

Good Friday

March 29, 2024

### Cross-Eyed

*“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame ...” Hebrews 12:2*

Today, we fix our eyes on Jesus, **“... the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame ...”** (*Hebrews 12:2*). Our focus upon Christ the Crucified is enhanced by a painting from Salvador Dali printed on your bulletin covers and displayed here on the walls. Dali's painting is titled, *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, and is based on a sketch made by a 16<sup>th</sup> century friar that really impacted Dali.

As we view this painting, there are three really unique features that distinguish this work of art from nearly any other depiction of the crucifixion. The first unique feature is the perspective of the piece. The angle of the crucifixion isn't the most common angle taken by artists. The second unique feature is Jesus' appearance. This painting highlights beauty in this moment instead of the unfathomable gore. The third unique feature is the location of this painting. The setting for this painting isn't the historic location of Calvary but rather is inserted into a scene of the artist's own home landscape. As we ponder these unique features of the painting, our reflections will be summed up with verses from the song, *How Deep the Father's Love for Us*.

Whenever we consider Jesus' crucifixion, I think the more natural angle we imagine is looking up at Jesus suspended on the cross. This point of view is commonly depicted in our churches. Some churches have large crucifixes hanging in their buildings. Many churches, like ours process a crucifix for certain services, and as that crucifix is processed, it is raised up, again drawing one's eyes up towards it. Even most of the language of Scripture, describes this upward perspective towards the cross. And honestly, this approach makes sense as we try to place ourselves into this crucial moment.

Yet, the perspective of the painting before us is the opposite. Instead of looking up at Jesus upon the cross, we are shown an angle looking down upon Jesus' bowed head. It seems as if the artist is attempting to broaden our perspective by highlighting the view of God the Father looking down on His Son's sacrifice. Instead of looking up at the ugly horror of Christ's suffering through our own eyes, we are shown deep and vast love through the Father's eyes as He peers down on Jesus' full and complete payment for the sins of the world.

Given God the Father's eyes for just a second through this painting, the gory glory of Jesus' crucifixion is revealed. Jesus' endurance of the cross, His despising of its shame, pales in comparison to the glorious foundation and perfection of salvation for all that Jesus' suffering actions won. And because of Jesus' glorious actions upon the cross, the Father's love is now extended and delivered to us.

*How deep the Father's love for us / How vast beyond all measure / That He should give His only Son / To make a wretch His treasure / How great the pain of searing loss / The Father turns His face away / As wounds which mar the Chosen One / Bring many sons to glory.*

Along with the unique perspective of this piece, Christ's appearance stands out in this artwork. We don't see Jesus' face in this painting. We are protected from His profile of pain. We avoid the agony in His eyes. We escape the exhaustion exuding from His face. His bowed head is pristine untouched by thorns. His body isn't marred with bloody wounds. Even the places where we expect to see the nails in His hands and feet are covered up without even the slightest trickle of blood.

And yet, the lack of these gruesome and anticipated details isn't a denial of the great suffering that Christ experienced for the world's sin, for our sin. Instead, this painting depicts Jesus bearing the burden of our sin upon His shoulders. With head bowed, back curled and arms unnaturally extended, we can almost see sin's weight physically resting upon Jesus like it was some massive stone. So, even without all the horrific details of this moment, the gravity of sin is shown.

The absence of wounds and blood in this painting allow us to see Jesus' willing strength to endure the cross and despise its shame. The muscles of Jesus' back and shoulders are more clearly defined for us to recognize and appreciate the power of the Son of God to hold up under sin, death and Satan's greatest attack. The covered nail holes remind us of Jesus' sacrificial choice that kept Him on the cross. It wasn't merely the nails or our sins that held Him there, it was joy set before Him, the salvation of many, your salvation and mine, that led Him to this point. Without regret or resentment, Jesus made sure to finish the salvation He set out to accomplish for you and for me.

*Behold the man upon a cross / My sin upon His shoulders / Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice / Call out among the scoffers / It was my sin that held Him there / Until it was accomplished / His dying breath has brought me life / I know that it is finished.*

Truth be told, there's more to this painting than our image here shows. What you see before you is the upper half of a larger picture. The lower half reveals a scene from the artist's home when this was painted. While Christ and the cross dominate the painting, underneath is a depiction of a body of water with a boat and two fishermen. So, the full experience of this painting then, has this crucifixion scene filling up the dark sky above this peaceful body of water.

You see, instead of peering back into history, this piece highlights the impact and reality of this crucifixion moment in the artist's present time. Christ's death on the cross has ongoing purpose for each generation following that darkest day in history. There is peace on earth in light of the ransom Christ has paid and sealed through His death on the cross and rising from the tomb. The beauty and gift of that original Good Friday, is that for believers in Jesus, each and every day, each and every moment this side of heaven, is covered by Jesus' willing sacrifice on the cross in great anticipation of the long-awaited return of the Lamb who was slain.

Today, we focus on Christ the Crucified, and as we do, this truth becomes clear, our lives are forever "cross-eyed". Just like our painting's depiction, Christ's crucifixion fills and covers our lives. It is a gift greater than anything else we could value and treasure in our life. The horror, pain and anguish of Jesus' suffering and death don't simply stay reminders of our guilt and failures. No, because of Jesus' resurrection from the grave, those moments are also the beautiful proof of our God's, our Savior's, sacrificial and joyful love for us. May we remain fixed on Jesus, **"... the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"** (Hebrews 12:2) Amen.

*I will not boast in anything / No gifts, no power, no wisdom / But I will boast in Jesus Christ / His death and resurrection / Why should I gain from His reward / I cannot give an answer / But this I know with all my heart / His wounds have paid my ransom.*

In Christ the Crucified,

Pastor Dan