



THE DEATH OF JESUS

Reading: Mark 14 and 15

The problem of sin

Sin is a terrible problem for mankind. It is the root cause of all the world's troubles. It separates people from God and leads to certain death. It is impossible for mankind to conquer sin by its own efforts. Even the most sincere person has never been able to solve the problem of sin. However good a person may be, he will always fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

The Bible provides God's answer to the sin of mankind. God gave His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the sacrifice that was necessary for mankind to break free from sin. The Lord Jesus joined with his Father in this work by offering himself as a willing, obedient sacrifice for sin. It was a life long sacrifice – he gave up his own will and desires and chose to follow his Father's will at all times. Dying on the cross was the last great act of willing obedience in a life of sacrifice. Because Jesus was sinless to the end, he overcame death. He also made it possible for his true disciples to have their sins forgiven and so escape everlasting death.

The sufferings of Jesus

In the Gospels we read about the unjust trial of Jesus, the cruel mocking, his savage beating and flogging. There was also the distress of seeing his mother's suffering as she watched him die. He would be deeply saddened by the knowledge that it was the Jews, his own people, who were rejecting him, and he knew that later they would be punished.

Psalm 22:6-8 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!

Psalm 22:15,16 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet.

We learn more of Jesus' suffering through some of the Old Testament writings. Psalm 22 helps us to understand how he felt during the crucifixion. As well as the terrible pain, he felt the great shame of crucifixion.

Events leading to the death of Jesus

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the Jewish religious leaders in the time of Jesus. These groups usually opposed each other, but because they both hated Jesus, they worked together to destroy him. They were jealous of his popularity, power and authority. They hated seeing great crowds listening to him, amazed by his miracles. It was clear that no ordinary man could do miracles like Jesus – they were signs that he was God's Son. But the religious leaders did not want to see the truth – they were blinded by their jealousy and hatred.

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. The religious leaders wanted to arrest him quietly, without causing a protest among the people. Their opportunity came when Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, offered to betray him. Judas led them to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus and his other disciples were alone (John 18:1-3).

Jesus was arrested and brought before the council of religious leaders. They failed to find a genuine reason for putting him to death. It is impossible to find fault with a sinless person! In the end the High Priest said, "*I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God*" (Matthew 26:63). When Jesus agreed that he was God's Son, the religious leaders accused him of blasphemy. According to the Law of Moses, the punishment for blasphemy was death. Of course, it was a false accusation. Jesus had not blasphemed – he had spoken the truth.





At this time the Romans ruled over Israel, so the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to the Roman Governor of the area, Pontius Pilate, and demanded that he should be crucified – this was the way the Romans executed criminals. But Pilate could find no fault in Jesus. When he heard that Jesus came from Herod's area, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at the time. When Jesus remained silent, Herod mocked him and sent him back to Pilate. These men became friends:

“And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other” (Luke 23:12).

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. He repeatedly told the Jews that neither he nor Herod could find any fault with him (Luke 23:4,14,15,22). Pilate knew that the Jews wanted to put Jesus to death because of jealousy. The Jews told Pilate that since Jesus claimed to be a king, he was a threat to the Roman Emperor, and so it would be disloyal to the Emperor to release Jesus. Pilate weakly gave in. He allowed a murderer, Barabbas, to live and sent the Lord of life to his death – a dreadful injustice. Pilate handed over Jesus to Roman soldiers, to die by crucifixion – perhaps the most painful and agonising death ever invented.

Both Jews and Romans were therefore involved in the death of Jesus. God had planned from the very beginning to save mankind by His Son and knew that these wicked men would behave as they did. Later the apostle Peter said to the Jews,

*“This Jesus, delivered up according to the **definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men”* (Acts 2:23).

There was no other way

Jesus knew that his Father had brought him into the world to bring salvation. Throughout his life he was totally obedient to his Father, even to suffering and death on the cross. Jesus said that he wanted to *“do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work”* (John 4:34). In the Garden of Gethsemane, when he faced his greatest test of obedience, Jesus prayed three times to his Father, *“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me”*, but was careful to add, *“Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”* (Matthew 26:39-44). If it had been possible, God would have spared His Son the agony, but it was the only way. On the cross, as he neared death, Jesus said, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). He had finished the work that God gave him to do (John 17:4).

Why did Jesus die?

Adam sinned and so he died. Death is the punishment for sin. This is God's law. Romans 6:23 says: *“For the wages of sin is death”*. Just as we earn wages by working, so we earn death by sinning. We all sin and so we all deserve to die.

SIN → DEATH

Jesus died on the cross to take away the sins of the world. This was his Father's will, and he was obedient even to death. However, he also died because he was mortal like us. If Jesus had not died on the cross, he would have died at some time later.

Jesus was also tempted just as we are, and in some ways more than we are, but he never sinned. In Hebrews 4:15 we read that Jesus *“in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”*.

Although he shared Adam's dying nature, Jesus did not deserve death because he was sinless. Therefore, God raised Jesus from the dead without breaking His own law that *“the wages of sin is death”*. Jesus died to gain his own redemption, and to make ours possible.

We all die:

we all have Adam's dying nature

AND

we all sin.

Jesus was raised from the dead:

Jesus had Adam's dying nature

BUT

Jesus did **not** sin.





Jesus agreed with his Father that sin should be punished by death, which is why he refused to give in to sin. He knew that the only way to conquer death was to conquer sin in himself. He knew that His Father would raise him from the dead if he was sinless.

After his resurrection God gave the Lord Jesus a new nature – a nature like God Himself – that cannot sin and cannot die. Romans 6:9 says:

“We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.”

What about us?

Jesus died at the feast of Passover. At the original Passover, each Israelite household killed a perfect lamb and placed its blood on the door posts at the entrance to their home, to save them from death (Exodus 12). This pointed forward to the death of Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:7). He was an acceptable sacrifice – he was like a perfectly formed lamb with no scars or blemishes (1 Peter 1:19). God was willing to accept this perfect sacrifice as the offering for all who believe in Jesus as *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Speaking of Jesus, long before his birth, the prophet Isaiah said:

*“But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all**”* (Isaiah 53:5,6).

Romans 5:6-8 speaks of God’s love in allowing His Son to die for sinners:

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

John 15:13 shows the love of the Lord Jesus in giving his life for those he came to save:

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends”.

God and His Son have done all they can for us. God has given us His beloved Son as a sacrifice. Jesus has laid down his life for us. We have to realise that we are sinners and desperately need salvation. Unless we acknowledge how sinful we are and how much God and His Son have done for us, the sacrifice of Jesus will not help us.

The crucifixion allowed mankind to come close to God

Sin separates mankind from God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus it is possible for our sins to be forgiven. The barrier between God and ourselves is then removed and we can be brought close to Him. This is described in the Bible as **reconciliation**, and through it we can have fellowship (a special relationship) with God through the Lord Jesus, our mediator in heaven. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 the apostle Paul clearly shows that God was working through His Son to reconcile sinners to Himself. This message of reconciliation to God was preached by the apostles:

*“... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, **not counting their trespasses against them**, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation”.*

Taking up our cross

The crucifixion is at the heart of the Gospel. It is the source of salvation provided by God in His love and is made possible by the love of His Son. Forgiveness is God’s gift to those who repent of their sins and come to Him through belief and baptism:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

But more than baptism is needed. Jesus said,

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

The idea of taking up our cross is that we need to make self-sacrifices each day. If we want to follow the Lord Jesus we have to please God and not ourselves. We have to





make every effort to stop sinning, and walk with Christ in a new way of life. The apostle Paul says:

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

Crucifying the flesh involves putting to death (completely destroying) our sinful desires. We must try really hard not to allow sin to rule over us in our lives.

Some lessons from the crucifixion

1. The crucifixion of Jesus was a terrible event. It showed mankind at its worst as people took the perfect and lovely Son of God and killed him brutally. The crucifixion shows how evil people are, and the awfulness of sin.

2. It also shows how much God loves all true disciples of Christ. The apostle Paul says:

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he (God) not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

3. A huge price was paid so that true believers can have immortal life. It was the cost of a completely sinless life. The apostle Peter, writing to believers, says:

“... knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

4. Jesus gave us a wonderful example of how to behave.

- He did not protest that he was right when people said evil things about him (1 Peter 2:21-23).
- He forgave those who crucified him (Luke 23:34).
- Even when in great pain and distress, he cared for others (John 19:26,27; Luke 23:27-31).
- He obeyed his Father in all things, completely trusting Him.

Summary

1. We all sin and so we all deserve to die.
2. In His love God has given us His beloved Son as a sacrifice for sin.
3. Jesus joined with his Father in this work by willingly laying down his life for us.
4. God raised Jesus from the dead, because he was sinless and so did not deserve death. God gave the Lord Jesus immortal life.
5. Through the sacrifice of Jesus it is possible for our sins to be forgiven. Then we can share the hope of immortal life in God's kingdom.
6. We must acknowledge our sins, repent and be baptized, and walk with Christ in a new way of life.

A verse to learn: Romans 5:8

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Verses to read:

2 Corinthians 5:15

He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Also read 2 Corinthians 5; 1 Peter 1

