved. He was born in Bethlehem. As a young man he overcame the giant of evil.

Who is this man on the cross? Solomon, who builds the Temple—the Church of God. He is the wisest, the richest.

He is Jonah taken from the ship and cast into the deep to remain for three days before resurrection.

Who is this man? He is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the Second Member of the Godhead, the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega. Scripture gives him over 208 titles. Every one is sufficient to provide day upon day upon day of meditation, bringing glory, insight, wisdom, and hope. Who is this Man? *He is our Savior.* ❖



Daisy Stanley

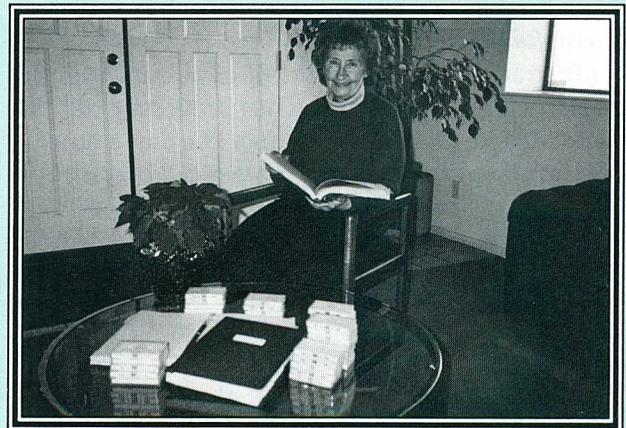
This is Daisy Stanley smiling at you. Daisy is a skilled medical secretary from San Carlos, California. She has just completed transcribing Dr. Ford's thirty-two tape series *The Passion Week*. "My boss writes newspaper articles, so I'm used to this kind of work," Daisy said. "I guess I took about an hour a tape. So I've been at it over four months, squeezing it in when I could."

"This was a pleasure for me," Daisy explained. "I work best when I have a project. Otherwise I don't always get to my Bible

study. But the knowledge in these tapes, and the illumination from the Scriptures! Wonderful! These tapes gave me a closer walk with God. I believe GNU is going to be the wave of the future in evangelism."

Our magazine this month consists of just a smidgen taken from Daisy's three immense volumes.

The selections are from Tapes 2101, 2102, 2107, and 2114. We hope you enjoy them!



Our office Manager, Marian Fritz, examines Daisy's work.