

March 29

The Mystery of the Cross

Part 2: The Lofty Cedar & the Lowly Cross

“This is what the Lord God says: ‘I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, so that it may bring forth branches and bear fruit, and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will perform it.’” (Ezek. 17:22-24)

We do not know what kind of wood Jesus’ cross was made from. For years, critical scholars claimed that no crucified criminal, like Jesus, would have a burial. Well, that was proven to be wrong in 1968 when an ossuary (a special “bone box” used primarily in Israel in the first century) was discovered just north of Jerusalem. In that ossuary was a heel bone, with a 4 ½ inch long nail driven through it, and bent at the end where it was embedded into a knot of olive wood. This man had been crucified, in a traditional Roman way, without breaking bones, but securing the feet to the cross. This archeological, historical find corroborated not only burial of the crucified but also the use of lowly (next sentence contradicts "lowly") olive trees for crosses.

Jesus was crucified, but it is very doubtful He was crucified on a cedar cross – a tree too valuable to be wasted on common criminals. But Jesus was no common criminal. He was God and King. At least a cedar cross would have *seemed* more fitting. But most likely His cross was of olive wood - a common, useful, but short humble tree. Jesus would be associated with humility, shame and sin, not glory – on that day we call “Good... Friday.” He was associated with *us* – and separated from His Father. Indeed, He was cursed (Dt. 21:23). As we know, Jesus’ cross was mobile. He carried it as a sign of public shame. God exalted the humble cross, putting it at the top - above all trees.

Although Jesus would invite people to ***“Take up your cross and follow Me,”*** people drive past crosses every day, without ever thinking about His invitation or the oxymoron of our God and King, nailed to a common little tree, shaped like a cross, between two criminals. Maybe if it (and duplicates of it near churches) were a 100 foot tall cedar cross, people would pay attention. But I doubt it. The Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro is just about that tall. It is a great tourist attraction, but it won't bring people to faith. Only Christ and the ***“word of the cross”*** can do that. (I Cor. 1:18)

The cross is real and powerful only if, like a nail, it pierces our heart - and sticks, by faith. We believe the mystery of Christ on the Cross is the conduit to connecting our soul with Holy God and King - Who took our curse – on that cross – so that we might become ***“the righteousness of God in Him.”*** (II Cor. 5:21)

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, You are our Glorious King, Whose glory was our shame - taken upon Yourself and nailed to the humble cross. Let us not seek the things of glory that the world seeks. Instead, help us seek the things of God – faith, mercy, fellowship with You. Help us reach vertically in love for You and horizontally in love for our fellow man. Give us Cross-shaped love. Thank You for showing us Your love that day. May we always believe in and carry that love to all we meet. Help us never go past another person without thinking what You did for them, and all of us, that **good Friday**. Amen.*