

## An Italian and His Crucifix

by Walter L. Wilson, M.D.

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The servant of the Lord has the privilege always of looking to the Holy Spirit for special wisdom in dealing with special cases. The story which I am about to relate illustrates clearly how the Lord of the harvest will direct the conversation when the points of view are quite divergent.

A convention of Christian young people had been convened and the chairman had requested me to give a series of message on personal soul-winning. The delegates brought with them unsaved friends in order that the messages might be a blessing both to the saved and to the unsaved. Among those accompanied by an unsaved friend was a young man who had formed the acquaintance of an Italian lad whose heart was quite dissatisfied with his religion. The first day of the convention these two sat together and listened to the messages, but gave no opportunity for personal conversation.

The message given the second evening of the Conference seemed to touch the heart of the young Italian, and he remained after the service for a personal talk. The Christian boy brought him to me, and we retired to one side away from the crowd and talked together about the great provision God has made for the soul. I did not know at the opening of that day that the Holy Spirit would give me the privilege of ministering to one of a foreign nation, nor to one of the Roman Catholic faith. We never know what lies ahead in the affairs of the day. It is our privilege to look to the Spirit to direct our steps and to make our contacts. The One who led Philip to the chariot on the Gaza road will lead you also on the road of life.

After the usual introduction, I inquired of Bennie whether he had a religious faith and if so, what it was. He replied, "I am a Catholic, but I cannot see that it has done me much good, nor that I have been much of a credit to it. My parents were Catholics and so am I. In the United States, however, I do not always go to the church and would say that I am not a very good Catholic."

"Did you enjoy the message this evening?" I asked, "and did you understand the truth that I was trying to make known?"

"Not very well," came the reply. "The religion you Protestants have is quite different from ours and I do not know that I really get the hang of it. I would like to know more about it, for it seems to me that you have something that I do not have."

I had noticed on various occasions when visiting Catholic churches that there was to be found on the wall just inside the door of the church, a large life-size crucifix.

"Where do you attend church?" I inquired.

"I go to St. Ann's."

"Do you not have within the lobby of that church a crucifix of Christ?"

"Yes," he said, "we do."

"I suppose that it has been placed on the wall to remind you of the death of Christ. Am I right?"

"Yes, that is what it is for," he answered.

"Can you tell me, Bennie, who Jesus died for on the cross?"

"Sure," he said, "He died for everybody."

"Yes, He surely did, but for whom particularly did He die? Do you know any individual for whom Christ died?"

"No, I do not," he said.

"Did it ever occur to you, Bennie, that it was for you that He was dying?"

"Oh, I suppose so," he answered, "because Jesus died for everybody."

"Yes, Bennie, but let us not think about 'everybody,' let us think only of your own self, because it is your soul that needs to be saved, and it is you individually about whom we are thinking this evening. Did He die for you?"

It is always difficult to get the sinner to apply the truth of God to his own soul. Satan would have the troubled heart thinking about

salvation in general instead of in particular. He seeks to keep the lost soul thinking about others rather than his own need. It had never occurred to Bennie that the One upon whose image he was gazing day after day, really loved him personally and died for him personally. I continued: "Bennie, if Jesus died for you on the cross, what good did it do you? Was anything accomplished by that death? What blessing do you get because the Saviour died for you?" The young Italian friend was nonplussed. This question had never before been presented to his mind. It had never occurred to him that there was any personal relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and himself.

Bennie meditated on the question for quite a while before answering. "I never had thought that Jesus did anything for me. Do I understand that His death was really for me and for my sins? How can I know that this is really so?"

In answer to this inquiry, we turned to I Timothy 1:15, and read: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

"If you are a sinner, Bennie, then it is evident that He came to save you. God in His Word puts it in a general way so that everyone will feel free to come and take advantage of it. The food in the restaurant is for everybody, but it only blesses the individual who comes and partakes of it. The dentist in his office, with all of his splendid equipment, is there to serve everybody, but only those are helped and relieved who come and turn their cases over to him. The Saviour did die for everybody, 'He died for all'; St. Paul says so. But you will only get the blessing of His death as you come personally and turn your own case over to Him and believe in His death for you."

Bennie listened very respectfully and attentively to this explanation, and began to perceive that the death of Christ had meant nothing to him personally heretofore. This was the first time he had ever been told that the Lord Jesus came to save him and had done the work at Calvary that would blot out all of his sins. "I have not been taught this way," he said, "but I believe that you are right. Certainly the Saviour would not die as a failure."

Immediately, I put the question to him again: "Bennie, what good did the death of Christ do you? What was accomplished in your life by His suffering and sorrow?"

"Nothing yet," he answered, "but I can see that something should be accomplished, because I believe that He is the Son of God, and that God sent Him to die to put away the sins of people."

"Did he put away your sins, Bennie?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I wonder if He did! How can I know?"

Turning to Hebrews 9:26, we read: "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Then I said to him, "If the work of Christ on the cross is not sufficient to blot out your sins, Bennie, then where will you go, or what will you do to get rid of those sins? There is no other Saviour and He is not coming back to die again just particularly for you."

"No, I suppose not," he said. "I believe that He did the work all right, but I just don't see how that will save me."

At this point we turned away from the thought of the death of Christ and took up the thought of the gift of Christ, reading in John 3:16 — "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Then I explained, "God has given Christ to you, Bennie, to save you. Christ is just now on the throne a risen, living, powerful Saviour, who is waiting for you to turn your case over to Him and for you to accept from Him the *gift* of eternal life. If you will come to the Lord Jesus just now and take Him for your own, He will immediately put your name in His book of life, blot out every sin stain, and make you His own child. Will you do it?"

As he stood in quiet meditation, my heart was going out to the Lord of the harvest to unfold to this lad the finished work of Christ and the sufficiency of the blood to blot out his sins. His bowed head was soon raised in radiant joy. He had trusted the Lord Jesus Christ. "I do take that Saviour," he said, "I believe that when He died for me, He blotted out my sins. I am so glad to know it. I have a new peace in my heart. How foolish I have been to look always at my crucifix, and never to think that it was for me He died, and that it was my sins He blotted out! I thank you very much for telling me about it, and I am happy to confess

that Christ is my own Saviour."

The Holy Spirit had brought this lad under the sound of the gospel, and prepared his heart for something better than a mere formality and an ancient tradition. Again, the Spirit of God took His living Word and cleared away the doubts, dispelled the darkness, and made Christ precious to another heart. May He lead every reader of this story in the same blessed path.

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