

death. Withholding forgiveness, refusing repentance, and neglecting to be kind are often examples. God leaves people up to their choices (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) when they are so stooped in sin.

The thief would die with his last words being ones of condemnation. Let us be careful not to allow hard circumstances to lead to our rejecting of Jesus.

The Cross of Repentance.

While death bed repentance in the denominational sense is unbiblical, here is a case of true death bed conversion. One can be saved up until their dying breadth (Hebrews 9:27). The threat of death makes one realize his spiritual state. Some have repented and obeyed hours before death; the thief on the cross was one of them. This thief was a robber (Luke 23:39), may have been a Jew like his counterpart, and was in terrible pain. At first, he railed on cross (Matthew 27:44). This cross represents those who give their life to Christ, especially in the final hour. The man on this cross is very admirable because:

He feared God. One can imagine the look on the thief's face as he hears the blaspheming words of the other thief. Perhaps this other thief dwelt upon Ecclesiastes 12:13 if he was familiar with his Bible.

He believed. Note some things about which he had conviction:

- *He believed in judgement.* If not, he may not have answered the thief.
- *He believed himself to be a sinner.* He said, "And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds."
- *He believed in Jesus' innocence.* He said, "but this man hath done nothing amiss."
- *He believed that Jesus was special.* He called Him lord. Perhaps he knew about His deity or Messiahship too.
- *He believed he could be saved.* He wanted Jesus to remember him.
- *He believed in the kingdom.* Perhaps he heard about the kingdom from John (Matthew 3:1-2).

He repented. Unlike the other thief, this thief

knew he needed to repent. He understood his wrongdoing and knew it was just for him to be punished for his past actions. Perhaps he was present at the teaching of John in Luke 3:2-15. Jesus' words still ring closely in our ears today: "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

Because of the thief's actions Jesus offered words of comfort[4] (Luke 23:43). The words likely fell upon his ears like rain does on dry ground. What if the thief would have died with another band of men? Jesus' words are a beautiful picture of His mission. He was saving souls literally up until his final hours on the earth. Only Jesus was qualified to make the statement He did to the thief (John 6:68; Acts 4:12). The thief would die today, but live forever with God. Truly, God's patience is with all men up until their last dying breadth.

Both thieves had the same sins, state, and sentence, but they **CHOSE** two different decisions.

The three crosses on Calvary are an important resemblance of three different things: Rejection, Repentance, and Redemption. Each cross bore a man with a different attitude. One full of anger, one of humility, and one of love. If you were to be put on a cross like the two thieves, what would you do?

Endnotes

[1]<https://www.lccofc.org/sermons/three-crosses/>

[2]Some points come from:

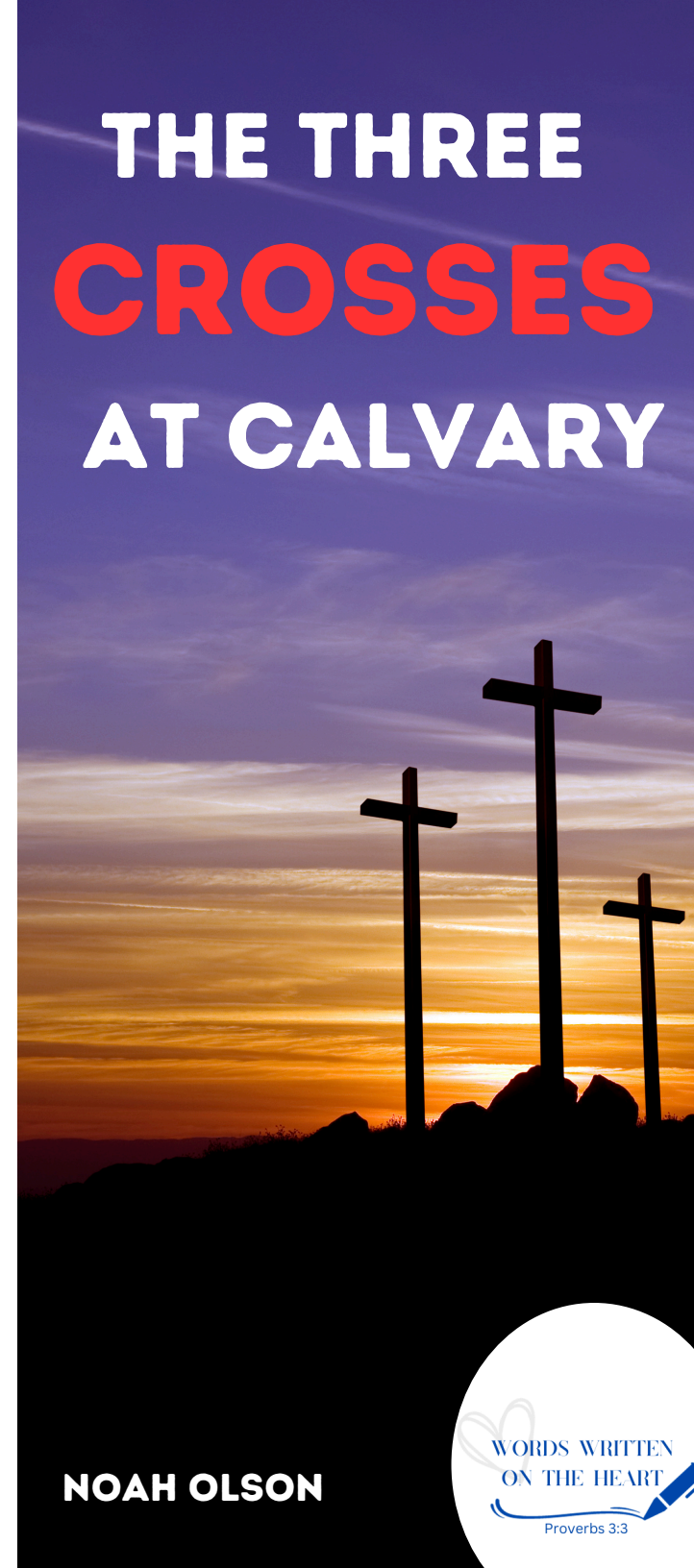
<https://southlogancoc.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/9/3/42938811/anexaminationofthreecrossespt2.pdf>

[3]<https://dianaleaghmatthews.com/way-cross-leads-home/>

[4]Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-6). He has all authority (Matthew 28:18) so He could forgive this repentant thief. The ONE baptism (Ephesians 4:5) was not established until after Jesus rose from the dead; therefore, the thief could not have obeyed that command. Instead, he was obligated to follow the Law of Moses. Too, he may have been baptized under John's baptism.

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THE THREE CROSSES AT CALVARY



NOAH OLSON

WORDS WRITTEN
ON THE HEART

Proverbs 3:3

We can learn a great deal about someone as they sit on their death bed. One's deathbed can leave a lasting impression for those watching and waiting with them. One's death bed can involve, confessions, regrets, anger, sadness, joy, or perhaps conversion. Lessons can be gleaned from such an important time in a person's life. Let's go to a specific deathbed setting recorded almost 2,000 years ago. No other deathbed has gained more familiarity than the one at Golgotha (Matthew 27:38).

One could divide the three crosses as follows

- Redemption for sin.
- Rebellion in sin.
- Repentance to sin.[1]

It was prophesied that Jesus would die with sinners (Isaiah 53:12). Each cross presents some powerful principles to be pondered. Beside the one in the middle, each cross represents a different disposition of mankind. If you were on the cross, what one would you be on?

The Cross of Redemption.

The central event of all existence is the cross. Everything before the cross looks forward and everything after the cross looks backward. It was prophesied about the death Jesus would die (Psalm 22:16) and the terrible pain He would face (Isaiah 53:3-7). The cross of redemption is the most important cross for without the cross of Christ no man would be saved. This cross was:

A cross of peace (Colossians 1:19-20).[2] Sin brings much confusion and weariness and ultimately separation from God. The word "propitiation" means appeasement (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). The cross was the means by which man could appease the wrath of God (Romans 5:8-9) and sinners could be set at one with God. Jesus went through pain so we could have peace (Romans 5:1). The veil was torn because of the cross, indicating men could have fellowship with God!

A cross of joy (Hebrews 12:2). Paradoxically, the cross was something about which to be joyous. Jesus' death paved the way so that men could enjoy

heaven one day. Not only was there the joy of man's salvation, but Jesus was also set at the right hand of God, being given an eternal kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14). The cross brought joy to the world.

A cross of sacrifice (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus left heaven to die a horrible death on the cross. He did not have to, but He did so out of love. He sacrificed everything in heaven so we could one day have everything in heaven. He became the sin offering (2 Corinthians 5:21) to pay the debt we could not. No man would die the most comforting death for one person, but Jesus died the most painful death for everyone.

A cross of love (1 John 3:16; Revelation 1:5). Maximillian Kolbe said the "cross is the school of love." The greatest example of love is the one which involves a life (John 15:13). The cross is the manifestation of God's love (1 John 4:9-10). How much does God love us? A cross will tell the story.

A cross of unity (Ephesians 2:16). Death unifies. People become closer during hard times. The death of Jesus brought the Jews and Gentiles together. It also brings every race, gender, and nationality into one body (Galatians 3:28). One can be baptized into one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) because of the ONE death of Christ. As families are unified at one's death, God's family are unified because of the death of Christ.

A cross that ended a system (Colossians 2:14). Death is the cessation of life. The cross ended the second dispensation (The Mosaic System). At the death of Christ, men were no longer bound by the Law of Moses and were not required to offer sacrifices for sins; observe days, months, and years; and were no longer under the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7:12). While the Old Law just rolled back sin (Hebrews 10:1-4), the New Law takes it away (Hebrews 10:16-17). **Jesus' death was a Declaration of Independence from the law of Moses!**

The cross of Christ is precious. The preaching of this cross is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). The cross of Christ points men to heaven. "A London police officer came upon a lost child who was unable

to tell him where he lived. Finally, amid sobs and tears, the child simply said, 'If you will take me to the Cross, I think I can find my way home from there.'"[3]

The Cross of Rejection.

Scripture provides us with many examples of people who rejected blatant truth. One of the greatest examples is the railing thief on the cross. He was a robber (Luke 23:39), perhaps a Jew, and was in terrible pain. This thief had a blind or hardened heart (Ephesians 4:18). Observe what this thief on the cross did:

He blasphemed the Son of God (Luke 23:39). The Greek word for "railed" is blasphemo and it means to blaspheme. Blasphemy of God's name was punishable by death under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 24:10-16), imagine doing this right in front of the Son of God!

He did not believe (Luke 23:39). He said, "If thou be Christ." The first step of rejection is to disbelieve that Jesus is the Son of God. It has been said that belief is the greatest requirement because it is the first step in one's obedience to God. There are billions who refuse to believe in the Son of God; this thief was one of them.

He was selfish (Luke 23:39). He was not focused on the salvation Christ offered, but on being saved from this present condemnation. He perhaps had heard about Christ's miracles, but He cared only for himself. Many today are on this cross because of their selfishness. They do not mind heavenly things, but earthly things.

He had no repentance. One said he had no respect for civil law or divine law. He was not sorry for what he had done. Instead of seeking to be free of sin, he wanted to be free of consequences, as many do today. One said "if the heart becomes hardened, the eye becomes dry." No tear for his sin fell from his eye that day.

He stood face to face with Christ and still rejected Him. It takes one hard heart to reject Jesus while standing right next to Him. An opportunity was given, but he refused. Many are hard hearted up until