

Cody, 1912

"THE CALL OF THE CROSS"

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"Lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect," and context. - 1 Cor. 1:17-31.

This verse clearly implies that the divine will must find human expression, or it is inoperative. This at least is true of the divine will in its purpose of love. The human instrument is necessary. It is the wire that carries the power to otherwise dead machinery.

Not only must the divine will find human expression, it must find proper human expression. The human instrument is not a mere wire, but must, in its measure, answer to the purpose which seeks expression. Is the divine justice to be expressed? Then human justice must be the instrument. The divine love must find shipment in human love; the divine suffering, in human suffering; the divine zeal, in human earnestness. The music of heaven must find the chords of the human heart in tune with itself, or it is never heard on earth. I am persuaded that the interdependence of the divine and the human is deeper and minuter than we often think for. It is a partnership that involves all the purposes of religion in so far as those purposes seek to become operative in human history.

And it is this which makes the revelation of God's purpose not merely a revelation of fact, but a call to Christian people. God reveals what he loves that his people may love that thing, that in their love God's love might become a fact in history. If he reveals his hate of any iniquity, it is that his people might in their hate give his wrath a channel. If he reveals a glorious future of peace and brotherhood and justice, it is not a mere prediction of what will be whether or no; but it is a future for his people to adopt and work for. And thus God's predictions are living words moving through the conscious faith of his people towards their own fulfillment. If there is a revelation of divine power, of the power that over-turns strongholds, of the power that brings all things into subjection to God, even this is not so much a revelation of fact, as it is a call to men to put forth their energy in that direction that the omnipotent power of love might have its opportunity. What a paradox! Our feeble strength must stretch forth its arm to give omnipotence its needed instrument! And yet it is true. The Apostle implies it all when he speaks of his care in preaching "lest the cross of Christ be made of none effect." Our religion, in all of its parts, is both a revelation of fact, and a call to God's people.

### THE CALL OF THE CROSS

I have come today to speak on the call of the cross. What does this revelation call for? What is the proper response that we should make to it? What is the human condition of its effectiveness? This is a large question; and I will confine myself only to a part of the answer which this passage gives.

From it, I think that we can see that the response which the Apostle made was this: He gave to the cross a faith which mirrored its reality and its greatness. He offered to the cross a heart and life on which its image was impressed even to minuteness. If we could not see the cross, but could see Paul's heart, we could know what the cross is. He gave it a life that reflects it. He reflects it both in its reality and in its greatness. But it is especially to this last, its greatness, that I will call your attention today.

But is there any difference? If the cross is real, it is great. If it is a fact that the Son of God redeemed man by his death, then that fact is the greatest and most significant event and treasure of the human race. It is greater than any institution or possession of the race. It is greater, or as great, as the creation of the race itself. If it is a fact, it is not possible to overstate its greatness. And on the other hand, if it is insignificant, it is not a fact. To make redemption less than anything is to deny it. The reality and the greatness of the cross are correlative terms. The one necessarily implies the other. But we will look

today into the Apostle's faith to see only the greatness of the cross. The passage before us leaves us no doubt of this truth.

COMPARE PAUL'S ATTITUDE WITH THAT OF THE GREEK

One of the things which the Apostle did, that has caused some people embarrassment, was his rejection of the Greek philosophy. But he did reject it. He rejected it on principle; and with a finality which can leave no doubt as to the attitude of his mind. He did not reject all of its findings; but he did reject its fundamental aim. To him there was in it an irremovable antithesis to his gospel. And to him the gospel had completely discounted that philosophy; and he looked on it as among the things that perish. The reason for this is very plain. To the Greek, the aim of life was not truth, but rather the quest of truth. He sought for the truth about God, about man, about their relations, and about the relations of man to man. Especially did he seek for the constitution of the true human society. But always it was a quest, and life degenerated into the sensational habit of looking for something new. But to the Apostle Paul, truth had been revealed in the cross of Christ. God was revealed there, man was revealed there; all divine and all human relations were revealed there. In that cross was the foundation and constitution of the true society and kingdom. How could the Apostle Paul fall in with a tendency that meant that all that God had revealed in the cross was yet to be found? He refused the slightest compliment to such

a philosophy, even declined the use of its language lest he be misunderstood as endorsing its aim. "Other foundations can no man lay than that is laid", was his conviction declared in this connection.

But this gospel which was so much to him was foolishness to the Greek. Why this difference? Well, in the fact that his gospel was foolishness to the Greek, I think we have a sidelight on the Apostle's method of preaching the cross. He evidently did not preach it as a new theory of life, as any theory of life. That would have pleased the Greek. No, he evidently preached it as a fact, as the act of God. And I believe he did not disdain to dwell on the physical features of the fact. And to the Greek this substitution of a fact for philosophy was nonsense. Why? There is but one answer. To them the fact was insignificant; and being little, it was unreal and negligible. But to Paul, it was not insignificant. And just here was all the world-wide, eternal difference between them. To him, it was the redeeming act of God. In it God was revealed. In it, men were saved and made brothers. On it the kingdom of God and the eternities rested. To the Apostle, it was a great, dominant, sovereign, exclusive, universal act, that outweighed all the theories of the world, that set at naught the greatest of human philosophies as the prattle of children. It came into his mind with

all the certainty and power of a fact and enabled him to pronounce a definite judgment on the systems of antiquity that will last to all eternity. Hear that triumphant cry - "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

COMPARE HIS ATTITUDE WITH THAT OF THE JEW

The cross was an offense unto the Jew, not because of the stigma of the crucifixion, not because of its idea of the atonement, but because it did away with all the special privileges of the Jew and his superiorities. It leveled him; leveled the classes in his race; leveled the best to the place of the sinners, leveled his whole race with other races. His was a religion marked all over with the signs of superiority, and he asked that all that came to him come with the same signs. The cross refused to do this and it was not only foolishness, it was hated. Of those Jews who did accept the cross, the majority tried to turn it into a badge of superiority for their own people. They did not and would not be controlled by it. They refused to become evangelical or missionary; and held all their pride and divisions and exclusiveness, at the very same time they held the cross. Thus they perverted the cross and refused to lose anything by it.

But the Apostle was a Jew of the Jews, He was rich in the holiest treasures of his race; and by the cross

suffered the loss of all things. Yet he gloried in the cross. Why was this difference? Here again we come back to the same answer, the relative size of the cross. To the Jew, the cross was less than his national possessions. In it, he lost all and gained nothing but disgrace. To accept it was at the sacrifice of the achievements of his race, and in their place he received social degradation. But to the Apostle, it was otherwise. He did not undervalue the inheritances of his race. But he did not feel that he lost anything or was lowered by the cross. The glory of the old was lost in the better glory of the new. Old fellowships were superceded by higher and better. The new kingdom created was holier and greater than that which had been brought to a close. To Paul there was gain and elevation. By the side of his new wealth in the cross of Christ, the inheritances of his race became rags, and he cast them away as so much refuse. The cross was all this to him because he saw its superlative greatness.

And because he did, he could not, as did some of his countrymen, hold it in words, and deny it in fact. Rather he surrendered his very being to the cross to be completely remade. He gave his whole life to its missionary purpose, nor did he ever hesitate a moment in carrying out its moral and social demands. As he saw it, the cross must be the dominant and regulative principle of all human life, not one single thing was

allowed existence that denied it in word or deed. He put Jew and Gentile dog to eating together at the same table. He laid ruthless hands on the holiest institutions of Moses and burnt them before the cross as he did the books at Ephesus. He demanded that "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." There was nothing in all human life that was allowed to contradict it. It contained not one word that he was afraid to speak, or obey, or carry out. Its greatness mastered him, and led him in triumphant conquest over the world.

#### THE NEED OF TODAY

My brethren, I believe that the call of the cross today is for a faith like this, a faith that seeks to express anew its greatness.

This is, I think, our greatest theological need, though it is not of that I wish to speak now. I sometimes fear that we spend too much time in theorizing about the death of our Lord. Such a tendency seems to imply that we have forgotten the magnitude of the fact. I am sure that all erroneous theories find their soil in a little cross. The moment the cross becomes to us great, the very foundations of error are cut away and nonsense perished in its holiness. It is as impossible to have radically false views of the atonement before a great cross as it is to be an infidel before the great white throne.



### TAUGHT BY APOSTLES

The New Testament leaves this in no doubt. The Apostle of whom we have been thinking today was ever exhorting his brethren to abundance. You remember how he closed one of his greatest discussions: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord." In those prayers for his churches in which he agonized with God as did Jacob at Peniel this was their burden: "That the Lord may make you to increase and abound in love." And from his trembling knees he rose to write them, and you can feel the throb of his prayer in his words: "I beseech you brethren, that you increase more and more." And what was his marvelous description of Christian love? We all know it: "Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things; endureth all things; love never faileth." And with him agree his great fellow Apostles. When the Christian was exhorted to add virtue to virtue in his character, he was told, "If these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." When brotherly love is commended, it is added in the same breath, "See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently."

### WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

But this truth, as we might expect, receives its greatest emphasis in the teachings and example of our

Lord, "Herein is my Father glorified that he bear much fruit and so shall ye be my disciples." Jesus said that he came "that men might have life and have it abundantly." He said that from them who received his spirit there "should flow rivers of living water." It is not enough to have a little fruit. It proves nothing. The poorest of the good ground bore thirty-fold, and the best could not stop within the limits of nature. Men must double those talents which the abounding grace of God bestows. When Jesus drew a picture of normal Christian life, from whatever point of view he pictured it, he gave something rich and full. If he pictured Christian benevolence, it was in the Samaritan who went beyond anything ever before heard of in his wonderful care for an alien. If he pictured repentance, it was in the humility of the publican who could not look up to heaven. In forgiveness, men were to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven. There were to be no limits to their patience, or forbearance or faith. In their abounding love and confidence, they were to honor every check which friend or foe drew on them. Jesus could not conceive of any run on a true bank of Christian charity that could bankrupt it.

#### THE EXAMPLE OF THE LORD

And what was true of his teachings was illustrated

in his life. It seems that there was not anything that our Lord could do just a little of. If he preached, it was "till the evening was far spent." If he cured, it was to "heal them all"; if he journeyed on a mission, it was to all the over two hundred villages of Galilee; if he fed people, it was a "vast multitude"; if he prayed, it was "all night,"; if he fished, it was to catch them until "the net almost brake", and the "boat began to sink"; if he forgave, it was to see the prodigal afar off, to run to meet him, to fall on his neck and kiss him, to give the robe, the sandals, the ring, and to set the angels of all heaven singing with the joy of his welcome. Religion with him was an overflowing greatness.

#### THE GRAPES OF ESCHOL

And in their measure, this was true of his apostles and his first disciples. Whether we look into their minds at the intellectual fruit, or into their social church life, or at their labors and their sufferings, or at the result of their life work, we are astounded at the abundance. They were the men who spied out the new Canaan, and they returned bearing the marvelous grapes of Eschol.

#### THE HUMILITY SIDE OF RELIGION

My brethren, it is a New Testament truth and needs to be boldly affirmed that discipleship must have

the element of greatness in it if it meets the expectation of our Lord. There is, I know, a humility side of our religion. In fact, the stamp of lowliness is and must be on everything with which Jesus has to do. As to those called, they are not often great, for God hath chosen the weak things of the world; as to his ministers, they are earthen vessels; as to our instrument of war, it is foolishness to this world; as to the works of the kingdom, they are the lowly deed of charity; as to the classes among which we are to labor chiefly, they are the blind, the lame, the leper and the dead, they are the strangers, the poor, the sick and the prisoner, they are the little ones and those who are afar off. Woe to us when we lose sight of this our calling! Happy are the people who are not offended in their Lord! These things are humble. They are the mustard seed which is the least of all the seed.

But when I affirm that discipleship must have the element of greatness, I am not thinking of earthly greatness. Yet we ought not to be too quick to think that Christian work is always to remain insignificant even from a wordly point of view. It begins little, but always grows great. And when a work begins little, and remains little; when it abides in its original insignificance, it is not a mustard seed of the kingdom;

for that became the greatest of all the herbs; yea, it passed into the state of a tree, and the birds nest in its branches. But I speak today only of the spirit which a Christian must bring to his tasks, and I affirm that that spirit must be great to be Christian. It must be great in the faith that is brought to its tasks, in the consecration which those tasks cost; and in the multitudinous labors given to them.

#### THE DECEPTION OF THE LITTLE

My brethren, we should go back to Christ and his Apostles, to their words and their lives, to get the real meaning of our religion, that we might escape the snare and the deception of the little. And is there anything so deceiving as a little religion? A little fruit? A little praying? A little giving? A little work? A little consecration? A little religion has the appearance and some of the effects of true religion. It does not look like iniquity. It does not look like falsehood. It has nothing of the appearance of an enemy of Christ. But the truth is that a little religion is worse than no religion at all. There is enough to deceive and not enough to do any good. Sin itself is not so deceiving. The tree that was cursed had leaves. The foolish virgins had a little and it was their deception. The wise were concerned for a sufficiency, "lest there be not enough for you and for us", and it was their wisdom. The buried talent was something. To be forgiven fifty pence was something. To forgive seven times was something. But

these things were not enough. These were not Christian. How can that be called Christian when one does but little and wearies of that, gives but little and complains of that, prays but little and tires of that, forgives but little and is proud of that, is consecrated but little, and lessen that? How can that be called a rain where indeed a cloud passes over the land, but sends only a few drops to the parched earth? And yet what delusive power a little religion has!

#### THE MARK OF THE DIVINE

The truth is, my brethren, almost the chief thing that distinguished a divine religion from a human is its power to produce abundance. The powers of this world can to some degree do the things which Christianity does; and if our religion went no further than a little, it could not be distinguished from the world. Even the stony ground and the thorny ground can do something. You can find men in history who in some measure resemble Christ. There are heathen religions which to some degree produce good fruit; there are experiences, which to some extent, parallel the Christian experience, and there are charities which in a measure compete with charities of the church. There is resemblance. And there are people who because they see resemblance think that Christianity is only one of the religions, and is not entitled to say "Beside me there no other." Because they show likeness, they think they have proven identity.

Unfortunately, there are Christian apologists, who think the same, and hence feel called on to deny all resemblance. But the plain truth is there is resemblance between the human and the divine, and it has existed from the time the Egyptian magicians threw down their rods and "they also became serpents." But resemblance is not identity. There are other tests of the divine. And one of the greatest of these is the power to produce wonder after wonder, and in many realms. It is the capacity to abound in the good and the truth. For instance, other men can be found who in this or that resemble Christ, both in his teachings and in his character. But where in all the history of the human race, looking either before him or after him, can you find another who is to be placed by the side of the fulness of his mind, the completeness of his character, the richness of his personality, the all-preparedness of wisdom, the ceaselessness of his beneficent powers, the manifoldness of his labors, and his eternity embracing plans? Other men resemble him as they resemble God, and as completely fall short of him. And so of our religion. Resemblance is not enough. That which is divine is rich and manifold; and when a man or a church does not rise above the little, it does not rise above a sinful world. When the apostolic character of Paul's commission was

attacked, his reply was, "Are they ministers of Christ? I more, in labors more abundant?" And this is the sign manual of all commissions that bear the seal of Christ. Let me repeat once more, religion to be true must be great. No other kind matches the cross.

#### THE SIZE OF THE FAITH OF TODAY

My brethren, is our religion great today? Our faith? Our labors? Our giving? Our conquests? And our demands in the name of Christ - are these great? The question, it may be, is not easy to answer. I know well our tendency to belittle the present. We see so much of the present; of other ages, we see only what has survived. I will not undertake to answer my question.

But there are some thing which we, as a people, ought to look at and consider. They may mean, if we do not change them, that our religion will come to have the curse and stigma of littleness.

Is there not a tendency in our education to ignore the cross as a negligible thing? Is not the Greek about to capture our colleges? I can show you books written by Christians and written as if that yet was the search of the human mind which is revealed in the cross. I can show you class rooms and whole colleges, whose fundamental presuppositions do not take into account the fact that Christ has redeemed men and founded the only divine fellowship and



society. Or if the cross has consideration, it is treated as one of the schools. What do these things signify? Now, I do not believe that the cross has made useless human investigation; but I do believe that that education is false and un-Christian which ignores the cross, or treats it as one of the philosophies or religions. Education will never be true until in the cross it lives and moves and has its being.

Again, is the cross dominant in this country? Is it creating a divine fellowship among all classes and all races? Is it destroying all special privileges and offensive superiorities? My brother Pitt, in some remarkable editorials in the Religious Herald, has recently been calling our attention to the fact that in this country, in a hundred different ways, we place things above men. Could such be the case in a land where the cross was dominant? Would there not be an insuppressible outcry against these things if the cross was as great to any of us as it ought to be?

Again, is the cross dominant over the individual lives of our people in any great way? How hard it is to answer such a question I know. How impossible to give a yes or no answer; and yet it is a question that ought to be asked. How do our gifts to missions answer it - the gifts of our children, of our money,

of our thought, our time and influence? These walls bear mottoes and tables of figures which help to answer. I will not dwell on them. I will not recall to your memory what we spend on other things, on tobacco, on jewelry, on feathers, on chewing gum. You know the humiliating contrasts.

I will draw no quick conclusions from these things, but they certainly are asking us, who profess to believe in the cross of Christ, if our faith is a reality. We may well ask, can a faith be a reality that is surpassed? I lay it down as an axiom that a faith that is to convince the world that it is divine must do more than other things. That is not divine which is surpassed. It is no glory to God to stand second. God is always first. For a faith called divine to be surpassed, even though it does some things, yet it is discredited by the very fact that it is surpassed. The world spells the god of such a faith with a little g.

#### A LITTLE FAITH SPELLS AN EMPTIED CROSS

And the worst of it all is that such a faith, if it becomes characteristic of a people, empties the cross of its power. It makes it little. And a little cross can save no one. A little cross can not meet the needs of our Sunday schools. A little cross will fail on our own children. A cross that is emptied is emptied; and when it is made vain for one purpose, it

is not powerful for any. Here is the solemn truth; we must have a cross that conquers everything or it conquers nothing. It must be placed over everything if it remains over anything; it must be carried everywhere if it is kept anywhere. The cross of Christ refuses to have anything to do with parts. It demands the whole. The first commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind."

### THE DEMANDS OF CHRIST

This is the call of the cross: this consecration of our whole being. And it is nothing less than this that Christ expects of his disciples. My brother ministers, we sometimes hesitate to ask great things of our people, great gifts for missions, and for benevolence, and for education; great consecration of time in leaving business for the work of the Lord; the gifts of their sons and daughters for work in our own land and in the mission fields of the world. Let me say that we do not get this hesitancy from Christ. He told me to lay down absolutely everything and follow him; he called young men from the service and even from the funerals of their fathers. He commanded them to sell all that they possessed and give it away that they might take his cross. He said to all, "If you love life better than me, you are not worthy of me." He did not hesitate to send them to poverty, to exile, to jail and to death. And when he made these great demands, he was as calm as when he gave the invitation, "Come unto me all ye

that labor and are heavy lade, and I will give you rest." To him, the one was as naturally a part of discipleship as the other. Why should we Christians be surprised at the tremendous demands of our Lord? Our religion is a cross. Have we forgot the meaning of the word?