

The Meaning of the Death of Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah

Jesus Christ the Lord is risen. He lives forevermore. The New Testament is written from the perspective of Jesus' resurrection. In fact, everything depends upon Jesus' resurrection! It is the event which marks him out as the Lord and the only Savior of sinners. Therefore, his resurrection is the central proclamation of the early church. Now the death of Jesus has unique and saving significance because the one who died on the cross for sin and sinners is alive today. He is the living, exalted, glorified Savior. Thus, the real mission of Jesus and the true significance of his death can only be understood when viewed through the open tomb of the Messiah Jesus.

Listen to these statements from the New Testament concerning the meaning of Christ Jesus' death as it is understood in the light of his resurrection and ascension into heaven. *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).*

And from Romans 3-

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (Romans 3:21-25a).

¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18-19).

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin (Or be a sin offering) for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The significance of the death of Jesus hinges upon his bodily resurrection. Jesus said he had come to give his life a ransom for many. *For ... the Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for man*" Mark 10:45.

And in John 10:17-18, he made this claim., ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." In this way Jesus makes his resurrection to prove the validity of his death. He died as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. The essential completion of his death is his resurrection. Without the resurrection Jesus would have been the defeated One rather than the Victor.

Always we must consider the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ through the lens of the empty tomb. The actual climax of Jesus' incarnate life was the resurrection after he had paid the sin debt of sinners. Unless we view the death of Christ from the resurrection side of Calvary we cannot understand it.

The gospel narratives tell the facts of Jesus' death on the cross. Then the New Testament letters explain why Jesus Christ died on the cross and why it was necessary for Him to rise from the dead.

What is the meaning of the cross in reference to our sins and our guilt before God? It is our sin that nailed him to the tree. If we see Him merely dying, then there is nothing for us. A dead Savior cannot save. But Christ Jesus arose from the grave and His resurrection assures us that He overcame the penalty of our sin.

An illustration of this truth comes from a story of an incident that took place in England after the Waterloo Campaign of June, 1815. All England was awaiting news of the campaign in which the Duke of Wellington opposed Napoleon Bonaparte. This was a long time before the days of telegraph and watchers were stationed along the coast to catch signals from sailing vessels. These signals were communicated through the use of lanterns and flags. Finally one watchers spied a sailing vessel beginning to wigwag a message. The words were, "Wellington defeated." Then the fog closed in. These words were relayed across England and all the nation was plunged into gloom. The fog then cleared, and the message came through, "Wellington defeated the enemy." Sorrow was banished and all England rejoiced.

This story illustrates the state of mind of the disciples when Christ died. He had claimed to oneness with God – to be the unique Son of God. He was the long-expected Messiah. Then he was crucified. It was a terrible day – Black Friday. The sun was blotted from sight and there was darkness over the face of the earth. He died and His body was buried. The religious leaders of Israel smacked their lips and dusted their hands as if to say, “Well, that’s done. We’ve gotten rid of this man.”

Jesus defeated! He is dead. The sorrow of grief and the blackness of despair gripped the hearts of the disciples. Three days later we find some of them attempting to pull their lives together again by returning to their former occupations. Jesus was dead: “We had hoped and thought that this was He who would deliver Israel. But now he is dead and defeated.

Then came the resurrection! The news was, “Jesus defeated the enemy! He vanquished death and hell. He endured the sin debt for the many and rose victorious in the strife! Today we can sing:

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!* (Horatio Spafford)

What then is the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ considering his glorious resurrection from the dead? Paul wrote in Romans 4v 25f:

25 He was delivered up for^[a] our trespasses and raised for^[b] our justification.^{[c]5:1} Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace^[d] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are several biblical terms used to define and interpret the nature of Christ’s death.

It is viewed as an atonement. This word literally means “a covering.” Atonement is at the heart of the Scriptures. The atoning work of Jesus Christ without which there is no Christianity is the ground of our right standing before God. The blood of Jesus Christ covers a believer’s sins and provides a garment of salvation – a garment of the righteousness of God.

Perhaps you have asked the question, *“Why was the atonement necessary?”* The necessity of the atonement was the justice and the wrath of God. The love of God provided for that atonement, but its necessity arises from the fundamental nature of God. He is holy and he has an active anger against sin. Thus the atonement springs from the heart of God who so loved sinners and desired to save them that he was willing to take this course of action – he would send his own Son who would die for guilty sinners in order that the justice of God might be satisfied and that sinners might be saved. Christ Jesus went to the cross and died there for our sins in order that he might be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

There are at least three aspects to Christ’s atoning sacrifice which can be summarized under the terms ***propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption***. Christ died to propitiate God, to reconcile God and sinful men, and to redeem sinners.

First, “propitiation.” The background for the description and interpretation of this term is the wrath of God. God has a personal, holy reaction against sin - sin evokes God’s holy wrath and displeasure. The doctrine of propitiation is that God so loved the objects of his wrath that he gave his only begotten Son that he by his blood should make provision for the removal of this wrath.

Now death is the wages of sin and judgment awaits the guilty with the result of eternal punishment. Jesus died for no other reason than that he in our place would meet the whole judgment of God upon our sin. If Christ propitiates, it must be God whom he propitiates. A propitiatory sacrifice is one that is offered to God to appease him, so his holy wrath is turned from us. Christ averts that wrath of God against us by absorbing this wrath in his own body on the tree. (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2, 4:10; John 3:36)

The New Testament presents a God who sent his Son into the world to be a propitiation. Jesus Christ came into the world in order that he might cover our sins, that he might cleanse us from them, and that he might remove them from us in order that we might be brought to God, free from all condemnation.

When the Savior died upon the cross and that awful, soul-agonizing cry wrung from his lips, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* – he was not play-acting. He was enduring the wrath of God against sinners and against sin. It spent itself out upon him – the fire leaped up as if to consume him but instead he consumed the fire. He made propitiation for the sins of his people and this is the essence of the meaning of Calvary.

Another facet of the death of the Son of God is highlighted in the term "**reconciliation.**" "Reconciliation" is concerned with our alienation from God and our enmity against him, that is, our hatred and hostility toward God.

You see, sin separates us from the favor and fellowship of God. Jesus Christ is set before us in the New Testament as the One who reconciles us to God. In bringing us back to God he takes away the enmity that exists between us, and he restores us to the divine fellowship. We are at enmity towards God and also God is at enmity with us because of the holy reaction our sin provokes in him.

In the concept of reconciliation, the love of God is highlighted. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. He did this once-for-all to bring us to God. God took the initiative and sent Christ into the world to reconcile the world to himself. (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Colossians 1:22-23)

A certain kind of action on God's part was necessary. Christ must vicariously bear our sin and we must vicariously have his righteousness to be accepted of the Father. Jesus Christ, the sinless One, was made sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

God has brought us into his favor by the death of his Son; how much more shall we be saved from the wrath to come by the resurrection of Christ. (Romans 8: 31-34) God sent his own Son to die in our place. He is a living Savior who ever lives to be our Savior.

A third aspect of the New Testament teaching on the atonement of Jesus Christ is that of **redemption**, or deliverance, by the payment of a price. This involves an act of power, an act which is substitutionary and costly.

Christ died "a ransom for us all." He is our Redeemer. The Bible says, "*You were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus*" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The blood of Jesus Christ denotes this violent sacrificial death of the Savior in the behalf of sinners. By dying in their stead, God in Christ reconciles us to himself.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and thus we have been delivered from sin's bondage and brought into the family of God. As our great High Priest and only Mediator he ever lives to make intercession for us; as our Resurrected Lord he saves us completely on the basis of his finished work. Without the shedding of holy blood, there is no salvation and no gospel! (Hebrews.7:5; 9:22)

But Christ Jesus came into the world – he redeemed us by his blood; God is propitiated through his blood and we are reconciled to God and by God through the blood of his cross.

How we know this is what his death means and this is what it accomplishes for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ? *The empty tomb is our receipt!* He lives to administer his "so great salvation."

"If Thou hast my discharge procured,
and freely in my room endured
the whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand
First, at my bleeding Surety's hand,
and then again at mine." (C. Wesley)

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed by pardon with his blood,
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Amen.

This has been Wayne Conrad with Bible Insights, until next time...