

The Death Of Christ

By Johnny Ramsey

The world of today stresses the birth of Jesus. The Bible emphasizes His death. The early Christians met each first day of the week to remember the Lord's death in the memorial of His last Supper (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:26). Truly the cross of Christ is the pivotal point in human history. A study of the events surrounding the crucifixion of the Savior will but magnify the importance of His death. When one considers the glorious life of perfection Jesus portrayed it seems nothing short of tragedy that His life was violently taken from the earth. Why did the Son of God *need* to die? Why *did* He die? *How* did He die? What *lessons* do we learn from the Master's demise? It shall be the purpose of this brief lesson to notice each of these points.

"And Jesus, bearing his cross, went forth into a place called the place of the skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" (John 19:17-18).

I. WHY DID JESUS NEED TO DIE?

Was this cruel Roman execution necessary? Yes! Three dynamic reasons can be ascertained from the scriptures for such an answer.

(1) *The Remission of Sin*: In Hebrews 9:22 we learn of the necessity of "the shedding of blood" that our sins may be forgiven. The prophet Zechariah had foretold that a fountain would be opened for the cleansing of sin (Zech. 13:1). When the Roman soldier pierced the gentle side of Jesus as He was hanging on the cross, that fountain was opened (John 19:34). Christ was indeed the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He "washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5). Paul informs us that "Christ is our passover" (I Corinthians 5:7). Through our Savior we are delivered from death. Up to the time of Golgotha the finest hour in Jewish history had been the Day of Atonement. You can read of this important annual occasion in Leviticus the sixteenth chapter. Yearly, after offering a sacrifice for his own sins and for the people, the high priest would *figuratively* send the sins into the wilderness on the head of the scapegoat. Not until our Redeemer died could anyone *literally* be forgiven (Hebrews 9:15-17). Jesus needed to die for the remission of sins.

(2) *God's Eternal Purpose*: It is often difficult for finite minds to grasp infinite truths. Even when those truths are revealed unto man (Deuteronomy 29:29). Jesus said, "I am come down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). What was the Father's desire for the Son? In I Peter 1:18-19 we learn that it embraced the sacrifice of Jesus as the sin offering for lost humanity. Jehovah had warned the Devil in the Garden of Eden that one day the seed of woman would crush the power of evil. This promise was fulfilled when Christ died, after living a sinless life, and then arose from the grave. These events took "the sting of sin" out of death (I Corinthians 15:56 & Hebrews 2:14) and removed the power Satan had over mankind.

"For the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord" Romans 6:23.

(3) *To Reconcile Man to God*: When Adam sinned in the Garden mankind was separated from Jehovah (Isaiah 59:1-2). The perfect harmony and beauty of the creature with the Creator had been broken. It took the death of Christ to bring him back to God (Ephesians 2:16). Notice the comparison between a beautiful Messianic prophecy and a verified statement from the pen of Paul.

Isaiah 53:5

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Romans 5:10

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Therefore, we conclude that Jesus needed to die because man was alienated from God due to sin. It was heaven's eternal purpose that Christ's death should make it possible for this to be accomplished.

II. WHY DID JESUS DIE?

Under this heading we shall discuss those forces that contributed to His death. We have noticed the necessity of Christ's life being taken from the earth. Now we will see why such a tragedy occurred. *It was a combination of:*

(1) *The love of God*. "He commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

(2) *The weakness of man*. The betrayal by Judas, the denial by Peter, the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish nation—all of these things brought about the death of our Lord.

(3) *The cowardice of Pilate*. Even though he could find no fault with the man of Nazareth, Pilate condemned Him to death. Popularity meant more to him than principle.

(4) *The humility of Jesus*. The Son of God humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). In Gethsemane He said humbly: "Thy will be done."

(5) *Our desperate need of salvation*. Certainly the major reason for Calvary was the despicable condition of mankind. "There was none righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10). There was no hope apart from Christ Jesus. He gave His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). The Hebrew writer tells us that Christ "tasted of death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9). A very grateful apostle Paul stated that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15).

III. HOW DID OUR REDEEMER DIE?

A careful Bible answer to this question will certainly add depth to our appreciation of the Savior. First of all He died *openly*.

As Paul said, before King Agrippa, "these things were not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Jesus was executed during the Jewish feast of Passover. Historians tell us that two million Hebrews were in or about the city of Jerusalem for such an occasion. Secondly, the Man of Galilee died in a *noble* manner. Not once did He allow the pettiness of others to divert the will of God. When asked, "Art thou the Christ?" Jesus merely answered, "Thou sayest." So resplendent was He, even on the cross, that a centurion stated: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).

In the third place, Jesus died *vicariously*, that is, on behalf of others. In II Corinthians 5:14 we learn that "one died for all." Peter tells us that our perfect Example "bore our sins in his own body upon the tree" (I Peter 2:24). Jehovah made Him "to be sin for us even though he knew no sin." (II Corinthians 5:21). Fourthly, our Savior died *painfully*. The Roman scourging received prior to the actual crucifixion was enough to kill some men. The heavy burden of the cross was additional agony. Usually, in the first century when one was "nailed to the tree" he was laid on top of the crude cross while it lay on the ground. Spikes were driven sharply into the criminal's hands and feet. Then suddenly in excruciating pain, the cross would be projected between heaven and earth. These terrible things were experienced by the greatest One who ever walked the sands of time. The throng mocked Him; blood, from the wreath of thorns, flowed down His face. No wonder the hymn writer has touched our hearts with these words.

*"See from his head, his hands, his feet
Sorrow and blood flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and pity meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"*

Lastly, Jesus died *alone*. Peter had denied Him with a fervent speech; most of the apostles "followed afar off." A few faithful women were nearby weeping. Nicodemus and Joseph would later prepare His body for burial. Yet, for One who had done so much for mankind the scene about the cross was very lonely. From the Roman tree the Redeemer cried, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Father looked away from the Son for a moment to view fallen man. In that glance we have hope of redemption.

Praise God for His infinite love and Jesus for His willingness to offer His life that we might never die. A passage in II Corinthians 8:9 beautifully sums up this glorious result.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that,
though he was rich, yet for your sakes he
became poor, that ye through his poverty might
be rich. "

IV. LESSONS WE LEARN FROM THE DEATH OF CHRIST

There are four great lessons we learn as a result of the cross. Each point is a fundamental one as regards religion in our day. In fact, were these truths understood and embraced by all, there would be no religious division. Notice carefully the results of the Lord's sacrifice at Calvary.

A. The Law of Moses Was Abolished

In Matthew 26:28 we read that the New Testament was ushered in through the blood of Christ. In Romans seven we learn that men today are dead to the law that said, "Thou shalt not covet," that we may be spiritually joined to Jesus who arose from the dead. Paul plainly declares in Galatians 2:21 that Christ died in vain if we are still under the Law. In three distinct passages in Hebrews we read that Christ is the mediator of the New Testament and that He could not have been until after His death. Therefore, at the cross our Savior took away the first covenant. We are now under the last will and testament of the Lord (Hebrews 8:6, 9:16, 10:10).

Comprehension of this scriptural thought will answer the often-asked question about the thief on the cross. He lived and died *before* Jesus shed His blood of the new covenant. We live *after* that notable event. We are under the New Testament; the thief was subject to the Old Testament. While Jesus was on earth He had the authority to forgive sins as He chose (Matthew 9:6). But when Christ died, His law for man was revealed in the New Testament. The terms for pardon, sealed in His blood, must not be changed. According to the words of the Savior all accountable beings must now believe the gospel (Mark 16:16), repent of their sins (Luke 24:47) and be immersed in water (Acts 8:38 & 22:16). This arrangement will last till the end of the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

B. His Church Was Established

In Matthew the sixteenth chapter our Lord promised to build His church. Even "the gates of Hades" would not prevail against this decree. Evidently this refers to the Grecian idea of "the bars of death."

The enemies of Jesus thought that by putting Him to death they would forever destroy His influence. But, up from the grave our Redeemer arose. He empowered the Apostles to make the church a reality. On Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, Peter preached a magnificent sermon based on the triumphant death of the Son of God. That day, the church was formally established and the Lord added the saved to it (Acts 2:47). In Ephesians 1:20-23 we learn that Christ became the head of the church after His resurrection from the dead.

C. Our Hope of Resurrection

At the raising of Lazarus from the dead the Master made a statement that thrills our very souls. However, it took His own resurrection to make it possible. Do you remember John 11:25?

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

Paul tells us in the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians that Christ is the first fruits of those that sleep since He did arise from the dead. John reports that when Jesus comes again, "all that are in the grave shall hear his voice and come forth" (John 5:28). Brethren in the first century

comforted one another with the hope of one-day being raised to be with the Savior (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). In the sixth division of the grand book of Hebrews we read that Jesus became our forerunner into heaven by His resurrection. Thanks be unto God for such a precious hope.

D. The Spiritual Beauty and Significance of Baptism

A sincere study of the death of Christ will just naturally lead one to the subject of baptism. In Romans 6:1-5 we see that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is vividly portrayed when a person becomes dead to sin, is buried with Christ in baptism and subsequently raised to walk in a new manner of life. The identical point is referred to in Colossians 2:12. Thus, gospel baptism is neither foolish nor arbitrary. It is a necessary command of God for man that conveys the deepest spiritual meaning. The act of baptism puts a person into Christ (Galatians 3:27) where all blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3).

These are some of the grand lessons we learn as we meditate upon the death of our Lord. If we appropriate these blessings to our own lives we shall never really die. To such ones the second death (eternal punishment) hath no power. We agree with Wilbur Chapman who wrote:

*"One day when heaven was filled with His praises,
One day when sin was as black as could be,
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin,
Dwelted among men, my Example is He.
Living He loved me, dying He saved me,
Buried He carried my sins far away.
Rising He justified me . . . freely forever,
One day He is coming,
O Glorious Day. "*

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