

“WHY CHRIST WENT TO THE CROSS”

I. Introduction

- A. One of the things that stands out in the Bible’s four accounts of Jesus’ death on the cross is that the writers show considerable restraint in how they describe it.
1. In our text, John simply says, “they crucified him.”
 2. Crucifixion was a brutal method of execution, but the Gospels do not focus on the gory details.
 3. It is not that the Evangelists did not know about these details.
 4. After all, John was an eyewitness of Jesus’ death on the cross.
 5. And Luke, being a doctor, would have had a medical understanding of what happens to a person when they are crucified.
 6. There is a reason why John and the other Evangelists do not dwell upon the details of Jesus’ physical suffering.
 7. They are not interested in eliciting a purely emotional response in their readers.
 8. They do not want us to feel sorry for Jesus.
 9. Instead, they want us to reflect upon the meaning of Jesus’ death on the cross.
- B. As we study John’s account of the crucifixion today, we will see that these verses call our attention to three reasons why Jesus went to the cross.
1. First, Jesus went to the cross to atone for sin.

2. Second, he went to the cross to fulfill Scripture.
3. And third, he went to the cross to complete his work.

II. To Atone for Sin

- A. The first thing that we see in this passage is that Jesus went to the cross to atone for sin.
 1. John underscores this point in several ways.
 2. For one thing, he tells us that Jesus “went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull.”
 3. The verb “went out” conveys that Jesus was crucified outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem.
 4. This is a significant detail, because in the Old Testament, the sin offering on Day of Atonement was burned outside the camp, symbolizing God’s provision of atonement for his people’s sins. (see Lev. 16:27)
 5. That sacrifice also underscored the fact that sin causes us to be cut off from God’s favorable presence and placed under his curse.
 6. The fact that Jesus was crucified outside the holy city indicates that he is the true offering for sin.
- B. We should reflect upon what this tells us about how God regards us in our fallen estate.
 1. As Calvin explains, “In no other way could our guilt be removed than by the Son of God becoming a curse for us. We see him driven out into an accursed place, as if he had been polluted by a mass of all sorts of crimes, that there he might appear to be accursed before God and men. Assuredly, we are prodigiously stupid, if we do not plainly see in this mirror with what abhorrence God regards sin.”

2. God hates sin.
 3. He hates it so much that the only way for our guilt to be removed was for the sinless Son of God to bear our iniquities and have God look upon him as the object of his wrath.
- C. Another way in which this passage points to the atoning nature of Christ's death is that it tells us that Jesus was crucified between two men who were deserving of death.
1. The other Gospels tell us that these men were criminals and robbers, which probably indicates that they had participated in some kind of insurrection against Rome.
 2. The Jewish leaders had tried to persuade Pilate that Jesus was that kind of threat, but Pilate did not believe them.
 3. Yet here we see Jesus being crucified alongside of men who were guilty of this crime.
 4. This is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).
 5. Jesus was condemned alongside the guilty, not because he had any guilt of his own, but because he was bearing our sins and making intercession for us.
- D. The atoning nature of Jesus' death is also indicated by the notice that Pilate had affixed to the cross.
1. It was typical for Roman officials to do this in order to specify the crime for which the individual was being punished.
 2. In Jesus' case, the inscription read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."
 3. The chief priests were not happy about that way of summing up Jesus' offense.

4. They wanted Pilate to clarify the charge by noting that Jesus only claimed to be King of the Jews.
 5. But Pilate was not about to give in to them on this.
 6. He was irritated that they had pushed him into having Jesus crucified, so he used this as a way of getting back at them.
 7. He was mocking the Jews, saying, 'Look at what has become of your King.'
 8. Pilate's motives were far from upright, but because of what he did the official charge against Jesus was not one of disgrace but one of honor.
 9. The notice hung on his cross declared that he had no sins of his own for which he had to pay.
 10. He went to the cross to atone for our sins.
- E. It is also significant that Pilate had this notice posted in three different languages: Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.
1. Aramaic was the local language spoken by Jews in Palestine, Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire, and Greek was the language of commerce throughout the Empire.
 2. Everyone who passed by and saw Jesus hanging on the cross would be able to read the inscription affixed to his cross.
 3. This made a symbolic point about the scope of Jesus' atoning death.
 4. It tells us that Jesus is not just the Savior of Israel, but the Savior of the world.

5. As unlikely as it seemed at the time, Jesus was offering himself up as an atoning sacrifice for people from every nation, race, and language.

III. To Fulfill Scripture

- A. We turn now to the second thing that this passage tells us about why Jesus went to the cross: he went to the cross to fulfill Scripture.
 1. We have already said that Jesus was the fulfillment of the sin offering in the book of Leviticus and of the suffering servant foretold by Isaiah.
 2. Another way in which Jesus' death fulfilled Scripture has to do with how the soldiers divided up Jesus' garments.
 3. John says that this fulfilled Psalm 22:18, where David laments the mistreatment that he received at the hands of his enemies by saying, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."
 4. As the Lord's anointed one, David was a typological foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.
 5. The trials that he endured as Israel's king pointed to Christ's sufferings.
 6. For this reason, Psalm 22 is a description of David's suffering as well as a prophecy of Jesus' suffering.
 7. The Roman soldiers certainly had no intention of fulfilling prophecy when they were dividing up Jesus' clothing, but once again we see that God worked through the sinful actions of men to carry out his purposes.
- B. The distribution of Jesus' garments is also significant because it emphasizes the shameful nature of his death.

1. When one of our loved ones is dying, we do what we can to preserve their dignity, even though we know that death will ultimately prevail.
 2. Jesus was not afforded such kindness.
 3. He was stripped of his clothing, a fact that points us to the fulfillment of another passage of Scripture.
 4. In Genesis 3, after they had sinned, Adam and Eve saw the shame of their nakedness.
 5. And though they tried to cover it themselves, their attempts were in vain.
 6. Yet when God came to them and confronted them for their sin, he graciously covered their shame by clothing them with animal skins.
 7. This was a foreshadowing of how Jesus would take away our shame by bearing that shame himself upon the cross.
 8. Because he was stripped of his garments and made an object of disgrace, all of our disgrace is taken away and we are clothed with his righteousness.
- C. John also tells us that Jesus' statement "I thirst" was spoken to fulfill Scripture.
1. While no specific Old Testament passage is cited, this probably refers to Psalm 69:21, where David says, "for my thirst [my foes] gave me sour wine to drink."
 2. The sour wine that the soldiers gave Jesus was different than the wine mixed with myrrh that was offered to him when he was on his way to the cross.
 3. That drink was a drug that would have dulled his senses and made the pain that he was about to experience slightly easier to bear.

4. Jesus refused to drink that cup because he knew that his work was not yet done.
5. But here, knowing that he has completed his work, he is willing to accept a drink of sour wine to assuage his terrible thirst.

IV. To Complete His Work

- A. This brings us to the third reason that these verses set forth for why Jesus went to the cross: he went to the cross to complete his work.
 1. Jesus has repeatedly said in this Gospel that he came into the world to do the will of his Father.
 2. In other words, he came to fulfill the law and to carry out God's plan of redemption.
 3. In our text, we see Jesus keeping the fifth commandment, the commandment that says, "Honor your father and your mother."
 4. As Jesus looked down at those who were gathered around him, he saw his mother standing there.
 5. It is almost certain that Mary was a widow at this point.
 6. And while Jesus had siblings, they did not believe in him until later.
 7. They lived up in the north, up in Galilee.
 8. But Mary had traveled with her son to Jerusalem, and now she is there with him while he is dying in agony and disgrace.
 9. This is what was foretold in Luke 2, when the infant Jesus was being presented in the temple and the old man Simeon told Mary "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and

rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

10. As Mary watched her son dying on the cross, that sword was piercing her soul.
 11. Jesus knew this, and the arrangement that he made with John demonstrates the love that he had for his mother.
- B. This is one of several ways in which we see Jesus thinking of other people while he was suffering on the cross.
1. Jesus loved his enemies by praying for them, asking, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Lk. 23:34)
 2. Jesus loved the thief by extending mercy to him, assuring him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Lk. 23:43)
 3. These things are especially significant when we remember that love is the fulfillment of the law.
 4. Even while Jesus was suffering the physical and spiritual agonies of the cross, he was fulfilling the law of love by putting others before himself.
- C. Another way in which this passage shows us that Jesus went to the cross to complete his work is by its use of the word “finished”, which appears two times in the last three verses.
1. This verb describes the carrying out of a task.
 2. It tells us that Jesus’ death marked the accomplishment of the task for which he was sent into the world.
 3. He perfectly kept God’s law.
 4. He fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies, types, and shadows that pointed to him.

5. He brought God's plan of redemption to its point of completion.
- D. Jesus' cry, "It is finished," is perhaps the most comforting phrase in the entire Bible.
1. It tells us that Jesus has fully accomplished our salvation.
 2. This is why it is so important that we not look anywhere else for our salvation.
 3. We must not look at our accomplishments, our acts of kindness, our acts of devotion, our children, our repentance, the way others see us, or anything else as the basis of our redemption.
 4. If we would be saved from God's just wrath, we must receive and rest upon Christ alone, as he is offered to us in the gospel.
- E. John concludes his account of the crucifixion by telling us that Jesus "gave up his spirit."
1. The phrase "gave up" emphasizes the voluntary nature of Jesus' death.
 2. Once he saw that all that had to be done was done, he committed his spirit into the hands of God.
 3. And because Jesus died the death that he died, everyone who trusts in him can die in peace.
 4. If your faith rests in him, then you have the assurance that death will not separate you from God.
 5. If your debt has been paid by Jesus, then the sting of death has been taken away.

6. As a Christian, you can take comfort in knowing that you will die under the benediction that is pronounced in the book of Revelation: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

V. Conclusion

- A. We die because we cannot help it.
 1. We die because we were born with a fallen nature, a nature that stands condemned by God.
 2. But it was not so with Jesus.
 3. He never did anything to deserve death, but he went to the cross because he was intent upon laying down his life for his sheep.
 4. This was the price that had to be paid in order to secure our redemption.
- B. And that price has been paid in full.
 1. Jesus finished the task for which he was sent into the world.
 2. This leads Martin Luther to say, "In this word, 'It is finished,' will I comfort myself. I am forced to confess that all my finishing of the will of God is imperfect, piecemeal work, while yet the law urges on me that not so much as one tittle of it must remain unaccomplished. Christ is the end of the law. What it requires, Christ has performed."