

This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.

Why Did Jesus Die?

Isaiah 52:13–53:12; John 18–19; Hebrews 10:1–18

God Friday 2014

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Why did Jesus die? Have you asked yourself this question today? It's Good Friday again, the day we especially gather in commemoration of Jesus' death and in celebration of its benefits for us. And not just tonight, but all our Christian life as individuals and as a congregation we say, sing, and speak of the death of Jesus:

suffered under Pontus Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell. (Apostles' Creed)

but above all, for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. (Prayer of Thanksgiving)

who by the blood of your only begotten Son has secured for us a new and living way into the Holy of Holies...that we, your redeemed people...may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity through the body and blood of Christ our Savior. (Communion Prayer)

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died.¹*

*'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
I crucified thee.²*

*O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame bowed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown.³*

¹ From the hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," in *Psalter Hymnal*, 350:1.

² From the hymn, "Ah, Dearest Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended," in *Psalter Hymnal*, 351:2.

³ From the hymn, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," in *Psalter Hymnal*, 355:1.

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Why did Jesus die? He did die, after all; that's a fact. We have the New Testament manuscripts themselves. There are more than one thousand times more manuscript data for the New Testament than for the average ancient Greco-Roman author. The extant manuscripts of those authors is no earlier than five hundred years after the time they wrote. The New Testament manuscripts are a mere decades after the events they record. For example, Tacitus, the greatest Roman historian died in 120 AD. The earliest manuscript of his is from the ninth century, yet we take what he wrote as factual and historical. And guess how many manuscripts of his there are? Three. We have five thousand seven hundred Greek New Testament manuscripts, ten thousand Latin manuscripts, and over one million known references to the New Testament in the ancient church fathers. The fact of his death is mentioned by ancient Jewish and Gentile philosophers, poets, and politicians. The Jewish rabbis did not deny that Jesus lived and was crucified; in fact, they positively stated that he was crucified in the Talmud, the authoritative tradition of their sayings and teachings.⁴ Ancient Roman writings never deny the existence or crucifixion of Jesus'. In fact, Josephus⁵ and Tacitus⁶ positively stated the crucifixion as historical fact. Even ancient anti-Christian philosophers positively stated that Jesus was crucified, as the Stoic philosopher Mara bar

⁴ See David Instone-Brewer, "Jesus of Nazareth's Trial in the Uncensored Talmud." *Tyndale Bulletin* 62.2 (November 2011): 269-294.

⁵ 18.3.3.

⁶ 15.44.

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Serapion⁷ and anti-Christian Lucian of Samosota wrote.⁸

Why did Jesus die? He died in fulfillment of the ancient Scriptures of the Jews. As we read in John 18 and 19, what happened to him fulfilled Psalm 22, 34, and 69 and Zechariah 12. The ancient bishop of Rome, Leo the Great, said, “to this mystery [of the cross] all the mysteries of the ages preceding led up.”⁹ Hebrews 10:1 speaks of “the law,” meaning, all that came before Jesus, contrasting it with what Jesus brought, saying, “the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.” Because of this, J.C. Ryle said, “...if you have not yet found out that Christ crucified is the foundation of the whole volume, you have read your Bible hitherto to very little profit. Your religion is a heaven without a sun, an arch without a key-stone, a compass without a needle, a clock without spring or weights, a lamp without oil.”¹⁰

Why did Jesus die? In the words of Jesus, the answer is, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) What is finished? The prophecies concerning him and his cross, yes; but even more profoundly, behind all the centuries of prophetic promises lay the plan of God. Jesus finished the work the Father gave the Son to do from before the foundation of the world. All throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of being sent to accomplish a work that God the Father gave him. Listen to this:

⁷ Cited in F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (1974; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 31.

⁸ *The Passing of Peregrinus*. Cited at <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>

⁹ “Sermon LIV,” in *NPNF*: 2 (), 12:165 col. 1.

¹⁰ “The Cross of Christ.”

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My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.
(4:34)

I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (5:30)

I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. (6:38)

I do as the Father has commanded me. (14:31)

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” (17:4)

Why did Jesus die? To finish the work he was given to do from eternity past.

This means that he did not come to earth by chance or accident; he came according to the counsel, determination, plan, and purpose of God himself. As Peter said on the day of Pentecost, Jesus was crucified “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). As J.C. Ryle said, “Not one throb of pain did Jesus feel, not one precious drop of blood did Jesus shed, which had not been appointed long ago.”¹¹

Why did Jesus die? To finish this eternal work, which was to reconcile a holy God with an unholy people; to bring peace between an offending people and an offended God. God is holy, meaning, he is pure from sin. God is just, meaning, he must punish sin. God is righteous, meaning, when he punishes sin it is a perfect judgment. This is the God who made us. This is the God we have offended in Adam. This is the God we offend daily. This is the God before whom we confess tonight, “Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee; I crucified thee.”¹²

¹¹ “The Cross of Christ.”

¹² From the hymn, “Ah, Dearest Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended,” in *Psalter Hymnal*, 351:2.

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Why did Jesus die? He died that this blazing holiness would be quenched; that this exacting justice would be satisfied; that this unbending righteousness would be fulfilled. The wrath of God was poured on him so that the love of God would be poured on us. He was propitiation so that we would have reconciliation. He was abandoned so that we would be embraced.

Why did Jesus die? He died to do this for unholy, unjust, unrighteous sinners like you and me. That's the beauty of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52–53: “Surely *he* has borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows” (Isa. 53:4); “But *he* 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. 53:5); “and the Lord has laid on *him* the iniquity of *us* all” (Isa. 53:6); “he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of *my* people?” (Isa. 53:8); “*his* soul makes an offering for guilt” (Isa. 53:10); “by his knowledge shall *the righteous one*, my servant, make *many* to be accounted righteous, and *he* shall bear *their* iniquities” (Isa. 53:11); “*he* poured out *his* soul to death and was numbered with *the transgressors*; yet *he* bore the sin of *many*, and makes intercession for *the transgressors*” (Isa. 53:12). He did this “for” me; he did this for you! And “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31)

Why did Jesus die? J.C. Ryle said, “there is more to be learned at the foot of the cross than anywhere else in the world.” By faith we bow at that foot tonight and learn that Jesus' humiliation is our exaltation; his weakness is our strength; his shame is our glory; his death is our life. Will you give yourself to him tonight?

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Why did Jesus die? This is why Jesus died. Amen!