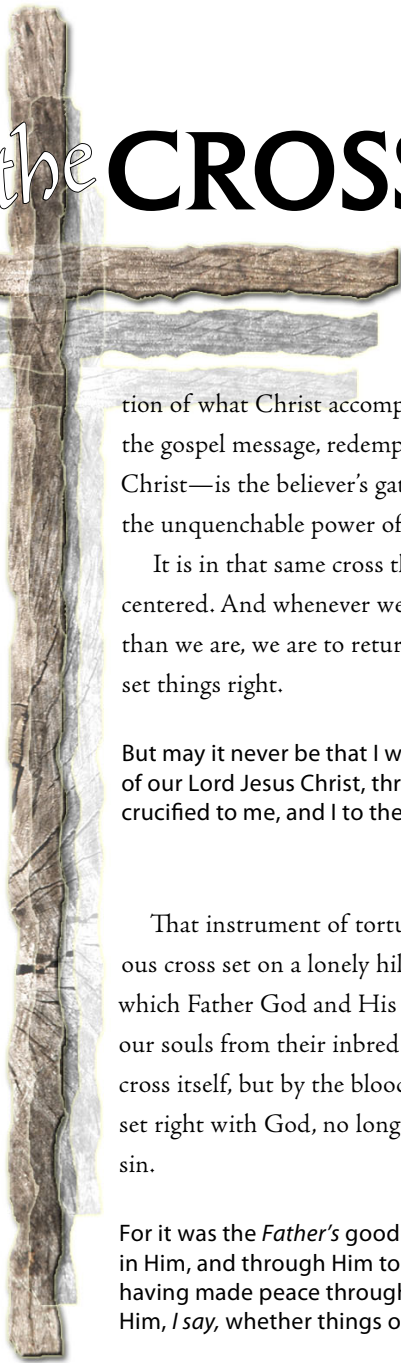


AFTER *the* CROSS



AFTER THE LONG WINTER MONTHS, mowing the lawn for the first time is a welcome and pleasurable contrast to plowing snow. Everything is turning green, fresh new life is springing up all around. Instead of a heavy coat and a muffler wrapped around the face, shirtsleeves are the uniform of the day. The air is cool and invigorating, but the sun is warm upon the skin.

Best of all, the breeze carries the sweet aroma of spring blossoms. And in these parts the fragrance of spring is defined by blossoming lilac bushes. Around this time of year the delicate scent perfumes the whole of our tended property, brightening the spirit as well as the olfactory sense.



And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."

Matthew 28:8-10

The fragrance of the cross and tomb is not the sour stench of death and decay, but the sweet perfume of spring. Jesus tells us, *Don't be afraid. Don't fear what I have been through. Do not fear my death, for it was necessary—for your life.* Beyond that, Golgotha and the empty tomb represent power—real power.

In the 1981 film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the French archaeologist and his Nazi masters seek the lost Ark of the Covenant. They think that possessing it means they will have a direct conduit to the supernatural power of God, thus making them unbeatable in the coming war.

In truth, however, the believer's conduit to the power of God is not the ark, but the cross—

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

—not as a physical relic (a la Steven Spielberg), but as a representa-

tion of what Christ accomplished on it. The *word* of the cross—the gospel message, redemption for man through the blood of Christ—is the believer's gateway not just to eternal life, but to the unquenchable power of God.

It is in that same cross that our lives are to be focused and centered. And whenever we are tempted to think ourselves more than we are, we are to return to the foot of the bloody cross to set things right.

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

That instrument of torturous execution, that horrible, glorious cross set on a lonely hill is to represent for us the lengths to which Father God and His Son would go to save us—to retrieve our souls from their inbred destiny of damnation. Not by the cross itself, but by the blood shed on it we have been reconciled, set right with God, no longer to suffer His wrath because of our sin.

For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:19-20



There is a sweet fragrance wafting from Golgotha. It is the fragrance of grace. And by it believers enjoy a life of eternal spring—a life in which fear has been replaced by power, in which failing effort has been replaced by a final sacrifice, in which God's wrath has been extinguished by the blood of the innocent Lamb.

The enduring message of the cross?

Life! Life in the risen and reigning Lamb of God.

