

Why did Jesus die for us?

Hebrews 10:11-18 & John 12:20-33

Passion Sunday 2020

*Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

29.03.20 Why did Jesus die for us? Heb 10:11-18 & John 12:20-33

Shortly after Jesus was born, men came from the East, asking, *Where is he who was born King of the Jews? We have come to worship him.*

Shortly before Jesus died, other men came from the West, asking, *We would like to see Jesus.* Of course, it wasn't just the physical sight of Jesus that these Greeks wanted - many crowds saw him. What they sought was a private interview.

Before we think about Jesus' answer, let's ask ourselves, *Is that our desire? Would we like to see Jesus, and spend time with him?* Once, after a funeral I had taken, an elderly man spoke to me. *I have never come to know Jesus for myself - can I speak to you privately about it?*

Do you really want to meet Jesus? Or are you keeping him at arm's length? But if we seek him with all our heart, he has **promised** we shall get to know him. (*Jeremiah 29:13; John 7:17*) Whether you come from the East or the West - the North or the South! - Jesus died for **you!**

We're told what Jesus said on this occasion - but what a **strange** answer it was! I think we can picture these Greeks standing at the edge of a little crowd about Jesus. They speak to Philip, who in turn speaks to Andrew, and together they go up to Jesus. They're not sure about it, because Jesus had once said he *was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* (*Matt 15:24*)

Jesus' answer was, I fancy, spoken to the crowd around him. All through John's gospel - from the wedding at Cana onwards, we hear Jesus say, *My hour has not yet come - until now.* It's as if Jesus sees the interest of the Greeks as a signal from his Father that **the hour had come**, for which he was born. Immediately Jesus opens up his heart and mind to share with us what he means. But he does it in paradoxes!

It's the hour which will glorify him - but it's the hour of his death - for **he** is the grain of wheat. He declares that it is only by **his dying**, that **life** can come to the world - the many grains of wheat which will arise from his death. The Greeks don't belong to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but Jesus said, *A time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.. (John 4:23)* Jesus' death will open the way to eternal life, and he *will draw all men and women to himself. (John 12:32)*

That picture of the grain of wheat is not for Jesus alone. **Every** grain of wheat must be buried and die before it can bring forth life. **This truth** is for every one **us**. And it goes clean contrary to what the world teaches. Doesn't the world teach *that we are to love our life?* To seek **self**-fulfilment, improve our **self**-image, invest wisely in the world, aim high and **promote ourselves?** Aren't we to seek to be free, and not to be controlled by others?

Jesus teaches differently. He tells us plainly that the world's way is the way of eternal loss. *(Lk 12:16-21; 13:23-30; 14:25-33; 16:19-26)* The man or woman who wants **eternal life** must reject the way of the world and die to it. The world sees that as crazy and suicidal - that we should humbly give ourselves away to Christ and live for him. *(Mt 20:26-28; Jn 8:32,36; 13:13-17)* But then, throwing a seed into the damp earth might seem an odd way to produce a beautiful plant!

God offers eternal life as a free gift. It cannot be earned or merited. Jesus *never* attracted disciples by painting a glowing picture of the life of discipleship. It can be hard and difficult. Jesus wants those who will take up their cross and follow him day by day. Not those who turn back when the enemy tempts them to give up. But, Jesus tells us, this is the way **that life will flow out from us to others**, and we shall know the joy of harvest. *(John 7:37-39)*

So it is - in the agony of this paradox - that **Jesus' own heart is troubled**, and he longs to cry out, *Father, save me from this hour.* But he will **not** listen to that longing. He prays instead, **Father, glorify your name.** And the Father gives Jesus - as he has done

twice before - an audible answer, *I have glorified it, and will glorify it again. (Matt 3:17,17:5)*

What does this answer mean? At the very least - the glory of the Father's name - **the glory of his revealed character** - is bound up with **the life and death of his Son**. At the beginning of his gospel, John writes, speaking of Jesus, *We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (1:14)* **Through the works that the Father gave Jesus to do** - which so wonderfully pointed to God's character of love and mercy - **Father and Son were glorified**. All those instances of healing the sick, delivering the demonised, feeding the 5000, stilling the storm, even raising the dead - they show us the Father's love towards us, and the Saviour's power to meet our deepest spiritual needs. But the Father's glory, and his Son's, would shine out **most of all in Jesus' death and resurrection**.

But why? What is the glory of the Cross? That awful death when Jesus was stripped naked and nailed to that scaffold of shame, to die in agony! Why should Jesus have to shed his life-blood in **death** - to bring us **life**?

Let's listen to the Holy Spirit's answer, as we heard it from the letter to the Hebrews. He tells us that Jesus' death is *only understandable* on the basis of **all God taught his people** through Old Testament days.

From the beginning (Gen 3:24), God made it clear that there was **a gulf, a barrier**, between **sinful man** and **an utterly holy God**. When Moses asked to see God's glory, he was told, *No-one may see me and live. (Exod 33:20)* For, as David said, *There is no-one who does good, not even one. (Psa 14:3; 53:3; Rom 3:10)* And as Paul wrote, *God lives in unapproachable light, whom no-one has seen or can see. (1 Tim 6:16)*

So, *when God gave Moses a pattern for the Tabernacle* - that portable Tent of Worship, that went everywhere with Israel in the

desert - there was **a curtain**, separating the inner Most Holy place from the rest of the tent. This Most Holy place contained only the Ark or Chest of the Covenant, and this contained the two tablets on which were written the 10 Commandments of the Law, which symbolised the holiness of God's presence.

The outer part of the tent was entered every day by the priests, but the **inner Most Holy place was entered only once a year**, by the High Priest, and that only with the blood of sacrifices, for himself and the people. Ordinary worshippers could not enter the tent, but only the courtyard outside, where the daily sacrifices were offered up.

Why these sacrifices? What was their purpose? They were needed to restore fellowship between God and his worshippers, whose **sin had come between them and God**. For our Almighty Creator, *the only real and true God*, is above all **morally pure and holy**. He is quite unlike the gods believed in by other nations: immoral, bad tempered, capricious, vain and evil.

The God of Israel gave his people the Tent of Meeting and the sacrifices *to teach this lesson* - that *He cannot tolerate wrong* (Hab 1:13) and therefore, when we break his laws, he **cannot** overlook it - sin must be dealt with, if we are to come close to him. Disobedience keeps us apart from him, the only source of life. So **our lives are forfeit**, we lose the right to have them! God was teaching this lesson **because he loves us** and wants to show us how we can be forgiven and come close to him.

For his ancient people Israel God allowed an **animal** to take the place of the worshipper. He or she would lay their hand on the animal's head - to **identify** oneself with it and, as it were, **transfer one's guilt** to the animal - which then suffered the **death** the worshipper's sin deserved. It was a bloody picture of the awful cost of our redemption.

But these sacrifices had to be offered again and again. Indeed, the priests offered sacrifices daily, and the High Priest year after year, on the special Day of Atonement, on behalf of the people, to atone for any sins that had been overlooked. As the Holy Spirit

comments, **such endless repetition** shows that the blood of goats and bulls could **never** take away sins. (Heb 10:4) They could only be an inadequate **picture** of a perfect sacrifice offered by a sinless and perfect Priest, which would take away our guilt once and for all.

We come now to the great mystery of God's plan to rescue us. A mystery at the heart of God, that we could never know about or fathom, if he had not revealed it to us - as much as we can grasp, or need to know. It has to do with God's coming to us in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, because of his great love for us, to rescue us from condemnation and death.

Jesus is that perfect, sinless and true High Priest. He was a **man**, knowing what it is to be tempted, but he **never** gave into it. (Heb 2:14-18; 4:15) He is therefore able to offer a better sacrifice on our behalf. He is a Priest who lives for ever, needing **no** successor. Jesus offered **one sacrifice only**. A sacrifice so perfect and adequate it **never** needs to be repeated. Its value lasts **forever** - and it can restore **everyone** to fellowship with God - everyone who puts their trust in him.

How can this be? Because it was the sacrifice, not of an animal, however free from blemish, but of **the sinless Son of God** - both God and man - and therefore **of infinite value**, given **freely** up to death for us, by the common will of Father and Son. Jesus bled and died on the Cross for **me**, in the place **my** sins deserve. And he did it for **you** as well! It was God's wonderful loving remedy and rescue of us from death. Did God's righteous anger against sin need a propitiation? - Yes, but **He provided it Himself!!** So great is his love for you and me!

To demonstrate God's acceptance of that sacrifice He did two things: At the moment of Christ's death, **God tore that curtain** from top to bottom. (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45) The way into his presence is now open. And **God raised Jesus from the dead** - *he is gloriously alive for evermore!* And he seated Jesus at his right hand in heaven. Those old priests had to **stand**, because their work was never done. But Jesus **sits**, for his atoning work is **completed forever**. (Heb 10:12,14; Psa 110:1; Zech 6:13; John 19:30)

What then must we do? We must do what the worshippers of old did. We must come to God and **confess our sins** and turn away from them. We must, as it were, *lay our hand on Jesus' head*. We must **thank him** for dying for us and **commit ourselves to him** forever. In simple trust, with empty hands, we receive God's gift of forgiveness and love.

What happens then? The Holy Spirit tells us in verse 14 that **we are**

1. *made perfect for ever* 2. *being made holy*. 1. happens **straight away**. See verse 17, where he quotes *Jeremiah 31:34: Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more*. These have been **forgiven forever** - no other sacrifice can ever be called for. We may appear before God, **put right with him**. It is the basis on which he will hear our prayers. (*Rom 5:1-2; Eph 2:13,18; 3:12; Heb 4:16; 10:19-20*)

He sees us clothed in the beautiful righteousness of Christ. (*2 Cor 5:21; Isa 61:10*) And he adopts us into his family and calls us his sons and daughters. (*John 1:12; Rom 8:14-16; 2 Cor 6:18*)

As for 2. God now *puts his laws in our hearts, and writes them on our minds* (verse 16, quoting *Jer 31:33*). Not on external tablets of stone! As a result, we find them good and **want** to obey them. Moreover, because he now comes, as his Spirit, to dwell **in our hearts** - he gives us **power** to overcome the down-drag of sin - we are those **being made holy**. As we must be, if we are to live in his presence.

Finally, after we've heard God's answer to the request, *we would like to see Jesus*, we must **give our own answer**. Are **we** willing to abandon the world's idea of what life is for? **Do we love Jesus** more than ourselves? So that we will willingly hand our lives over to him? Even though the world sees that as *hating* our lives?

If so, we will gladly give ourselves, **heart, mind and will** to Christ for time and eternity. We will **trust him** to save us from our sin - for all eternity. In dying to self we shall become free to live to God. We

shall rejoice and **know why Jesus died for us** - because in **his mighty love for us**, he was ready to go through that awful agony of the Cross, where our sin came between him and his Father. He did that to **rescue us** from eternal loss and destruction! To God only be honour and glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.