

# WHY DID JESUS DIE?

*'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except by me.'* (John 14:6)

This verse – spoken by Jesus on the night before his crucifixion, leads us straight to the cross. The cross lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

As St Paul writes:

*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* (1 Cor 2:2)

*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* (Gal 6:14)

We can't escape the fact that Jesus died on the cross. It is the pivotal point of Christianity. The problem for us is that the cross is so familiar. We wear it round our necks; it has become just another item of jewellery. It loses its power because we think of it as just another object that we talk about in church.

So what is its real significance?

## **The Problem**

Paul teaches that we all fall short of God's standards. The word he uses to describe this is sin.

*'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'.* (Romans 3:23)

## **What is sin?**

Sin may come in many packages, some seem to be great and others small, but its significance is that it is common to the entire human race. It's a barrier - it cuts us off from God. In essence, sin is anything that falls short of God's perfect standards.

We are all 'polluted' by sin. (Mark 7:20 -23) *'What comes out of a man makes him unclean: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, folly.'*

- There is a power to sin. John 8:34 *'Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'*
- There's a penalty to sin. Romans 6:23 *'the wages of sin is death.'*
- Sin cuts us off from God. It is a barrier.

## **God's Solution to Sin**

That's the bad news. But now for some good news: Jesus is the solution to

the problem of sin.

*1 John 3:8 'the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.'*

*1 Peter 2:24 "Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."*

As Jesus was nailed to the cross, He cried aloud, *'Father forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing.'* On the cross, we see Christ fulfilling God's ultimate solution to the problem of human sin.

In the cross, we see God's love in action. God has freely given himself to death in order to draw us to Himself.

In Isaiah 53, the prophet looks forward to the 'Suffering Servant' – the one who will do God's work on earth.

*'He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows.'*

In the cross, we see God's decision. *'God loved the world so much, that he gave His only Son.'* But that's not the only decision to be made. The ball is now in our court. We too must decide. What will we do about the cross? Our challenge is to believe - not only the facts about the cross, but to see this event as our hope for life. It's through the death of Christ that the dividing wall of sin and disobedience between God and us is knocked down, and our relationship with Him is restored.

God has chosen to die for us; we are challenged to respond to His love and live for Him. And then comes the Resurrection. *"If Christ has been raised from the dead, then is our faith not in vain."* Through faith in Christ, not only do we know that we are forgiven for everything that we have ever done wrong, but we know that life has a purpose, and a future. Our faith is vindicated.

The Bible offers us three words to explain what Jesus has done for us on the cross. We are **redeemed, justified, and reconciled** to God.

We are **justified**. (a word used extensively throughout Paul's Letter to the Romans.) The term comes from the law courts, from the same stem as the word for justice. We are pictured as prisoners at the bar, awaiting sentence. We know that we deserve punishment, because we have failed to live up to God's standards. But, because of Christ's death, we are justified, or acquitted. Jesus himself has stood in front of us in the dock. When sentence was pronounced, Jesus took it instead of us, he served it for us, so we are free to walk from the court. No longer are we fallen humans - we are justified in God's eyes.

We are **redeemed**. Writing to the Galatians, (3:13, 4:5) Paul says that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He takes this image from the

Roman slave market. In the Roman Empire, whenever a slave was granted his freedom, he could not buy it for himself. Everything that a slave had belonged to his master. He didn't exist as a person in his own right, so therefore could never purchase his own freedom. Whenever a slave was granted freedom, a legal procedure had to be completed. A ransom price had to be paid by another person, in order to release the slave from ownership. That, says St. Paul, is what Christ has done for us. He has paid our ransom price. We have been bought from the mastery of sin, and are now free agents - free to follow our new master - Christ.

We are **reconciled**. If there's one word which helps to explain why Jesus had to die upon the cross, it is 'reconciled'. Through his death, we are reconciled with God: granted peace, brought back into friendly agreement, restored to positive relationship. God has given us His vote of confidence. Here we have a metaphor drawn from family life. Reconciliation has within it all the imagery of forgiveness, making peace, being at one with each other, putting right a relationship which has gone wrong. *'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.'* (2 Cor 5:20).

By his death on the cross, Christ has done his part, but we must make our response. At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Jesus says:

*Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God. 'The time has arrived; the kingdom of God is upon you. Repent and believe the gospel.'* (Mark 1:14-15)

When he talks to the leaders of the church at Ephesus, Paul, says: *'with Jews and Gentiles alike, I insisted upon repentance before God and faith in our Lord Jesus.'*

## **How do we respond to God's love?**

If we want to be at peace with God, Jesus tells us that we must **REPENT** and **BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST**.

### **REPENTANCE**

- Repent means 'turn from your sin'. But this turning must be sincere. It is more a question of what is on our heart, than merely going through the outward rituals. In the Old Testament, the prophet Joel says, 'rend your heart and not your garments'.

Repentance involves a change of mind about the way we have been living. It concerns our need for God and demands a desire to turn towards God.

Repentance also involves a change of heart. To repent is to be genuinely sorry for past failures, and to be sorry for our sin. Repentance means saying

sorry to God and really meaning it.

And then:

*'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrongdoing.'* (1John 1:8-9)

If we repent, there must be a change of direction. We have to be willing, with God's help, to turn from everything we know to be wrong. This may involve doing something practical - saying 'Sorry' to some-one; refusing to join in gossip; avoiding a place or a situation which we know will lead us into trouble. It will mean that in the future we aim to please God, and not just ourselves - and go God's way, rather than our own way.

### **BELIEVE IN JESUS.**

*'You have faith and believe that there is one God. Excellent! Even demons have faith like that, and it makes them tremble.'* (James 2:19)

It is possible to know something in our head, without it ever affecting our heart or our life. I can believe that the bus that goes past our church will take me into town, but unless I actually get on board, I will remain right where I am! In a similar way, we can know all about Jesus Christ without that knowledge ever affecting anything within us. Faith must lead to action. We must receive Jesus, not just as a person, but as the Way to live our lives. That means allowing Him to be Number One in all that we do. All that we are, and all that we have must be submitted to God.

The Christian life is not easy. We face all kinds of difficulties, and can't do it on our own, but Jesus promises, at the end of the gospel story (Matthew 28:20), to be with us always, even to the end of time.

### **Making a response.**

Whoever we are, we need to make our response to God. As we recognize His love for us, we realize that we must give Him priority in our lives. One very simple prayer that does this goes as follows:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you love me, and that you know what is best for my life. I am sorry for the times that I have gone my own way, and failed to think about you. Thank you for dying for my sins. Forgive me, and help me to be different from now on. Take control of my life, and fill me with your Spirit, so that I can please you in all that I do. Amen.
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If you make this your prayer, God will receive you, and give you His Spirit.

## **How do we know that we are God's people?**

*Jesus said, ' anyone who comes to me I will never turn away.' (John 6: 37)*

Jesus promises to be with us, and never to turn us away. As his followers, we are members of God's family.

*'In very truth, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.'* (John 6:47)

Eternal life isn't just about life after death, it also includes the here and now. It is not so much a matter of quantity of life, but quality of life. Eternal life is a different kind of life that begins the moment we become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is life with new meaning, new power, new purpose.

*'If anyone is united with Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has gone; a new order has already begun.'* (2 Cor 5:17).

This life is ours when we turn to God. Welcome Jesus. Receive him into your heart!