



If you read the Bible, one thing soon becomes clear: the writers of this book considered the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the events leading up to these, to be very important. The four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, recorded the thirty-three years of Jesus' life, but devoted almost a third of their space just to the last week of his life.

So what is the meaning of the cross? What is the significance for us of the death of Jesus? Let's look at a verse from the Bible to try to answer these questions:

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (1 Peter 3:18).

We can see four things from this about the death of Jesus:

The wonder of it

Christ died—this is the wonder of Calvary. Crucifixion was common enough in the first century. There was nothing unusual about it. But the wonder of this crucifixion was not in the *act* but the *person*. Christ died. 'Christ' is a Greek word; the Hebrew equivalent is 'Messiah', and the English translation would be 'The Anointed One'. It was a title for a very special person. Another title given to Jesus was 'Emmanuel', which means 'God with us'. Christ is God. God died on the cross. This is the wonder of it! The immortal died!

From our verse we can see that Christ is also called 'the righteous'. This was yet another title used in the New Testament for our Saviour (Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14). It means that Jesus was pure and sinless.

So then, these titles tell us the wonder of Calvary. As the Righteous One, death had no way of claiming Jesus, because death is the wages of sin; as he had not sinned, he did not deserve to die. Yet Christ, the Righteous One, did die. Why?

The meaning of it

Our verse gives us two reasons for why Christ died: it was *for sins*, and it was *for the unrighteous*.

It was a punishment for sins—but we've just seen that Christ didn't sin, so whose sin was he punished for? We're given the answer: he was punished for the sins of the 'unrighteous'. When he died, he was acting on behalf of others. Elsewhere in his epistle, Peter states this truth so clearly: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Peter 2:24). Indeed, this is what the Bible is always repeating: 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities' (Isaiah 53:5); 'Christ died for the ungodly' (Romans 5:6).

These verses all declare the great biblical doctrine of the substitutionary death of Jesus atoning for sin—but what does this all mean at a personal level? It means that my deceit, pride, envy, jealousy, and the rest of my sins, all of which condemn me to hell, Jesus has taken upon himself. He took my guilt and was punished for me. This is what the Bible teaches.

Can it really be true? It's not *fair* that Jesus should die for us, but fairness doesn't enter into it. It's an act of God's love and grace. It's all thoroughly undeserved, and even unexpected. It's not fair, but it is perfectly just. Justice is not abused, because sin is punished. The guilty one dies. When Jesus takes our sin, he also takes our guilt.

The heart of the matter is this: God is Judge. We are the guilty ones. The Judge does not require us, the guilty, to provide some innocent friend to suffer for us. There are no innocents, because each one of us has

sinned. All are guilty. Instead, the Judge says, 'I will suffer instead of you. I will pay the price. I will die. I will become man, and, as the sinless man, as the innocent Jesus, I will die for guilty sinners.' That's the meaning of Calvary.

The success of it

'Christ died for sins once and for all'. It was a once-for-all act. It was unrepeatable because it was 100 per cent successful. 'This man made one sacrifice for sin for ever.' The success was guaranteed, because it was planned by the omnipotent, sovereign God. Peter again made this abundantly clear in his sermon recorded in Acts 2:23: 'This man [Jesus] was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.'

When Jesus said on the cross, 'It is finished', he meant that everything necessary for the fulfilment of God's loving purpose was about to be accomplished in his death.

The purpose of it

The purpose of it was 'to bring you to God'. God's love made Calvary possible, but it was God's holiness that made it necessary. The problem has always been our sin, which separates us from God. Because of our sin, we are enemies of God. We are not welcome in the presence of God. God and man are completely incompatible, and that will continue unless sin is dealt with, and the sinner changed.

Sin would, eventually, bring you to God, but only to be condemned and sent to hell. The aim of the gospel is to bring sinners to God as acceptable and righteous. This is a great task, and the only way it can be accomplished is by the cross. By his death on the cross, Jesus dealt with:

The guilt of our sin—he took it upon himself.

The wrath of God—he became the object of God's holy wrath for us, appeasing divine justice.

The sinful nature of man—the cross makes it possible for God to remain just and at the same time declare sinners to be not guilty (Romans 3:26). Faith in what Jesus has done gives us, in spite of our sin, the righteousness of Jesus.

All this is only possible because Christ died. *He* brings us to God.

What about you? Have you understood the meaning of the cross? Have you seen your own sin and guilt? Are you trusting in Christ's death to bring you to God?

God still saves guilty sinners, so why don't you repent and turn from the way of sin? Come in faith to the Saviour. Ask for mercy and forgiveness, and you will know the joy of sins forgiven and peace with God.

HE DIED
FOR
YOU

Text: Peter Jeffery
Illustrations: Bradley Goodwin

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