

What Jesus' Death Meant to Him

Scripture: John 14:28-31

Code: P27

As we look back on the cross after almost two thousand years, we stand in awe at all that was accomplished there for us. There the very Son of God suffered shame and ridicule at the hands of wicked, murdering men. He did it willingly to provide forgiveness for our sins and access to God. God's judgment was stayed and the righteousness of Christ became ours. God set us free to commune with Him, and we became His children and objects of His love.

When the disciples looked forward to the cross, they could only wonder what it meant. They had been with Jesus for three blessed years, during which He had loved them and supplied all their needs. When they heard Him talk about His death, they found it impossible to understand. How could God incarnate die, and what would life be like without their beloved Master and Teacher? Fear must have come over them at the mere thought of it; and then when they realized the time was at hand, the anticipation of loneliness set in. Looking ahead at it that awful night before He died, they could see nothing but the oppressive specter of tragedy.

The problem was their perspective; they were looking at His death from their own viewpoint--they gave little thought to what it meant to Him. Their faith was weak, but beyond that they had a simple problem: selfishness. They wanted Jesus to stay with them because He loved them and took care of them. In a sense they were acting like the multitudes that followed Jesus as long as He fed them, but that didn't want to pay the price of following Him wholeheartedly. They were moping around, brooding, stewing over their own dilemma, thinking only of how Jesus' death would affect their problems and their desires. Their love was superficial and based on a desire for their own good, not on a desire for the best welfare of the one they loved.

We tend to respond that way when death touches us. We feel great sorrow but often for the wrong reasons. We may wonder why God would take our loved one--as if we should have some guaranteed amount of time here together. When a Christian dies, sorrow is normal for a while, and tears can be healthy; but when it continues on for a long time, it may be because the grieving person is seeing the death only from his own perspective of personal loss instead of from the loved one's viewpoint of eternal glory. We must see death from the right perspective--as ultimate release from the body of sin, and the start of unending joy in heaven. Jesus' death, however, was not release from a body of sin, but rather a sinless body ravaged by bearing the sins of the world. And before He could enter into unending joy, our Lord would face a dreadful, quintessential moment of separation from the Father

and confront the force of a multitude of sinners' transgressions and deserved punishment.

Nevertheless, He anticipated it all with an eager heart. As the cross drew near, He revealed to His disciples what it meant to Him:

You heard that I said to you, "I go away, and I will come to you." If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here. (John 14:28-31)

The disciples viewed it with sorrow, but to Him it meant joy. Had they loved Him, they would have rejoiced with Him, and looked forward with Him to the four marvelous eternal works that would be accomplished at the cross.

His Person Would Be Dignified

Before the incarnation, Jesus was in eternal glory. He experienced the Father's infinite love and fellowship in a way we cannot even comprehend. But He left this glory to come to earth, not as a king to a magnificent palace, but as a tiny baby to a stinking stable. He lived in poverty; He had no place even to lay His head. He suffered the hatred, abuse, and jeers of evil men. He was rejected by His own people and vilified even by the religious leaders. "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face" (Isaiah 53:3).

From our human perspective, one of the most incomprehensible truths about Jesus Christ is that He, the eternal Lord of glory, was willing to humble Himself like that for our sakes. He stepped down from a position of equality with the Most High God and condescended to share His riches with us. Second Corinthians 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." Jesus had all the riches of heaven, yet He gave them up for a while so we could share them with Him forever.

The book of Hebrews also tells us about Jesus' condescension:

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels...because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.... Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:9; 17-18)

Jesus became one of us. He suffered what we suffer, not only so He could redeem us, but also so He could sympathize with us. The incarnation allowed Him to experience all the temptations, difficulties, griefs, and heartbreaks of people. He can empathize with us; He understands our struggles from His own experience.

Philippians 2:6-10 describes the incarnation as an act of unselfish humility on the part of Jesus, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." He was equal to God, but didn't covet the outward appearance of equality. Instead, He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." He was willing to come down to earth and become a servant, even if that meant death on a cross.

Since He humbly obeyed, God exalted Him. Paul continues, "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth."

There have always been those who get confused about the humiliation of Christ. They think that because He humbled Himself and became a servant, they are not to worship Him as God. Actually, the opposite is true. Because He humbled Himself He is to be exalted; every knee is to bow before Him and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, and others who deny the deity of Christ have misinterpreted John 14:28 by saying that Jesus is inferior to the Father. When He said, "The Father is greater than I," He referred not to His essential being, but to His role as a humbled servant. While He was humbled, the Father was in glory and therefore greater; Jesus had put Himself beneath the Father's glory.

He had also put His will beneath the Father's will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed to the Father, "Remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36).

Jesus repeatedly claimed to be equal in deity to the Father. Just one example is in John 14:9, where Philip asked to be shown the Father. Jesus answered, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Jesus took on a role that was beneath the Father, but He was not inferior in nature or essence (cf. Titus 2:13).

At the end of His earthly ministry, as He approached the cross, knowing what lay ahead of Him, Christ knelt prior to entering the Garden of Gethsemane, and prayed to the Father: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:4-5). He was looking ahead to the full expression of His glory--that same pristine glory He knew before the

humiliation of the incarnation.

The hatred and abuse was almost over. Death would end it, and He would return to the glory He once had with the Father. He found joy as He approached the cross because through His suffering there He would be restored to the full expression of deity. He looked forward to it. He rejoiced in anticipation of it. And He wanted His beloved friends to share His joy. "If you loved Me," He told them, "you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

Hebrews 12:2 says, "[Jesus,] for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." He rejoiced because He knew the result of the cross would be His glorification, and He knew He would soon be with the Father at His right hand.

Some people think Jesus didn't know that He was going to be crucified. He knew. He was familiar with the prophecies of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, both of which contain detailed accounts of the crucifixion. They were written long before Christ's birth and, obviously, He knew them. The crucifixion was not an afterthought, but a crucial element in the plan of God from the beginning. Our Lord knew exactly what was going to happen, but He went to the cross anyway. It was a bitter cup, but He was willing to drink it.

The Truth Would Be Documented

Jesus had made many claims about Himself to the disciples. Although they wanted to believe them--and for the most part they did believe them--doubt would often creep into their hearts. They found much of Jesus' teaching about who He was and why He came difficult to fathom, so they teetered between belief and unbelief.

Jesus used a simple method to strengthen their faith--He would predict events. When what He said happened, the disciples would remember what He had said. One prophecy after another came true, and each fulfillment grounded their faith a little more. By the day of Pentecost, their faith was so strong that they fearlessly set off the explosion of Christianity all over the world.

In John 14:29, Jesus acknowledged this method of strengthening them: "Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe." He knew they didn't believe everything then, but they would when His words came true.

Fulfilled prophecy is perhaps the greatest proof that the Word of God is true. For example, I once talked to a man who said that Israel no longer has a place in the plan of God. I pointed out to him that Scripture prophesied that Israel would be regathered in the land--just the way we see it happening today. Then I asked him, "What does your theology do with that?" He replied, "It wiggles a lot." Fulfilled prophecy has a devastating way to dealing with human doubt.

In John 13:19, Jesus had used the same method to strengthen the disciples' faith. There is a deep significance in His words at the end of verse 19, "so that...you may believe that I am He." Notice that the "He" at the end of the verse was added by the English translators. What Jesus actually said was, "I am telling you before, so that you'll believe that I am." "I AM" is God's name (Exodus 3:14). It was the same as saying, "I want you to believe that I am God." He was urging them to embrace the truth of His deity.

He had just told them, among other things, that Judas was going to betray Him. You can imagine what the disciples thought later when they saw Judas betray Jesus in the garden. Their minds must have flashed back to what He had said earlier in the upper room. He had given a string of prophecies that began with the betrayal by Judas and ended with the promise of a divine Helper. Their faith was solid by the time the last prediction was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

That final promise of a divine Helper was linked with a promise of supernatural peace. On the day of Pentecost, a supernatural peace like nothing they had ever known flooded their hearts as the Spirit of God took residence within them. Later, when Peter and John preached, the religious authorities confronted them and ordered them to stop. They calmly responded, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

One by one, every prophecy He had given them had come to pass. With each one, their faith was strengthened so that they trusted more and more. The fulfilled prophecies fully documented the truth that He was God.

You may wonder why, if Jesus wanted to strengthen the disciples, He didn't simply stay on earth and continue teaching them. The reason is that He had said all He could say. Now it was time to leave so that other prophecies could come true, God's purpose in redemption could be fulfilled, and their faith could be strengthened as they watched it all unfold.

Their faith was strengthened by the events that followed. He had said He would die by being lifted up on a cross, and He did. He had said He would rise, and He did. He had said He would ascend to the Father, and they saw Him ascend. He had said the Spirit would come, and it happened. He had said He would supply supernatural life, and they got it. He had promised them a supernatural union with the living God, and they experienced it. He had promised them an indwelling Teacher, and they received the Spirit of God. He had promised them peace, and they were flooded with peace. Every detail of each prophecy came to pass just as He had said. Through it, the disciples' faith became rock-solid. His words were thus documented and their faith cemented.

Christ's leaving was really an act of love for the disciples. He knew that their faith would have to be strong if they were to carry the message to the world. They would have to move into the full blast of Satan's fire, into the hotbed of the furnace. The only way their faith could remain strong enough was through seeing all His prophecies fulfilled one after another.

In fact, Jesus said that if they really loved Him--if they really wanted the world to hear the gospel--they would rejoice that He was leaving. In effect He was saying, "Stop looking at My death from your own perspective and look at it from My perspective. When I go, your faith will be strengthened because the truth will be documented in your lives; then you will take My message into all the world. But the longer I stay, the longer that will be postponed."

His Foe Would Be Defeated

When Jesus came to earth, His central purpose was to redeem sinners. In Adam, mankind had fallen out of fellowship with God. Now they were separated and had neither communion with Him nor knowledge of Him. Christ had determined even before the foundation of the world that He would come to earth to bring all who believe back to God (cf. Revelation 13:8).

In order to succeed, Jesus had to defeat Satan decisively. In John 14:30, He talks about His foe. "I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me." He calls the devil "the ruler of the world" because this world is Satan's domain, and the system of evil under which this world is oppressed is of Satan's devising.

Satan was already indwelling Judas, pushing him into the garden, where he would betray Jesus. Jesus knew that Satan was coming in the person of Judas to take Him. He knew He was about to enter the dreaded death-battle with His enemy.

Jesus had battled Satan all through His earthly life. Satan tried to kill Him as an infant--he had caused all the male babies to be slain throughout the region where Jesus was born (Matthew 2:16). Although the Bible is largely silent regarding the first thirty years of Jesus' life, He undoubtedly faced satanic opposition at every turn. Then when He began His ministry, Satan immediately confronted Him in the wilderness to tempt Him. He tried to get Jesus to bow and worship him. During Jesus' ministry, Satan tried everything. He confronted Him with people who hated Him and tried to kill Him, and demons who tried to stop His work.

From the night of His birth to the night of His death, Satan fought Jesus. Finally, His death would resolve the age-old conflict that had raged since Lucifer's fall from heaven (cf. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28). The outcome would be decided in this final conflict. The Lord was about to win the ultimate victory.

He had looked forward to victory over Satan. Earlier, He had said, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:31-32). John adds an editorial note to those words: "But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (v. 33). In other words, our Lord was saying that the ultimate defeat of Satan would be accomplished when He was "lifted up" on the cross. He went to the cross knowing it was the final blow that would wipe out Satan's power.

While Jesus was in the garden, the soldiers arrived. He asked them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against the robber? ...but this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Luke 22:52-53). The power of darkness is Satan. He was saying, "This is the hour for My judgment on you and the power of darkness." He regarded the cross as a conflict with Satan. Satan would bruise Jesus on the heel, but Jesus would crush Satan's head (cf. Genesis 3:15).

He became incarnate with the express purpose of destroying the devil. Hebrews 2:14 says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." First John 3:8 says why Jesus came: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." Jesus looked at the cross as a conflict with the devil and He knew He would be victorious.

Since the cross, the power of Satan has been broken. He is still active, but he has been stunned. Soon, he will be cast into the lake of fire. Because he has already had his power broken, he has no power in your life unless you yield to him. Now he is the prisoner of Christ and will be cast into hell.

So in effect Jesus was saying to His disciples, "Look at the cross from My perspective. I am through battling Satan; I've had enough of being beaten and buffeted; I'm finished with this endless conflict. When I go to the cross, I'm going to destroy the devil. You shouldn't grieve, but be joyful. I'm going to defeat the archenemy who has troubled us for ages." It turned out that all Satan's schemes to get Jesus to the cross were only part of God's plan to destroy His enemy.

Satan tried desperately but in vain to find a place where Jesus was vulnerable. Jesus said in John 14:30, "The ruler of the world...has nothing in Me." Satan had looked for some sin that would make a weak point, but he couldn't find one because Jesus had none.

If Satan had been able to find any sin in Christ, our Lord would have been worthy of death. As Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." But Hebrews 4:15 says we have a high priest "who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." In the words of Hebrews 7:26, "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." He did not sin; He could not sin. Satan had entered into conflict with One who was not

vulnerable. And it was Satan who would be destroyed.

His Love Would Be Demonstrated

If Jesus did nothing to deserve death, we are left wondering why He was allowed to die. The answer is that Jesus wanted to demonstrate His love for the Father. He was voluntarily going to the cross "so that the world may know that I love the Father, therefore I do exactly as the Father commanded Me" (14:31). He portrayed Himself as a Son who was obedient to His Father.

While it is also true that Jesus died because He loved us, here He emphasizes His love for the Father. It was a supreme act of love to allow Satan to kill Him without legitimate reason, just because it was the Father's will that He die. Through His obedience, He showed the world how He loved the Father.

Interestingly, although Jesus often spoke of His obedience to the Father, this is the only time in the New Testament He specifically affirms His love for the Father; yet each mention of His obedience implies His love.

The religious leaders of His day all claimed to love God. But theirs was a superficial imitation of love, because it couldn't pass the test of obedience. Jesus had said three times in this same chapter that the test of love is obedience (verses 15, 21, and 23). Now He was going to give them living proof of His love; He would die because that was the Father's plan. He would die because He loved the Father--not because He deserved death, but because God had designed it. He wanted to show the world His love for the Father, and He rejoiced at the opportunity, for love is shown best in selfless, sacrificial service for the one loved.

You would think that as these disciples listened and learned what Jesus' death meant to Him, surely they would be jolted out of their selfish stupor. They had a difficult few days ahead, and their pain might have been greatly eased if they could only begin to see through Jesus' eyes. He wanted them to understand the grandeur of the scheme of salvation that was unfolding all around them. If only they had listened, they might have been able to see beyond their little, selfish sense of sorrow and loneliness. But that didn't happen until after the resurrection.

We tend to be like the disciples--concerned about our own problems and needs. Many times our prayers are full of asking but void of thanks. We beg but don't praise. Instead of looking at things selfishly--how they affect us--we should look at the way they affect the cause of Christ. We must pray that God will cure us of ourselves so we can be totally obedient to the Father.

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