

The Death of Jesus

The envious and hateful religious leaders pushed the rulers to condemn Jesus to death. They stirred up the crowds to shout, “Crucify Him. Crucify Him.” At last they the kind and wise Jesus was sentenced to death. Pilate, the Roman governor, had Jesus whipped with a lash containing glass. Soldiers put a crown of thorns on His head, mocking and hitting Him. Then they pressed a heavy cross upon His wounded back and forced Him to carry outside the city. Two criminals also carried crosses alongside Jesus. They were doomed to die this most horrible of deaths.

On the top of a hill called the Place of the Skull, the soldiers took the two thieves and nailed them to their crosses. The men struggled to get away and screamed in pain. Jesus did not resist the soldiers. No curses came out of His mouth. The hands of Jesus had gently touched the sores of lepers with healing. Now those hands were nailed to a cross. The feet of Jesus had walked among the slums of the poor to bring courage. Now those feet were twisted and bleeding under the iron spike.

Jesus' Compassion on the Cross

The cross is thrust into the ground. Jesus looks around at those whose greed and loathing have put Him there. The soldiers gamble for the clothes of the criminals, oblivious to the pain they've caused. It is not His own pain that tears His heart. He is concerned for them. What does Jesus say in the face of all this ugliness and sin? “Father of Life, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

There is no anger in Jesus. He instead longs for these wicked men to turn from evil and escape further suffering. He is

calm and holds His power in check. Earlier when they came to arrest Him, He had told His disciples, “Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). Jesus will not use His power to escape. He has a purpose for this horrible moment. He is suffering for some higher reason than anyone has ever suffered.

Every breath is painful. He gasps to speak through a parched mouth. What is He trying to say? Jesus' mother weeps beneath the cross. Now she understands the prophecy at Jesus' birth, “A sword will also pierce your soul” (Luke 2:35). Jesus speaks regarding His disciple John, “Woman, behold your son!” And to John, “Behold your mother” (John 19:26-27). Even in the midst of horrific suffering, Jesus cares for his widowed mother.

The criminal on one of the crosses is unmoved by Jesus' gracious spirit. He mockingly screams out, “Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” However, the other criminal has seen the peace and kindness in Jesus' face. He rebukes his fellow criminal, “Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” He could see Jesus' innocence. He knew clearly that something special that had never happened in the history of the world, was going on. He pleaded, “Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom.” Again, Jesus rises above His pain to bring hope to a frightened soul. “I tell you the truth today, you will be with Me in paradise (heaven)” (Luke 23:39-43).

Why did Jesus Die?

Why did this criminal think Jesus could help him after he died? What was different about Jesus' death? An ancient prophecy written more than 500 years before this time had said about Jesus, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed....The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" Isaiah 53:6, 6b). Is that what was happening? Had the Father of Life found a way to help people escape from their suffering by taking their suffering on Himself?

There are many stories of people who out of love or duty have died for someone else. Perhaps you've heard the story about a commander who willingly grabbed a hand-grenade, thrown by the enemy, and held it to himself. There was no time to toss it away. He took the explosion full-force to protect the soldiers surrounding him. Such amazing sacrifice! He lost his life in order to give life to his soldiers.

The Bible's story tells us clearly that Jesus had no sin that would lead Him to suffer in this horrible way. Then it must be that the ancient scriptures are true when they say, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, who, when He was reviled did, not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed"(1 Peter 2:21-24).

This is what the criminal believed. He knew he deserved to die. His own sin had led to such suffering. But he cried out for mercy, not to escape from death, but to escape from suffering in hell and to be able to go to heaven instead. He

thought Jesus could help him. This is an amazing thought. Let's think more about it.

The Father of Life looked down on His children in this world. They were stuck in their suffering. He chose to send Jesus to show them His compassionate mercy. Daily Jesus had helped the poor and the sick, showing them the willing heart of God to help all people of every race and background. Did the Father of Life also send Jesus to receive the consequences of people's sins? Could He possibly forgive sinners and free them from their penalty?

It is the right of kings today. On their birthdays or another special day, they are free to release those prisoners that they choose to pardon. They have this authority and their wisdom is respected. The ancient scriptures say that the King of the universe has chosen to pardon the sins of those who turn to Him for help! Listen to the words, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been made righteous by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-9).

God promises that He can pardon our sins. Isn't it true that fathers can forgive their children and pay for their debts? Suppose your son likes to play with rocks. He throws them into the water. He throws them at trees. You tell him all the time, "Be careful, you're going to break something. Then what will you do?" He remembers for a little while. Now suppose one day your son is walking near a nice house. He sees a coconut up in a tree and takes a rock to hit it. He's not a very good aim yet, even after all that practice, and the rock sails past the trees and smashes a large glass window in someone's house. He tries to run and hide, but the neighbor sees him and you.

Guess who has to pay for the window? That's right, you do.

Now if your son had enough money, you'd probably make him pay. He needs to learn a lesson. But he doesn't have enough. So you have to pay. You will find another way to teach your son where to throw rocks. You will pay for the window because the boy is your son and you are responsible to help him with his mistakes.

Doesn't it look like this is what the Father of Life has done? He sent Jesus to pay for our sins, to receive our demerits, our mistakes, our sins. He Himself was full of righteous merit. Because He was also God from eternity, His righteousness is large enough to trade for our sins. What an amazing exchange. If this is true it is incredible news for our freedom and our peace.

The Battle between Satan and Jesus

As Jesus was suffering, around twelve-noon, the sky became very dark over the entire city. The crowd could not see anything. They were very frightened. Some thought that God was angry with them for murdering innocent Jesus. Others could feel the presence of evil. Satan and the whole host of evil spirits had come to the cross as well. They knew clearly the plan of God to save the people in this world through Jesus' death. They were determined to stop it if they could.

Satan knew that if Jesus died on the cross, He could save anyone who called on God. He would be able to completely overcome the evil spirits as well. Therefore Satan pressed in upon Jesus with enormous temptations. We don't know exactly what Jesus felt. Perhaps Satan pushed thoughts such as, "Don't You want to live?" "Can't You see that no one is appreciating what You are doing?" "Your own nation has turned against You and one of Your own disciples has betrayed You! You might as well return to heaven where You were adored by

the angels."

Later perhaps he tempted Jesus with the thought that the sins were so horrible that Jesus would never live again. During His ministry, Jesus had several times predicted His own death, telling the disciples that He would die but on the third day, He would be resurrected and alive forever. Now Satan pounded Him with doubts and fears. After it had been dark for around three hours, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" His heart was wrung by temptations and the dark and enormous load of humanity's sins.

Still, Jesus did not come down from the cross. In His incredible compassion and love for all people, He remained, bearing the load, until finally He cried out, "It is finished!" Then He hung His head and died. Why were those His last words? What was finished? The battle over Satan and the battle to save people from sin and suffering were perfectly completed. An earthquake shook the land, people cried and wailed both from fear and great sorrow at Jesus' death.

Some were quite surprised to think that Jesus had died so quickly. Normally crucifixion would take several days of torture and pain. But Jesus died after only six hours. They were sure it was another piece of evidence that Jesus died, not from the wounds, but from bearing the sins of the world. The captain of all the soldiers was so moved by what He had seen of Jesus' patience and purity that he cried out, "Surely this Man was the Son of God" (Mark15:39).

The Burial of Jesus

After Jesus had died, a rich man came and requested the body of Jesus in order to put it in his own tomb. That rich man had loved Jesus for a long time, but because he was afraid to

lose his position and friendships, he had not dared to show openly that he believed. Now he didn't care. He just wanted to show appreciation for Jesus' great love to him. He wanted to use his influence to give Jesus a good burial. The governor agreed to let him take the body of Jesus. Jesus was placed in the large tomb of this rich man on Friday evening. This was very unusual for criminals on crosses were never given such treatment. Their bodies were left to rot, eaten by the birds. Not so with Jesus' body.

The disciples of Jesus hid themselves and carefully locked the door because they were very afraid since Jesus had been murdered. They wondered if they would be next. They forgot Jesus' predictions that He would die and rise again. They didn't understand why such a good person should die. They didn't know He had been making a way for their sins to be forgiven.

In just three days they would understand clearly and in the next lesson we will discover the most amazing event that led them from sorrow to rejoicing, from despair to eternal hope. But we understand now many things about the death of Jesus. We can clearly see the character of God in how Jesus acted with such self-control and compassion on the cross. We know clearly God's heart towards us. We can see His amazing victory over the powers of darkness and evil. We know God can help us in the face of all our temptations and struggles with evil. We have seen that kings and fathers have the authority to pardon and pay for the sins of those who have done wrong. What joy this brings to our hearts to think that God could forgive our sins. What freedom it brings. What gratitude springs up in our hearts to God, making us want to turn from evil and live a life of compassion and self-sacrifice like Jesus.

How can we receive God's mercy? Later one of Jesus' disciples wrote in the Bible these words, "If we claim to be with-

out sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

We must humble ourselves and see the anger, hatred, greed and selfishness that is in our own hearts. We must tell God about it and ask for His help. He promises that if we will simply do this, He will forgive us and clean our hearts.

Why not try and see if it is true. Quietly now pray these words,

"Father of Life, thank You for Your amazing compassion. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for my sins. I confess that I, like the people around Jesus, have had evil thoughts, unkind words and wrong actions. Surely it was also my sins that killed Him. Please forgive me. Please change my heart and make it clean. Thank You for forgiving me because I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you prayed this with true sincerity, You can know that you are pardoned and that God cares for you.

Points to Remember

- * Jesus helped many people but He received persecution and died for them.
- * While the death of people is an ordinary occurrence, the death of Jesus had a plan.
- * Jesus died with the purpose of dying in place of good and bad people.
- * There is no love greater than dying for someone else.

Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in

this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Questions

1--Write T before the statements that are true and F before those that are false:

_____ Jesus had no sin.

_____ Jesus was very angry with those who hurt Him.

_____ Jesus being on the cross showed His love.

_____ Jesus died only because of the sins of others.

2--Underline the sentences that are correct.

Jesus has power to forgive those who have done wrong.

Jesus' heart is full of mercy.

Jesus sacrificed His life for His own peace.

Jesus sacrificed His life for His own sake.

When Jesus died what did He do?

He was angry.

He cursed.

He cried out to His father.

Who did not want Jesus to die?

The angels

People

Satan

3--Fill in the following blanks:

Jesus' body was put in the tomb of a _____
_____ man.

Jesus' body was put in the tomb on the evening of _____
_____.

Jesus cleanses people from _____ and gives
_____.

4--What are the two most important things that enable Jesus to be able to forgive sins?

5--If this statement is true of your choice today, check it:

____ I believe that Jesus died for my sins. I am thankful and I want to tell the Father of _____ Life thank you for having compassion on me and for sending His son.

____ I want to turn away from all my sins and ask God to give me power to stop sinning. I _____ want to thank Him for forgiving me like Jesus forgave the thief.