

THE THREE MYSTERIES OF JESUS

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Forward

There are three accepted ways by which man's identity may be established: by thumb prints, by blood tests, and by his name.

Criminals are required by detectives and police to submit to a finger-print test. Babies who have been mixed in a hospital ward, in order to be restored to their rightful parents, are submitted to a blood test. Friends writing from far away are recognized by the name test.

Jesus tells us that He came to save "sinners." He tells us that unless we turn and become as little "children" we are not worthy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Finally He calls us "friends."

Doubters will find their doubts swept away when they see the nail prints in His hands. Sinners will find their sins washed away by the blood shed on Calvary. Believers will find their prayers are answered when they ask in His name.

These, then, are the three great mysteries in the Christian religion: the Cross, the Blood, the Name. One meets them all on Golgotha hill. All are means of identifying Christ. All are means of interpreting Christ. All are means of salvation through Christ.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24).

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." (I John 1:7). "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:13).

If one truly has been redeemed by the blood, and truly knows that Name that is above every name in heaven and on earth, and then brings his entire being into harmony with Jesus, immediately Jesus is in his midst, and all his prayers are answered. But how can this redemption be achieved, how can this miracle of answered prayer come to pass? These questions can be answered only by considering these three mysteries of Jesus, the Cross, the Blood, and the Name.

Chapter I. THE CROSS

When I was in England I found that all roads led to London, just as when I was in Italy I found that all roads led to Rome. Since then I have discovered that when one finds himself lost in the labyrinth of unrelated, uncorrelated things, he can find the crooked roads becoming straight, chaos turning into order, and confusion giving way to understanding the moment he turns his eyes upon the Cross of Jesus. This is the one sure landmark for the confused traveler in a weary land. It is the one safe chart and compass to guide him to sanctuary and security.

When we study it closely we discover that the symbol of the Cross is at the center of all life, and when properly understood it opens up the secret of the knowledge of the universe to the understanding of all.

History and political science tell us that all civilization has its downward and upward focal points, its expansions and its two-way pulls. For instance, the Pope, the Kings, the Dictators are the vertical pull, either upward or downward, depending upon whether inspired of God or the devil, creating a form of unity and cohesion similar to the centripetal force in the field of matter. The horizontal pull, on the other hand, came from the liberals, giving multiplicity and diffusion. Democracy creates freedom and breadth (rather than solidarity and depth, in society).

Until one understands this law of the Cross in human society and the necessity for both elements to be established in proper juxtaposition and balance--until he understands this, any economist or teacher of political science or sociology is an illiterate as far as the subject of human society is concerned.

Jesus summed up the vertical and horizontal pulls in their perfect balance in human and divine relationship when He gave us the first and second great commandments: "Love God" is the vertical pull; "Love Man" is the horizontal pull. "Upon this cross hang all the laws and the prophets."

In painting all artists know the value of the vertical and the horizontal lines. In a picture of lakes, meadows, even low-spreading trees and shrubs, and clouds, we get the message of tranquility, serenity and peace. In mountains, church spires, and forest trees we catch the message of worship, reverence and aspiration. Zigzag, oblique lines give us neither peace nor aspiration, merely the message of energy, movement, of something marching on its way. The vertical and horizontal lines of the Christian Cross are a perfect symbol of peace and aspiration meeting in the place of permanence; whereas the Nazi swastika is a perfect symbol of violence and energy, meeting in a place of impermanence. One is for Eternity, the other is for the day.

In music we catch this symbolism in a very quaint and unusual way. "The principles upon which the human voice depends for its effective development and control," writes Louise Ewing Batchelor, "are replete with a religious symbolism which derives its basic tendency from the horizontal and vertical lines of the cross. Every vocal effect, every movement of the tongue, lips, larynx, pharynx, diaphragm and jaw, and even the alignment of the body itself conforms to these two tendencies of horizontality and verticality.

"For example, there are two principal lip adjustments necessary in forming the vowels, one being a long or vertical lip spread (which is characteristic of the vowel 'ah') and the other a wide, smiling or lateral lip spread (characteristic of the vowel 'ee'). Concurrent with these two basic movements are a series of gradually modified lip positions which move in sequence away from 'ee' and toward the 'ah' group, or away from 'ah' and toward the 'ee' group.

The 'ee' or smiling vowel exerts a general influence over five other vowel sounds represented by the words 'six', 'ten', 'where', 'sweet', and 'light'; while the 'ah' or vertical vowel establishes a general position for the five sounds contained in the words 'father', 'odd', 'pause', 'omit', 'moon'. Between these two opposing groups are three 'mid' vowel sounds which partake somewhat of the characteristics of both.

"The vocal cross manifests itself likewise in the correspondingly vertical and horizontal movements of the tongue and pharynx.

"The physical body also conforms to these same laws. Every singer, dancer, and actor knows the indispensable value of finding the vertical 'axis' of the body upon which to move, speak or sing. This axis has a certain magic in it. Once it is found a perfect centering of physical and psychological forces takes place within the body and the performer seems to 'find' himself for the first time, losing all fear and self-consciousness and performing with a spontaneity and ease hitherto undreamed of. Great opera singers, forced by the necessity of achieving some particularly dramatic effect to turn and twist the body in every conceivable direction, know that this 'axis' or magical central line must never be entirely broken if the voice is to retain the flexibility and ease so necessary to effective performance.

"In like manner, many singers and teachers of singing are familiar with the various horizontal devices for securing vocal expansion, the 'smiling' throat, the 'smiling' lips and cheeks, the 'smiling' nasal cavities and lips, the 'smiling' chest, waist and shoulder blades, all pitted against the 'long' jaw, the 'long' spine, the 'long' torso, the 'long' throat and neck, confronting the harassed singer with the somewhat formidable task of keeping two mutually antagonistic processes going in his body at one and the same time.

“All these techniques are revelations of a great truth, namely the universal significance of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which pervades every minute area of life, hidden away in every little thing and available to all who will seek it in reverence, humility and love. The symbols of God are everywhere, we need only to open our spiritual eyes in order to see them. For as Emerson has so aptly put it:

‘God Himself does not speak prose, but communicates with us by hints, omens, inference, and dark resemblances in objects lying all around us.’

“And so to Sir James Jeans' mathematical God I should like to add a God of music and to suggest that a God of economics, politics, history and art can yet be found; and when He is found, He will be the same God that we have always known, made more real by an increasingly rich association with all the concrete manifestations of our otherwise routinized and humdrum daily existence.”

But it awaited Jesus to take this law as deep as nature and as high as heaven, that permeates and harmonizes all things, and lift it to be the symbol of salvation from the mundane to the divine, the golden doorway that shows the way from earth to heaven. This symbol, that resides at the heart of every science, and of every act, becomes a veritable dynamo of life lifted to Eternity the way He uses it.

Jewelers place their trade mark upon a watch only after it has met every test of perfection. Manufacturers of automobiles do the same.

The stamp of the Cross lifts any art, any science, into perfection. The dancer who holds his body in perfect balance between the vertical and horizontal pulls, the singer whose voice responds exactly to the vertical and horizontal notes, are perfect in their fields. Especially is it true of the realm of the Spirit, that anything which has the stamp of the Cross upon it is perfect.

The arts which Jesus specialized in were the arts of Living and Dying. He showed us that only as we truly die do we truly live. "But how does death lead to life?" He merely points to the Cross. As the first man, Adam, passes away, the second man, Christ, rises in us. As we put down the Ego, the Soul is freed to rise to glorious heights. Jesus demonstrated to all of us that as we cross out the little self on the outstretched arms of Love, the Great Self rises triumphant within us. People of great power for God in the world are invariably people who hang on crosses, or who at some time or other have hung on crosses. Indeed the time shall come when we shall count our crosses not as liabilities but as assets. Our sufferings and sorrows, our defeats and disappointments, our heartbreaks and humiliations are not sources of weakness, but are reservoirs of power.

Here are some of the crosses that we all have hung upon:

First Cross: The Cross of Secretiveness

One of the hardest crosses to bear when dealing with sacred things is the simple admonition to keep our mouths shut. When one has had a great spiritual experience his first impulse is to run straightway and tell it- to all the world. One of the hardest lessons to learn is that a spiritual experience is in reality an adventure into a new country, entailing the learning of a new language. While the words that we use to explain it are the same old words which we have long been accustomed to using, the same words in the same old dictionary, nevertheless they now to us have an entirely new meaning.

We think we are telling our friends in plain, simple language, that which any child could understand, a very beautiful, helpful and inspiring message. As a matter of fact we are telling them something that they don't have the least inkling about. When they finally make this fact clear to us in unmistakable terms either of scorn or reproach, we are amazed that those nearest and dearest to us can't appreciate what to us has been the greatest experience of our life. While we think we have been telling them of Pentecost, they imply that we have been filled with new wine at the Tower of Babel. When we would go farther afield and tell our more distant acquaintances and neighbors we find that our "tongues" are "to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness."

Plumbers installing pipes for conducting water or gas or heat inform us that every new pipe presents a new opportunity for leakage. Unless the points of juncture are delicately sealed something will be lost. This is never more true than in human relationships. Every person we tell is another opportunity for diluting our experience and wasting our message. Not only is there danger that our friends (and enemies) will think we are showing off, but there is an actual danger that we shall be showing off. Jesus pronounced this warning when He said, "When you pray, go into the inner room, and close the door. The Father, who seest in secret will reward you openly." He gave similar instructions regarding giving alms, fasting, and spreading word of His miracles. We are to erase ourselves so completely out of the picture through secrecy that our right hand will not see what our left hand does. Jesus re-emphasized it many, many times, such as when He cautioned the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and later told the young man cured of blindness, "Tell no man."

The book, "Magnificent Obsession," which started Lloyd Douglas upon his career of writing best-selling novels, dealt with this theme. The famous brain surgeon recorded in the book found his power through giving gifts to others secretly. With every gift, thus given, great miracles happened in his operations.

A young college girl once brought to me a project, which I felt sure would bring good fortune to our college. When she finished speaking she added, "There is just one thing I wish to add, and that is that you don't tell anyone else that I had anything to do with this." The moment she said that I knew that the project would succeed. And it did, beyond my fondest dreams.

There has been no end of wonderful things happening in my own life and under my own observation from the working of the power of this Cross.

Second Cross: The Cross of Humiliation

We are not accustomed to thinking of the most humiliating experiences of our lives as our richest assets. But that is what they are. The time you forgot a piece you were reciting before the whole school, the time you slipped in the mud before all your associates, those and many others, if they helped to make you humble, are treasures storing wealth which neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.

The most humiliating thing possible to mankind is to be reduced to slavery. Joseph and Daniel, the most Christ-like of all the leaders in the Old Testament, were both slaves. One was sold into slavery, the other was seized into it. Jesus Himself was sold for thirty pieces of silver, the exact sum recorded in Deuteronomy as the price agreed upon for all men-slaves. Jesus stated the law of selflessness--and slavehood--when He said, "He who would be first shall be as a servant and he who would be greatest of all shall be as a slave." Paul took pride in calling himself the slave of Christ. Yes, willingness to be as low as to be a slave of mankind is one of the Crosses that leads through the portals of power into the Service of God.

Third Cross: The Cross of Discipline

One price that many have to pay for the blessed realization of true sonship of God is the faithful keeping of the Quiet Hour, where, through meditation, contemplation and communion, the doors of heaven open. Much must be relinquished,

much must be sacrificed to keep this hour. Sometimes habits must be renounced whenever an addiction threatens to block the way. Sometimes possessions are given up. Pride is one of the first things that must be "disciplined" away. Many men devote hours each day to rigid self-discipline to acquire this mastery of life. Luther arose an hour earlier to have uninterrupted time with God. Dr. Carver arises at four each morning to talk with his Blessed Creator. Gandhi sets aside one day each week for complete silence in the presence of God. Schweitzer left a great career to go into the wilderness of Africa, Grenfell left the luxurious home in England for the wilds of Labrador, Muriel Lester left a similar home for East End London.

Yes, the Cross of discipline repays one in spiritual power and service as much as any of the seven Crosses. Indeed, these first three Crosses might be said to form the three prongs of an all-enveloping Cross of humility.

Fourth Cross: The Cross of Suffering

The Crosses of discipline and secrecy we can choose at our own volition; the Cross of suffering, like the Cross of humiliation, is often thrust upon us. Occasionally it is brought upon us through our own mistakes, violations of natural law, or wrong thinking; but always (whether we bring it upon ourselves or not) it is sent to us as a means of crossing out the little ego and letting the soul emerge into greater control of our lives. Whether it is brought upon us by mistakes that we have made, or by divine mandate of God, what after all is the difference if we can seize it as an opportunity to achieve that inner clearing and that deeper surrender which brings one closer to the heart of God?

A young minister, Clifford Boren, before his thirtieth year became a victim of arthritis, and finally could move only one part of his body, his jaw. He lay upon his bed, as upon a Cross, arms outstretched, perfectly helpless. Finally he became half-blind. But he bore it all in such beautiful surrender to the Lord that his bedside drew people from all around, all finding inspiration to bear their own little crosses from the way he bore his larger cross. Finally the nurses in the great hospital where he lay asked him to conduct Divine Worship for them on Sunday mornings as their work prevented them from getting to church. So each Sabbath morning his bed was wheeled into a larger room, where it was tipped up so that he hung as one on a Cross, and there he preached a short sermon. In a few weeks the entire hospital was transformed by the magic of one man hanging on a Cross of suffering.

Paul preaching with weak eyes, Fanny Crosby, entirely blind, Helen Keller, blind and deaf and dumb, all these and hundreds of others prove to us the truth of the old adage that the best perfume is made from crushed roses that have been trod upon. This is the perfume of the soul that rises and sweetens the world from the hearts of those who bow beneath the Cross of suffering.

Fifth Cross: The Cross of Sorrow

All that I am and hope to be I sometimes think springs from the moment that my twelve-year-old brother died, and left me at the age of fourteen to carry on alone in the work that he and I had planned to do together. I do not need to expand upon this theme. In every, community, in every church, in almost every home, in every movement for good that the world has ever seen or ever known, we shall find that the starting point has often been the point of sorrow. From deep sorrow that culminates in complete surrender to God the one who sorrows finds new power coming to him from the unseen partnership in heaven.

Lincoln, after the death of Ann Rutledge, developed that Christ-like quality that all of us love. Tennyson, after the death of Arthur Hallam, flowered out into his poetic maturity.

Jesus gave this cross its classic statement in the Beatitudes when He said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." It has been my unique experience in thirty years of teaching, to find that the college boys and girls who catch this spiritual vision clearest have almost always been those who have a vacant chair in their home.

Sixth Cross: The Cross of Persecution

This is the greatest cross of them all. Joseph's power dates from the moment when the wife of Potiphar, through jealousy, accused him of a sin that he did not commit. As a result he was cast into prison and might have stayed there for the rest of his natural life had not his capacity to interpret dreams brought him to the attention of the Pharaoh. Moses had to flee to the desert because his act against the Egyptian bully was discovered. Out of these fugitives, these captives, these hunted and persecuted ones, came some of the very greatest spiritual leaders that the world has known.

There is nothing that seems to release so much power into spiritual work, as for an innocent man to be accused falsely, and for good people to believe him guilty. It is not the accusation that is so serious as the betrayal by good persons who believe the Judas' remark and make capital of it from jealousy of the one who was wronged. The English soldiers were not so much to blame for the burning of Joan of Arc as the French Churchmen who betrayed her into the hands of the British, because they, the priests of orthodox religion, were jealous of the power this prophet who heard the voice of the Holy Ghost was getting over the people of France. Joan's influence will long outlive the influence of the churchmen who persecuted her, just as the influence of all the persecuted ones will outlive the power of those who would build upon their fall.

There is hardly a great man but who has been subjected at one time or another to the insidious whispering campaign of those who would destroy him. Perhaps no one in history was subjected to more of this than Jesus. In our own nation no one was attacked in this way more than our saintly leaders, such as Washington and Lincoln. The Cross of persecution creates more power for the intended victim than all the crosses that have gone before it. Jesus climaxes His wonderful Beatitudes with this sweeping and far-reaching assertion: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Seventh Cross: The Cross of Atonement

If those are blessed who are persecuted when they do not sin, still more blessed are those who go out of their way to take upon themselves the sins of others, and die that others may be saved. Many have done this for the weak and the helpless, but it awaited Christ to do it for the sinners as well. The thief, the harlot, the outcast, those who others rejected, Jesus took to His heart. Herein was He glorified that He being innocent took the sins of all mankind upon Himself and dying as a common criminal, despised and rejected of men, crossed out the sins, erased them from the Book of Records, and as mankind turns in repentance and gratitude to Him, He sets them free.

Because Christ died a ransom for us, why should we have to hang upon this Cross? Jesus did it once and for all. That is true. We do not need to hang upon it, but in this weak and erring world, no one who would help his brother can avoid at times bearing this Cross. A Bishop seeing a drunkard lying in the gutter said,

"There, but for the grace of God, might be I." I who did not inherit an alcoholic's appetite must help the alcoholics. I who was born in a home of Love must bear some of the burdens of the criminal who was born into a home of hate. Why should not I, who am fortunate enough to be born into a home of plenty, share with one who is starving? What if we are misunderstood? What if people say of us as they said of Jesus, "He eats with publicans and sinners?" Yes, we, too, will find strength beyond our power to describe when we, like Simon of Cyrene, help to carry for a little way the atoning Cross of Christ.

All seven crosses Jesus bore. For thirty years he carried the Cross of Secrecy. Bound, beaten and spat upon, He knew the Cross of Humiliation. The Cross of Discipline He bore for forty days in the wilderness, and again in declining the crown when they would make Him King, but above all in keeping every concern of every minute of the day in complete subjection to the Will of His Heavenly Father. Suffering and Sorrow and Persecution met Him upon every road. But while He was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, He did not let the crosses He bore crush Him down. Instead they lifted Him up. Each cross was to Him a source of additional power. And so great were the crosses, and so great was their lifting power, that the whole world has come to know the truth in His prophecy, "And I, if I be lifted up, shall draw all men unto me."

Let us pray that we may cross out the little self--not on the swastika of impermanence where human hate, human energy and human power blasts itself to pieces, and all finally resolves itself into its native nothingness--but on the seven crosses of Christ, where He, in answer to our prayer, may cross out in us the little "i" with a dot over it on the outstretched arms of Love, and let us know the bliss of truly being branches of Christ the Vine, and thereby entering into the complete joy of our Lord.

See: Chapter 2 - The Blood
Chapter 3 - The Name

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