



18 LESSON CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 8

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Foretold in the Prophets

Long before Jesus was born, it was prophesied that in the town of Bethlehem a Jewish child would be born, who would become King of Israel. He would be the Son of God, son of a virgin, descended from Abraham and David. But it was also declared, that he must endure suffering, and that he would die to save his people from their sins:

“He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows . . . He was pierced for our infirmities, and he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed . . . For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken” (Isaiah 53:3-5,8).

The Lord Jesus understood the Old Testament very clearly. As a twelve-year old boy, he amazed the teachers in the temple at Jerusalem by his knowledge and understanding. From the Gospels we learn that he knew beforehand that he would suffer a cruel death at the hands of his enemies.

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matthew 16:21).

But the disciples could not believe that their Master should come to such a terrible end, and after he was crucified they were confused and afraid.

On the third day after the crucifixion, two of his followers were going from Jerusalem to a nearby village. They were joined by a stranger, and they talked to him about their sorrow. Although they did not recognise him, the stranger was Jesus himself, now risen from the dead to live for ever. He said to them:

“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Obedience to the Purpose of God

Not only was it foretold that Jesus would suffer a cruel death, but it was in “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” that Jesus was delivered into the hands of his enemies for this purpose (Acts 2:23). Though he had the power to resist and overcome his enemies, Jesus, in obedience to the will of his Father, allowed himself to be taken and killed. This is what he said:

“The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:17,18)

“Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?” (Matthew 26:53)

“My father, if it is possible, may this cup (of death) be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39)

Later, Paul comment on the fact that Jesus *“humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”*(Philippians 2:8)

In Isaiah it was prophesied: *“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (53:7).*

He was killed because the leaders of the people hated and envied him, and he, like a lamb, did not resist, so providing an example for all who would follow him, when attacked or persecuted.

The earliest prophecy

For further understanding we can go right back to the beginning, to the garden of Eden, after Eve was tempted by the serpent. To the serpent God said:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

The serpent became a symbol of sin and of the enemies of God; the one who will crush the head of the serpent is a descendant of the woman, that is, Christ. He was conceived by a woman through the work of the Holy Spirit, no man being involved. The death of Jesus at the hand of his enemies (described as “snakes . . . vipers!” - Matthew 23:33) is represented by the wound in the heel. This was not a mortal wound, for Jesus rose from the dead by the power of God. By contrast, the offspring of the woman will strike the head of the serpent. This is a mortal wound. So Jesus, by his death, destroyed once and for all the power of sin in himself, and also in those who believe.

The power of sin destroyed

To understand how sin was destroyed, we must remember that Jesus was *“tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). He shared our nature, with its sinful passions (Romans 7:5): *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared their humanity . . .”* (Hebrews 2:14). But he, and he only, always succeeded in overcoming those “sinful passions”. That was his triumph over sin, and his destruction of it. His tortured body upon the cross was the symbol of this victory, at the end of a lifelong struggle with all that is against the will of God.

We ourselves *“have been made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus gave up his life so that men and women might be delivered from sin through God’s forgiveness. But this is only true for those who believe in Jesus and in his resurrection, for those who repent and strive to obey his commandments. Such believers learn to hate sin and begin to struggle against it. And even though they do not altogether overcome it, they have the promise:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Summary

From the beginning, by the will of God, it was necessary that the Son of God should be born into the world to suffer at the hands of wicked men. It was God’s intention that Jesus should struggle against his human nature and overcome it, that he should endure temptation but never fall, that his life should be sinless. Jesus willingly submitted to suffering and death, in order to become a perfect sacrifice for sin. By that sacrifice, by that free giving of his life, we can receive the forgiveness for our sins if we believe, and can hope for eternal life at his return.

Questions

H1 In what way was Jesus the same as other men, and in what way was he different?

H2 Why did Jesus submit to crucifixion?