

**CHRIST THE BRANCH AND OUR CALL TO BEAR FRUIT  
(2) IN HIS BODY ON THE TREE**

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

John 19:31-37

Galatians 3:10-14

1 Peter 2:24

Jeffrey S. Carlson

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**SCRIPTURE**

<sup>22</sup>When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup>his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the LORD your God is giving you for possession (Deuteronomy 21:22-23 NRSV).

<sup>31</sup>Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. <sup>32</sup>Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. <sup>33</sup>But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup>Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. <sup>35</sup>(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) <sup>36</sup>These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." <sup>37</sup>And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced" (John 19:31-37 NRSV).

<sup>10</sup>For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law." <sup>11</sup>Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for "The one who is righteous will live by faith." <sup>12</sup>But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, "Whoever does the works of the law will live by them." <sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"— <sup>14</sup>in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:10-14 NRSV).

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24 RSV).

## MESSAGE

There are many themes in Scripture tied to a specific image. Christ and the branch would be an example. Today we are continuing a series that focuses on Christ as the Branch raised up and ties that theme to our bearing fruit for him in various ways. Each message will feature a key verse related to Christ, our Branch, and then applies that verse to how we should grow in our own faith as plantings of the Lord.

The key verse for today is from 1 Peter:

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24 RSV).

When we hear the word "curse," we tend to think in terms of "cursing and swearing." We think about someone using offensive language, perhaps remembering times when we used words that would have been better left unspoken. The Old Testament reading describes a different kind of curse. It is a serious curse, a condemnation, pronounced by God against anyone who is put to death by being hanged on a tree. According to the law as written in Deuteronomy, "anyone hanged on a tree is under God's curse." The one hanged on a tree was to be taken down and buried the same day so the land of promise would not be defiled. According to the law in Deuteronomy, anyone who did not conform to the words of God's law "by doing them" is also cursed. These harsh and terrible condemnations pointed ahead, down through the ages, to an even more harsh and terrible day yet to come— to a day when an innocent man would bear that curse.

Centuries later, on a hill outside of Jerusalem, the promise of the righteous Branch of David's line and the curse against one hanged on a tree came together at another kind of tree, the tree of the cross. Jesus the Messiah, the righteous Branch of David's royal house, was lifted up from the earth and hanged on a tree.

The cross was not literally a tree but it was given that nickname since it was an object made of wood that stood upright. The term "hanged" should not be understood in the modern western sense of a rope around the neck but simply as a term for capital punishment with the condemned being affixed, as it were, to the "branches" of this tree.

Jesus the Messiah, the righteous Branch of David's royal house, was lifted up from the earth and hanged on a tree, there taking the curse into himself. The world – long ago lost in the darkness of sin through the forbidden fruit of one tree – was plunged into darkness again as the innocent Son of God hanged from another tree.

Jesus was innocent. The curse was ours. The book of Deuteronomy states,

“Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them” (Deut 27:26).

The apostle Paul, in our epistle reading from Galatians, repeats that condemnation:

"Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law" (3:10).

The just condemnation of God rests on everyone who does not keep "all the things" written in his Law, on anyone who does not do everything that God's Law says. It isn't enough to try really hard to keep God's Law, to try and follow his will most of the time. It's not enough to say that you are at least better than the other guy who is obviously a much worse sinner. It's not enough to make excuses by saying, "Well, at least I'm not an axe murderer," or "I don't steal things." It's not enough to keep the Law of God 80% of the time, or 95% of the time, or even 99.9% of the time. And even if we could keep God's commandments 99.9% of the time – which we cannot – sin is not just a matter of doing or not doing things. Sin describes our standing, our status, before God. We are estranged from God. We are in a state of enmity with God. We are sinners. We inherited the stain of sin from our biblical parents and we justly and rightly stand condemned under God's curse: "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." That curse applies to you and to me.

There is nothing we can do to remove the curse. The curse of God against human disobedience and rebellion is lifted from us only because Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch of the house of David, took the curse onto himself. The innocent Son of God carried our sins in his body on the tree. Paul writes:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (3:13).

Recall that Jesus cried out from the tree of the cross,

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1).

The condemnation of God fell on Jesus so that – by God's grace, through faith in Jesus' name – it will not fall on us.

According to the Law, the one who was put to death by being hanged on a tree was to be removed the same day so that the land would not be defiled. Jesus died on Friday, the day before a Passover Sabbath. To fulfill the law, and in view of the coming holy day, the

Jewish religious leaders asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified criminals broken so that they would die quickly and could be removed from the crosses. But when the soldiers came to Jesus, they found that he was already dead. John, the disciple and gospel writer, gives us his eyewitness report:

"But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup>Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. <sup>35</sup>(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) <sup>36</sup>These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." (Jn 19:33-36).

The bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken. In like manner, the bones of Jesus were not broken. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (see Jn 1:29).

Jesus was taken down from the tree of the cross and buried in a sealed and guarded tomb. The sentence of death, first earned by our biblical parents, and daily earned by our own sin, was carried out against the righteous Branch of David's line.

But on the third day, God raised up his righteous Branch. The powers of sin, death and Satan that had cut Jesus down were in turn crushed in the death and resurrection of the Son of God. Jesus took our sin on himself and in exchange gave us his own righteousness. By God's grace, through faith in Jesus, our standing, our status before God, is changed-from condemned sinners to righteous sons and daughters! The holiness of God's righteous Branch is now ours by grace. The curse is removed and new life is given to us. Joined to Christ by faith, rooted in him, we are like the tree mentioned in Psalm 52, "a green olive tree in the house of God." Grafted into the life of the righteous Branch, we will live in God's presence, now and forever.