

Why Did Jesus Christ Die?

In the spring of AD30 the most ghastly miscarriage of justice took place.

The leaders of the Jewish nation handed over a young man to the occupying forces to be tortured to death.

This young man had done nothing wrong. The Roman governor had, after examination, three times declared Him innocent.

Matthew 27:15-18 [NIV] *“Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.”*

Pilate, the Roman governor, knew that it was fear of losing their power over the people that the Jewish leaders, out of envy, wanted Jesus dead.

Matthew 27:20-26 [NIV] *“But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered. “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!” All the people answered, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*

Pilate was now fearful of losing his own position as governor if he allowed a riot to take place. So Pilate gave in to the murderous cries of the crowd prompted by their own religious leaders.

This murder of Jesus Christ was inevitable for two reasons:

1 There is something very ugly and twisted in our human nature.

John 3:19-20 [NIV] *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”*

We do not like our lives to be exposed by the words of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus’ words and His living example show us what needs to be changed in our lives.

It was the quality of life that Jesus lived that made it inevitable that He would be murdered.

2 Jesus had come into irreversible conflict with the religious leaders of the Jewish nation.

Jesus was enormously popular with the common people because of the message of hope that He brought.

Jesus was putting a massive question mark at the heart of Jewish worship.

The temple with its sacrifices, the ritualistic law and the scribal exponents, the Sabbath with its restrictions and even circumcision, the very seal of belonging for all Jewish males, were all questioned by Jesus’ words and life.

Matthew 23:13, 23-24, 27-29 [NIV] *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.” ... “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” ... “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.”*

Jesus had ruthlessly attacked the clerical dishonesty and hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus was shining a bright light on the inner life of these religious leaders that was contrasted to the pious outward appearance put on for others to see and admire.

It was inevitable that Jesus had to be silenced and the bright light of His life extinguished.

But the death of Jesus was not merely inevitable, it was voluntary, and that is the astonishing thing about it.

John 10:14-18 [NIV] *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

Jesus’ death and resurrection were part of God’s plan for all humanity. Jesus being “one” with the Father willingly faced this needed sacrifice so that all humanity could be saved from their deserved death as rebels against God’s life of love.

John 3:16-18 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*

Without this substitute death of the perfect Son of Man/Son of God we have no hope of a future beyond this short physical life.

Matthew 26:47-54 [NIV] *“While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”*

Even in the final hours before His crucifixion Jesus confidently knew that if He asked the Father would set Him free and give supernatural aid.

But Jesus did **not** cry out to be set free.

Jesus was determined to go through with this prophesied sacrifice of His life, although every nerve in His body was shrieking in protest.

There was something inexplicably voluntary about the death of Jesus that sets it apart from all other horrendous deaths.

Jesus knew that His death was foretold by the prophets in minute detail.

As Jesus studied the Old Testament scriptures He saw a trail of sacrificial death wherever He looked.

The animal sacrificial system was central to the commanded worship of God.

Sacrifice and the shedding of blood accompanied every covenant that God made with human beings.

Matthew 17:22-23 [NIV] *“When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.”*

Matthew 20:17-19 [NIV] *“Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”*

Jesus acknowledged to His followers He knew what the end of His life would be like.

Psalms 22:12-18 [NIV] *“Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”*

Jesus knew this was a detailed account of His death.

Why was all this written about the death of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ?

Jesus knew somehow that His death would fulfil something that no other being could ever fulfil.

Jesus' death is unlike any other death, because of the One who was suffering and dying in agony.

Jesus was both human, able to feel physical pain and shed lifegiving blood, but also divine, the Son of God.

John 15:13 [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

Jesus Christ's death on the cross was an example of the supreme love that God has for all humanity.

Romans 5:6-8 [NIV] *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, **Christ died for the ungodly.** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Jesus displayed even greater love than dying for a friend.

He died for those who are hostile to Him, who do not yet know who He is and what He has done for all rebellious, sinning humanity.

Luke 23:32-34 [NIV] *“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”*

John 19:26-27 [NIV] *“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, **“Dear woman, here is your son,”** and to the disciple, **“Here is your mother.”** From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”*

Even as Jesus died in agony on the cross the love He had for others shone out in what He was motivated to say and do.

Jesus the Son of Man died on the cross to bridge the gap that our sins have put between us and God.

Isaiah 59:1-3 [NIV] *“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. **But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you,** so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.”*

All have sinned and are cut off from access to God.

John 14:6 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”***

Jesus the Son of Man is the **only way** that we can return to a relationship with God.

Matthew 27:46, 50-54 [NIV] *“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, **“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”** — which means, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** ... **“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, **“Surely he was the Son of God!”*****

The curtain of the temple was the veil that separated the Holy of Holies, representing the throne and presence of God, and the rest of the temple and world.

The moment Jesus the Son of Man died access to the presence of God was made available to all humanity.

The cross of Jesus the Son of Man is the only way we can be reconciled to God the Father.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 [NIV] *“**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.** And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: **Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**”*

The heart of the Christian message is that the death of Jesus the Son of Man is the only way to be reconciled to God by our sins being cleansed by His blood sacrifice as the prophesied *“lamb of God”*.

This is what really makes the sacrificial death of Jesus unique, and accepting it as essential for our present and eternal life.