THE STRANGEST VERSE IN THE BIBLE?

Posted on June 23, 2016 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

People who write about the Roman Empire or the early spread of Christianity often write about theÂ *pax Romana*, the Roman peace. Across the Roman empire there was peace and security. Travellers, such as the Apostle Paul could coverÂ vast distancesÂ in relative safety. It was a remarkable situation and one that was not to be repeated for hundreds of years. It's no wonder that people write very enthusiastically about theÂ *pax.*

However, there is a dark underside to the "peace" that people don't talk so much about; the way in which it was imposed. For all of their supposed civilisation, their central heating and fine oratory, the Romans were a brutal bunch. The empire existedÂ on the back of dreadful slavery and through systematic violence. TheÂ *pax Romana* was maintained by brutally killing people who stepped out of line - often by crucifixion. The Roman peace was imposed by using the cross.

This is the background against which Paul wrote his letters and it demonstrates why I think that Colossians 1:20Â (when read in context)Â is the strangest verse in the whole Bible.

"... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

The Romans were quite used to the idea of making peace by shedding blood on the cross - they did it all the time. Only, theirÂ idea wasn't to reconcile people, but to exterminate anyone who threatened the state. Paul however, takes this familiar concept and turns it completely round. Christ, the creator, the one who is greater than the emperor (as he sets out earlier in the chapter), is the one who died and through his deathÂ he brings reconciliation and real peace. This one little verse isn't just a wonderful statement of Christian faith, it also undermines the whole structure of the Roman empire.

The cross, a brutal threat and a symbol of oppression is transformed by Christ's death into a symbol of hope. The Roman empire achieved many great things, but it did so at an incalculable cost of human misery and suffering. Christ is bringing in his kingdom, which will be far more peaceful than Rome could ever have managed, but he is the one who suffered.