

God's Preparation for Christ's Cross

Luke 21:37-22:2

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Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 22...Luke chapter 22. We have finally, after a long, long journey, a lifetime for some of your children, arrived at the culminating finale to the gospel of Luke. This chapter, Luke chapter 22, begins the final and most significant section of Luke's gospel. Everything up to this point has been prologue. Everything has been introduction. This is the great climax. This is the culmination of the gospel. This is the crucial point in redemptive history. We now begin the account of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And with the cross, we come to the reason for the incarnation. It all comes to this great point. Apart from the cross and the resurrection, there would be no hope, there would be no good news, there would be no forgiveness, no salvation no hope of heaven and every human being who has ever lived from Adam to the last human would spend forever in hell in eternal torment. Without the cross and the resurrection, there is no salvation for anyone. This then is the great high point of redemptive history. It is the reason that Paul said, "We preach Christ and Him crucified," 1 Corinthians 1:23, followed it up in chapter 2 verse 2 by saying, "I am determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. That is what I preach and you cannot move me off of that subject."

The glory of the cross, though now unfolding for us in the twenty-second chapter of Luke, is not new in Scripture. The glory of the cross is foreshadowed in the death of the first animal in the Garden, slain by God to make coverings for guilty sinners. The glory of the cross is seen in the acceptable sacrifices of Abel offered to God. The glory of the cross is seen in the ark that delivered Noah and his family from divine destruction. The cross is foreshadowed in the ram caught in the bush substituted for Isaac as a sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah. The cross is foreshadowed in the Passover lambs in Egypt whose blood was splattered on the doorposts and the cross piece in order to cause the angel of death to pass by and not slaughter the first born. The glory of the cross is foreshadowed in the rocks smitten in the wilderness. The glory of the cross is seen in all the Levitical sacrifices throughout the whole Old Testament economy. The glory of the cross is seen in the serpent lifted up in the wilderness to whom people could look and be delivered from death. The glory of the cross and the redemption found there is even seen in Boaz, the kinsman redeemer.

Those are a few of many of the Old Testament illustrations of the cross, many Old Testament anticipations of the cross. There are Old Testament pictures of the cross, figures of the cross, symbols of the cross, types of the cross, direct prophecies of the cross. From the very beginning, it is crystal clear to any honest student of the Bible that the soul that sins dies and that the only hope to escape that death in its eternal sense involving divine punishment was forgiveness of sin which was dependent on a sacrifice. It is clear throughout the whole Old Testament also that no sacrifice ever offered was satisfactory. That all was just shadow and picture and figure and symbol, but there never was a sacrifice offered in the Old Testament that put an end to all other sacrifices because it was sufficient, because it satisfied God. They were all pictures. They were all figures. They were all symbols.

So the whole Old Testament points in the direction of a suitable sacrifice, a final sacrifice, a complete sacrifice, a satisfactory sacrifice which atones for sin, satisfies divine justice and propitiates divine wrath. That is why it was so monumental when Jesus showed up in the wilderness where John was preaching and John identified Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. All the Old Testament pointed in the direction of a necessary sacrifice. All the Old Testament screams loudly and collectively that no sacrifice yet is sufficient. All the New Testament points as well to the cross. The record of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the consummate gospel record is the record of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. It is the history of His living and His dying and His rising and ascending. It is the focal point of those gospels to look at the cross.

When you come to the book of Acts, you find the Apostles and the early preachers scattering into Jerusalem, Judea and the uttermost part of the earth, preaching the cross, preaching that Messiah must needs have suffered and died and risen again. So the message of the gospels is the cross. The message of Acts is the preaching of the cross. When you come to the epistles, the epistles give us the meaning of the cross, the theology of the cross in understanding its application to salvation, sanctification and glorification. When you come to the book of Revelation before you see the unfolding of the eschatological visions of the Christ who will come in triumph to rule and reign and judge, you see Him identified as the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

Now the whole of Scripture points to the cross, forward, right directly at in the gospels, and back from the book of Acts on. With this chapter now in Luke, chapter 22, we begin the account of the most wondrous of all biblical themes. We begin the account of all accounts, the triumphant account, the most glorious of all events, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Chapter 23 verse 33 specifically refers to the actual crucifixion, "And when they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left." Chapter 24 and verse 1 and 2 indicates the resurrection. "But on the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."

In just a couple of verses, the crucifixion and the resurrection are stated but there's a lot more here in chapter 22, 23 and 24 than just those few historical facts. We are going to be eye-witnesses of everything leading up to that event, that event itself the subsequent resurrection and what followed. This is going to be the greatest part of our journey through the gospel of Luke. This is, in some sense, what we've all been waiting for, for a long, long time. Luke wonderfully will make us eyewitnesses of everything going on that is critical to our understanding with regard to the cross of Christ.

But this does not introduce the subject in the gospel of Luke. Nor is this the first time it is spoken of with any specificity. All the way back in chapter 9 of Luke, our Lord Himself spoke of His cross. He understood what was coming. In verse 22 He said this, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised up on the third day." Absolutely unequivocally specific.

In that same chapter if you further drop down to verse 44 and 45. Verse 44, "Let these words sink into your ears for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. But they did not understand this statement and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it and they were afraid to ask him about this statement." Interesting. He told them about it. He told them

specifically about it. He reiterated it to them and yet they could not understand. And to some degree, it was not good for them to understand. It was more than they could handle. Why then did He tell them? So that all throughout all history and all ages would know that the cross was no surprise to Jesus.

So this is not new to Him, and this is really not new to us because we've heard these words long ago. But when we come to 22, it's no longer in the future, it's no longer something that is to come. It is now time. Let me begin reading this text at verse 37 of chapter 21. Verse 37 of chapter 21, and I'll read down through verse 13.

“Now during the day He was teaching in the temple, but at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet. And all the people would get up early in the morning to come to Him in the temple to listen to Him. Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is called the Passover was approaching. And the chief priests and scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death, for they were afraid of the people. And Satan entered into Judas who is called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the Twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad and agreed to give him money. And he consented and began seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the multitude. Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And He sent Peter and John saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us that we may eat it.’ And they said to Him, ‘Where do You want us to prepare it?’ And He said to them, ‘Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water, follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the owner of the house, The teacher says to you, where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with my disciples. And he will show you a large furnished upper room, prepare it there.’ And they departed and found everything just as He had told them and they prepared the Passover.”

All of that constitutes the preliminary preparation for the cross...the preliminary preparation for the cross. It involves a number of persons. First of all, the devout, we'll call them the devout, the religious leaders in Israel. Secondly, the devil, Satan. Thirdly, the defector, Judas. And fourthly, the disciples who carry out our Lord's desires regarding the Passover which He will turn in to a memorial to His cross. All of this is preliminary preparation. And we're going to look at the devout and the role they played, and the devil and the role he played, and the defector, Judas, and the role he played, and the disciples and the role they played. But they're all role players.

The real architect and designer and power behind all of this is the deity. This is really the work of God. And I find that very evident in the opening verses that I read to you, verses 37 through verse 1. You're not going to find the name God there or any identification of Him by any other term. But the implication here is that God's time has come. And when you compare Luke's account with the opening of the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, verses 1 and 2, it becomes very clear that the divine timetable has reached its climax and God is moving into action. The chief priests and scribes and Jewish leaders do what they do because God has prompted it. Satan does what he does because God has prompted it. Judas does what he does because God has prompted it. The disciples do what they do because God has prompted it. God is the sovereign power behind it all.

Now as you come to verse 1, it says, “The Feast of the Unleavened Bread which is called the Passover was approaching...” It is still Wednesday night of Passion Week, Wednesday night. Matthew 26:1 adds this, “Jesus had finished all His words.” He was through speaking. He started

speaking to the multitudes in the temple area. He had spoken to the leaders in the same temple area. He had exited late in the day with His disciples, gone to the western slope of the Mount of Olives and had spoken to His disciples in a prolonged presentation of His Second Coming, recorded in chapter 21, as well as Mark 13, and Matthew 24 and 25. All those words are now finished. He ends His massive important critical discourse on His Second Coming and now He turns to matters concerning the termination of His first coming.

It may seem like an abrupt dropping of the subject. It may seem like a hard transition to make, but the subject is not completely dropped, that is the subject of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Luke keeps us aware that it remained in the conversation of Jesus even after that great speech was finished.

For example, in chapter 22, go down to verse 16, "And when Jesus on Thursday night eats the Passover with His disciples, He says, 'I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.'" And in verse 18, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the Kingdom of God comes." So Luke is not interested in abandoning the great theme of His return and His Kingdom.

In verse 29 or chapter 22, He says, "Just as My Father has granted Me a Kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Chapter 24 and verse 25, Jesus said even after His resurrection, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken, was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" So Luke does not abandon the subject of the Kingdom and reigning in the Kingdom and the glory and power with which Christ will come.

But clearly, nonetheless, from the beginning of this chapter on, the subject is the cross. Matthew 26:2 adds this, "Jesus said to His disciple, 'You know that after two days...this is Wednesday, that means Friday...after two days, the Passover is coming.'" Why is that important? He went on to say, "And the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion." That's specific. After two days, Friday, the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion. Jesus knew what God's timing was...specifically.

Up until that time, Jesus was teaching. In fact, verse 37 and 38 tell us, He was teaching every day during that week, at least through Wednesday, in the temple and the people, verse 38 says, would get up early in the morning and come to Him in the temple to listen to Him. But the interesting note in these two verses is that at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet. It doesn't say He went to the home of Mary and Martha and the now living Lazarus, which He did on many occasions and which would have been a very comfortable place for Him to recover from the immense rigors of a day banging around in the crowds in the temple area. It just says He went to the Mount of Olives...thick, dark, thick with olive trees.

Why? Because it would have been very dangerous...very dangerous for Him to be anywhere easily found at night. The Jews wanted Him dead. They had been planning that for a long, long time...since His ministry began, since even before the Galilean ministry was completed they wanted Him dead. But the timing wasn't right and they couldn't ever pull it off until the timing was right. And then as it turned out, they wind up executing Jesus at the time they most wanted not to do it. And this is because, before you ever talk a///bout the role of the devout or the devil or the defector, or the role of the disciples, you have to talk about the role of the deity which is really the design of the whole plan. When it isn't time for Jesus to be taken, they can't find Him. It would have been dangerous for Jesus to be in Jerusalem at night because they wanted to take Him captive. And then they would hold Him

somewhere until the Passover was over, until the crowds disappeared, many weeks later, perhaps, and then they would do whatever they were going to do and minimize the public reaction. At night without the surrounding crowds to protect Him, to insulate Him, He would be in great danger.

Verse 2 says the chief priests and scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death for they were afraid of the people. They were caught. They wanted to kill him which meant they needed to capture Him. You have to capture Him before you can kill Him. They couldn't capture Him openly because the people were enamored with Him. He was extremely popular. If you go back to chapter 19, for example, and verse 47, He was teaching daily in the temple but the chief priests and scribes and leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him. And they couldn't find anything that they might do for all the people were hanging upon His words. It was this immense popularity that put them in an impossible position. They needed to find Him in a clandestine way. That's why they pulled the deal together with Judas, it was essential to have a Judas who knew where He was at night. And when they finally came, they came with torches in the middle of the night.

And so, He was hidden, as it were, perhaps in the open air in April in that part of the world, it's lovely in the evening and even in the night. He would stay out somewhere hidden with his friends at night. Even His entry into the city on Thursday night, the next night to have the Passover with His disciples had to be in secret because they would grab Him at any moment if they could do it in a clandestine way. That's why Judas' collusion with the Jews was so critical. That's why God moved on Satan and Satan moved on Judas, and Judas moved on the chief priests, it all took place precisely when God wanted it to take place and not one day before. The plan of God was that Jesus would die at the very time the Passover lambs were dying. That God would even make a statement about Him being the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world in that symbolic way. Every detail planned by God.

So when you come to verse 1 of chapter 22 and you read, "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is called the Passover was approaching," and Matthew says it was just two days away, you know it's time for God to act. You've got to start moving. Things have to be set in motion. Only two days...only two days for the chief priests and the rulers and the leaders and the Sadducees and the Herodians and everybody else that's going to get involved in this, Caiaphas and Herod, Pilate, the Romans, only two days for Satan to do his work, for Judas to play his role, for the disciples to get together to have the Passover, that's only one day away, to establish the new feast pointing to the new deliverance of the cross. Only 48 hours. In part, only 24 hours.

It's God's purpose that on that very Passover in that very year, likely 30 A.D. if calculated back from today, on that very Friday when all the Passover lambs were being slain, the one true Lamb of God would die for the sins of the world.

Now just a couple of comments without getting in to too much detail because you're familiar with these things. The feast of unleavened bread and the Passover, just exactly what are those? The Jews had three big feasts. They were commemorative. They were memorials. They were sort of ways to look back and remember the goodness of God in the past. The three big feasts the Jews celebrated were the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Booths, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the Feast of Unleavened Bread looked back at the deliverance from Egypt. You remember when they were delivered from Egypt, Exodus chapter 12 lays this feast out. They made unleavened bread. Why? Because they were moving in a hurry and yeast takes time. So unleavened bread symbolized haste. And they remembered the Exodus and the great deliverance of God, when God delivered the whole nation from Egypt and opened up the sea and let them walk through and drowned Pharaoh and his entire army in that sea. And eventually brought them through the

wilderness to the land that He had promised to give them. So they looked back at that. And they celebrated...it originally started at barley harvest...barley harvest was kind of the trigger time that originally was used as a time to celebrate this, according to Exodus and Deuteronomy.

But it became something they celebrated every year in the month of Nissan which is like our April, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first. It was a seven-day remembrance of God's delivering them from Egypt.

Well before they were delivered from Egypt, of course, the angel of death came and passed over those houses where the blood was sprinkled on the doorpost and the cross piece. So prior to the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a Passover celebration, it was on the fourteenth of Nissan. Together they made an eight-day celebration. And the words became interchangeable, the identifications interchangeable. That's why Luke writes, "The Feast of Unleavened Bread which is called the Passover."

The Passover actually was one day commemorating one event, the death angel passing by the house and not killing the firstborn because the blood had been sprinkled, as God had commanded. It was followed by the seven-days of Unleavened Bread, but they became interchangeable terms through the years. And so it is that as this inevitable moment of the Passover, Unleavened Bread, comes and is only two days away, God puts everything in motion.

Divine purpose...clear. On Thursday night, Jesus is going to eat the Passover meal with His disciples and it's going to be transformed into the Lord's Table. And it's going to become a new feast and a new commemoration of a new and infinitely greater deliverance at the cross. Bread and wine once remembering a deliverance from Egypt will now remember a deliverance at the cross. On Thursday night, He will eat the Passover with His disciples and transform it.

He will be arrested early on Friday. He will be sentenced by a series of illegitimate courts. He will be scourged, treated mercilessly, crucified and buried before Friday ends. He will be in the grave on Friday through Saturday, part of Sunday and rise the third day. That's the divine plan. Jesus said it was so. He said He would be arrested. He said He would be killed. He said he would rise the third day. He said it several times, recorded. And perhaps many more times. Jesus knew the timing. He knew it was time for Him to die. This is the plan of God.

Several times I've received phone calls from the History channel. They have asked me if I would become a theological consultant on a regular basis on the History channel..which is a horrifying thought because every time they do any treatment of Jesus Christ on the History channel, it is blasphemous. I'm not going to get on there with a lot of critics and skeptics and pseudo-scholars who want to attack the simple, clear honorable glorious truth of Scripture. And if there's anything they want to attack, believe me, it is the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross as an atonement for sin. Critics, unbelievers, skeptics along with the pseudo-scholars have tried to explain Jesus' death every way but the right way. It is a nice story of a nice man with a very bad ending.

Oh, there are those who would suggest to us that the ending of the story in Jesus' case was an unplanned, unintended termination of a perhaps well-intentioned religious man whose ideals were really beyond the capability of His culture. He just was way ahead of His time. Or He was trying to lead some kind of a coup, some kind of a revolution and people saw the political implications of that

and killed Him at a fear of reprisals. And that, too, was a sad ending to a somewhat misconceived plan.

Or perhaps He was just a little carried away with His intellectual and spiritual development and therefore it was something of a delusionary madman who actually believed He was God.

I suppose there are many variations of all of those and Jesus could be viewed and is viewed by many as a visionary good man, mad man, prophet, holy man, schemer who for whatever reason ended very badly. All of that, of course, is blasphemous and utterly unnecessary...utterly unnecessary. Jesus predicted on several occasions that He would die and rise again. And guess what? He died and rose again. He said His death would be at the hands of the leaders of Israel. It was. He said He would die in Jerusalem. He did. He said He would come back to life in three days. He did. He is not the victim of anyone.

In John chapter 10 and verse 18, He says this, "No man has taken it away from Me." What? Verse 17, "I lay down My life, no one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again."

In the nineteenth chapter of John, Pilate who overestimated his importance, said to Jesus, "You do not speak to me, do you not know that I have authority to release you? And I have authority to crucify you? Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above." Who do you think you are? You have no authority over Me unless God gives it to you.

Jesus had total control of His own life in perfect accord with the will of the Father. Oh there were many times when people wanted to kill Jesus. I mean, His whole life story is a story of efforts to kill Him. And how many others there are that aren't recorded in the four gospels, we can only imagine. They wanted to kill Him all the way along. And if there had been an acceptable good opportunity to do it, they would have done it. He was under divine protection His whole life. It all began just after He was born when the first attempt on His life was made by Herod who so badly wanted Him dead that he just massacred every male child in the vicinity two years old and under. Jesus, along with His family, were at the time in Egypt, having been warned by an angel of God of what was coming.

There was early in His ministry in Galilee an opportunity to speak in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, according to Luke 4. And He preached a message there that the people didn't like. Well they didn't like it a lot. And even though it was His own synagogue where He grew up and everybody knew Him, and it was His extended family, and neighbors and friends, they tried to kill Him. They hated the message so much they took Him to the edge of a cliff and wanted to throw Him off. But He disappeared out of their presence.

Early in the gospel of John, chapter 5, Jesus healed a crippled man at the pool of Bethesda. And the Jewish leaders, it says in verse 18, were seeking all the more. They had already always wanted to kill Him, now they wanted all the more to kill Him because He was breaking the Sabbath, calling God His Father and thus making Himself equal with God. There are those who wanted to kill Him for political reasons like Herod, like Caiaphas. There were those who wanted to kill Him for theological reasons, like the chief priests, and scribes. There were those who wanted to kill Him for economic reasons, like Caiaphas, Annas, Sadducees, those that ran the temple money machine. But there were many who wanted Him dead.

In fact, it was so obvious that in John 7:25 you have an amazing statement, "He became known as...quote...'the man whom they are seeking to kill...the man whom they are seeking to kill.'" Look, you can't come up with anything as ridiculous as Jesus going along in some happy-go-lucky fashion thinking He's going to bring about some great spiritual, moral revolution and finding out only at the end...Oops, this thing isn't working out very well. You have one that from the very beginning knew they were after His life. His enemies surrounded Him from the go to the finish. He was never under any illusions, but He also knew from the beginning to the end that He was going to die, when He was going to die, at the hands of whom He was going to die and He knew where He was going to die and He knew precisely the very event that would be taking place when He died and He knew the reason for His dying. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die. Whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

When the temple police were sent by the religious leaders in John 7 verses 44 to 46, they told them to go arrest Jesus. We can't take it anymore, just arrest Him and we'll kill Him. The police came back and didn't have Him and the only answer was, "Never a man spoke like this man." They were so stunned by His presence and His words, they were paralyzed into inaction. All attempts to kill Jesus recorded and unrecorded failed until it was God's time for the Lamb to be slain.

Go down to verse 22 of Luke 22. Jesus says at the Passover on Thursday night, "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined. The Son of Man is going as it has been determined."

Really? Determined by who? Satan? Judas? The chief priests? Caiaphas? Herod? Pilate? No...Acts 2, Peter answers, "Who determined this?" in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:22, "Men of Israel, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know, this man...listen to this...delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross."

Who determined it? It has been determined, says Jesus in the Upper Room, it has been determined. Determined by who? By the predetermined plan of God. Every Jewish family had to select a lamb for Passover. And God selected His Lamb, His Son. And He would slay His Son on this Passover. The divinely decreed time for Jesus to die had arrived. And everybody would line up with the plan of God. The chief priests in their hatred and with their full guilt on display would do what they did because God had determined it would be so. And Satan did what he did and Judas did what he did, and the Romans did what they did, including Pilate and everybody else who was a part of it because God had determined it to be so. His Son would die as His sacrifice, His chosen Lamb at the very time when lambs were slain at Passover, the one true Lamb whose death would take away the sins of the world would finally and forever satisfy God.

That's why Philip, explaining to the Ethiopian in Acts 8, said, "Jesus is the Lamb that Isaiah talked about who was led to slaughter and didn't open his mouth." That's why Paul said to the Corinthians that Jesus is Christ our Passover, who has also been sacrificed. That's why Peter proclaimed to the persecuted and scattered saints that Jesus was the unblemished Passover Lamb foreknown, he says, before the foundation of the world, but having appeared in these last times for your sake. That's why John sees Christ as the Lamb that was slain and is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, Revelation 5.

I suppose from a human viewpoint, if that's all you know and your mind is completely darkened, you could say it was a life gone bad, it was a well-intentioned life, there were a lot of good things about Jesus. He said a lot of good things. Had high moral standards, it's too bad it ended the way it ended. It wasn't right. It wasn't good. And I think there are people skeptical people, who would look at the end of Jesus life and say, "It was a terrible injustice. He didn't do anything to deserve that. Never killed anybody, never robbed anybody, took the moral high ground, it really was a horrific injustice." And it was and from even the human viewpoint, we would agree with that. No victim of injustice as ever more innocent than Christ, the sinless Son of God. Nobody could find anything against Him. No fault could ever be found against Him. No accusation could ever stand or stick. And yet no one suffered more deeply, more profoundly, more undeservedly than He did. And He was actually murdered by people who acknowledged His faultlessness.

So from the human side, I guess there is some kind of nobility in saying it was a very unjust act. In truth, it was the unequalled act of injustice, the worst act of injustice ever perpetrated in the history of the whole unjust world. He's the only truly sinless person who ever lived...innocent, blameless, holy, undefiled, yet He's killed like a criminal. He suffers at the hands of men unjustly. He's punished for crimes He didn't commit. Accusations trumped up against Him. He's framed. He suffered as if guilty, when innocent.

So, you could look at the cross legitimately and say, "It's the worst miscarriage of justice in human history," and you would be right. But that's just not the whole story, is it? From a human viewpoint, it is the worst act of injustice in human history and the people who participated in it bear full culpability for that injustice.

But it's not only that. It is the worst case of human injustice, but it is, at the same time, the greatest act of divine justice in history. From one side, it looks like divine injustice. If it was wrong for men to kill Him, then it must have been wrong for God to kill Him. If He didn't deserve the death that men perpetrated upon Him, why would God kill Him? He didn't have any sins for men to kill Him. He didn't have any sins for God to kill Him. Could we then say that He suffered not only unjustly at the hands of men, but He suffered unjustly at the hands of God? Men punished Him for sins He didn't commit. And then God punished Him for sins He didn't commit.

Jesus Christ was a victim of men on the cross, but not merely that. He was murdered by evil people who hated Him, but not merely that. He was executed unjustly and illegally, but not simply that. Even more staggeringly, and more in some ways unbelievably, He was God's victim. It was God who slew Him. It was God who killed Him. It was the infinitely perfect, holy, righteous, loving God who was His own Father and one with Him in eternal coexistence who killed Him. He is executed in one sense unjustly in order to achieve divine justice on behalf of people who don't deserve it.

This is the staggering reality of the cross. And He is a willing victim...a willing victim. If He could escape, if there's any other way, Father, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done. No man takes My life from Me, I lay it down of Myself.

Why would anybody submit Himself to such injustice to satisfy divine justice? Answer, ultimately for the salvation of unworthy sinners who can be brought into eternal heaven to forever praise and glorify and honor His name. He is God's victim. He is God's chosen Lamb to be killed at God's

moment by the One who loved Him perfectly. He is to be executed by the divine Judge to satisfy His own justice and His own righteousness for your sake and mine who are utterly unworthy. And He went to the cross willingly.

This is the greatest sacrifice ever made, infinitely greater. It's the purest act of love ever done. He is not killed because the plan went wrong. He is not killed because the revolution was rejected. He is not killed simply because of human hate or human injustice, nor is He killed because somehow God has a flaw. Whatever might appear to be an act of injustice on the part of God is really an act of pure justice mixed with pure love and grace. His death was God's plan for us.

Now look, all Christians know that, right? All Christians know that. If you don't know that and believe that, you're not a Christian. That's what it means to be a Christian, to know this and believe this...that's being a Christian. We understand that. Christ's death then is the highpoint in redemptive history, it is God's highpoint, it is God's moment. It is the center of God's story. The cross is our only hope, our only refuge from divine judgment. And listen to me, the cross must be the sanctuary for every Christian's private worship. The cross must be the sanctuary for every Christian's private worship, that's why it's here behind me for all of you to see, to sit at the foot of the cross and be reminded that this is our Holy of Holies. You cannot take it for granted. You cannot become familiar with it so that it loses its wonder.

Now, Luke is going to give us a front row seat to the unfolding drama of the cross. And that was the introduction to the introduction. Let's pray.

A staggering and stunning reality grips our hearts as we think about the glories of the cross. Such transcendent reality, we can't even comprehend this love, we cannot understand how You would receive glory from redeeming such as we are. And yet we know, Lord, salvation is not for us, it is for You. That all of this is not just so that we can enjoy heaven but so that You can be worshiped by redeemed sinners. But the scheme is all about gathering a bride for the Son who will love Him and worship Him and honor Him and praise Him and the bride whom He can give to You, along with Himself, so that You become all in all. We're caught up in this staggering, sweeping drama and one day brought into glory that we might become the community of those redeemed and glorified who give You worship, worship which apparently holy angels cannot fully satisfy. And so You bring us to glory. All of this for that, that You might be forever glorified.

And now we want to gather with those until that day we gather in heaven, here on earth we gather with the redeemed as if around the throne and say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor and glory and blessing." May the cross be the sanctuary of our private worship in all its glory. As it unfolds in the weeks ahead, Lord, may we be given a greater and greater understanding than ever before that we may honor the One who gave Himself for us and in return gladly give ourselves to Him.

Before I close in prayer, just a reminder that if you don't know the Christ that I've spoken of, if you have not come to the cross and put your trust in the One who gave His life for you, this is your opportunity to do that, to ask the Lord to forgive your sins and to apply the death of Christ to you. He died bearing sins not His own but yours. He paid in full the penalty for Your sin. If you believe in Him, accept Him as Lord and Savior, you receive eternal life, the promise of heaven. Honor Christ by granting Him that which His heart desires, the souls of those whose names are written in the book of life.

Father, we come again thanking You for this great, great beginning, the wondrous truth of the cross. Refresh our hearts in it again. May we be lost in wonder, love and praise over being loved so greatly and over being so graciously given salvation when we are so unworthy. We praise You, we thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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