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Why Jesus' Death Stands Out

by Tommy Peeler

In the first century, thousands were crucified. "During the last siege of Jerusalem, hundreds of crosses daily arose, till there seemed not sufficient room nor wood for them" (Alfred Edersheim). Of those thousands crucified, how many of the victims could you name? If crucifixion was such a common but horrible death, what makes the cross of Jesus' death stand out?

The Identity of the Victim

Who was He? He was God come in the flesh (John 1:1-3). He was the Maker of the world (John 1:10). He was the Word become flesh (John 1:14), and He came to reveal the Father (John 1:18).

The Innocence of the Victim

This is not to say that this never happened. No doubt, there were some people crucified who did not deserve it. However, even though they did not deserve death for the charges against them, they had committed sins and wrongdoings.

It is striking how many connected with the cross declare Jesus' innocence. Pilate (Luke 23:4, 14-15; 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6), Herod (Luke 23:14-15), Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19), Judas (Matthew 27:4), the thief beside Him (Luke 23:41), and the centurion (Luke 23:47).

New Testament writers often affirm Jesus' innocence of any sin (II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; I Peter 2:22; I John 3:5).

The Willingness of the Victim

No doubt many went to the cross fighting and kicking, but He went of His own free will (John 10:17-18; Matthew 26:39). He could have called a legion of angels to defend Him (Matthew 26:52-54). He went of His own free will. There was no other way they could have taken Him.

The Sacrificial Nature of His Death

He did not die for His own sin, but for ours (Matthew 20:28; 26:28; Romans 5:6-8; I Corinthians 15:3-4). Isaiah 53:4-7 dramatically presents this.

The Resurrection of the Victim

How many of those crucified were raised from the dead? He was (John 2:19-22; Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-35; John 20-21), and He gives hope to those who trust and build their lives on Him (John 11:25-26; I Corinthians 15).

This is an outstanding sermon I heard from Bill Crews in 1984. May it be a blessing to you.

La Vista church of Christ

God's Wrath and Jesus' Death

Doy Moyer

We read of God's wrath in Scripture in several places. For example, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18). While this denotes a type of anger, I fear that we read the word "wrath" from our own perspective and may often think more of an unwieldy, vindictive flying off the handle kind of anger that comes from one who about loses control and furiously explodes on people. This is not God's wrath, since "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). God is ever in control, measured, just, and always righteous in how He handles matters. God's wrath is not cruel, vindictive, or maliciously out of control. Instead, we can think in terms of His wrath being revealed in judgment, and His judgments are always just. Paul further writes, "because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works" (Rom 2:5-6).

God's wrath is often connected to the death of Jesus in our minds, sometimes, unfortunately, portrayed as God angrily killing His own Son as punishment for sins He didn't commit. This is not a picture we get from Scripture. Is God's wrath connected to the cross? In the sense that the cross entails death, and death is the chastisement for sin, then yes there is a connection. Death is judgment for sin (Rom 6:23). In that way, Jesus "was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:6). Yet we need to remember that all of us will experience death because of sin (save the Lord returning first). God's wrath is seen in death.

The difference is that Jesus was an atoning sacrifice for us, which is something none of us could do because we are guilty of sin. Christ was not guilty of sin. He did not become guilty. The sacrificial system under Moses required that the victims be spotless and holy. Jesus was perfect, pure, never guilty. The atonement sacrifice, while it involved death, was much more about life, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev 17:11). Jesus did bear our sins in His body (1 Pet 2:24), but not because He was guilty; it was to carry those sins away so that we could be forgiven (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). Recall the two goats on the Day of Atonement. One was offered to the Lord as a sin offering; the other was presented alive. This second goat (the so-called "scapegoat") bore the sins of the people and carried those sins away into the wilderness (Lev 16). The offering of the first goat was given, blood shed, for the purpose of cleansing the Holy place from the impurities of the people, and the second, presented alive, for the purpose of carrying sins away. Jesus fulfills both purposes.

By shedding His blood, which is life, Jesus cleanses and opens the way back to God so that our impurities do not prevent approaching Him. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Heb 10:19-20). By bearing our sins, Jesus carries them away so that we may be forgiven. Then, by resurrection, He defeats death completely and guarantees life for us if we will die to self (1 Cor 15:54-57; 2 Cor 5:14-15). Because of what Jesus did, we have victory over death and need not fear the wrath of God in the final judgment (Rom 5:9).

Jesus met the wrath of God in that death was God's judgment for sin, but He was not angrily targeted by the Father who then unleashed some mad fury on Jesus (though His enemies did do that). Rather, Jesus died willingly as a sacrifice for cleansing and for carrying our sins away (the two goats) so that we will die to sin, be forgiven, and raised to live in His presence, thereby saved from God's wrath, His final judgment of death (Rom 5:9).

Make no mistake. The crucifixion was humiliating, and Jesus despised the shame of it (Heb 12:1-3). He wished it could have been another way (Luke 22:42). We cannot begin to fathom the horror of what Christ, God manifested in the flesh, felt as He did this for us. Yet He did it, with love and in full agreement with the Father's will, "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb 2:14-15). Vestavia Bulletin 12/07/25