

Why Did Christ Have to Die in the Manner in Which He died?

Almost two thousand years ago, as the light of the morning was breaking over Jerusalem, there was a guard around a sepulcher in a small garden just outside the walls of the city. The guards were guarding a grave! Some strange scenes had occurred three day before. While the man, whom the Roman solders had taken from the hills of Galilee, had been hanging on a cross, was being crucified as a malefactor, strange signs had appeared in the heavens, and on earth, and, even, in the temple.

It was rumored that this man had said that he would rise the third morning. The third morning was here, and as the light began to break in the East, there came two women silently, and sadly, wending their way among the tents that were pitched all around the city of Jerusalem, for it was Passover time. The women came to see the sepulcher and were bringing spices to anoint the body. They loved the man who had been crucified as a malefactor, because of his goodness, his purity, and his compassion. It seemed that the circle of friends of the one in the tomb was very small. There had been curses upon him as he hung on the cross - curses from bystanders, the soldiers, curses from the people. They cried, "*Away with him, let his blood be upon us and on children.*" On this morning of the third day, only a few, feeble, obscure, heart-broken, friends dared to come near the grave.

However, now that almost 2,000 years have passed, on the anniversary of that day, the morning of the first day of the week, the first Sabbath after the full moon and the vernal equinox, the whole world gathers to celebrate that empty tomb. The eyes of world leaders and statesmen, the poor and humble, from all over the world are turned toward that sepulcher.

Men and women, all over the world, are thinking of that grave, and Him that lay in it! Across America, from ocean to ocean, on mountain tops and in valleys, across broad prairies and deep ravines, the eyes, and hearts, of people have gathered around that grave. In the darkness of Africa, here and there, one can see hands stretching out toward that grave. Along the coasts of India and the heights of the Himalayas they, too, have heard of that grave and are bending toward it. The Chinese, laying aside their prejudices, are turning their eyes westward and are looking toward that sepulcher. Along the sea shores, over the mountain tops and in the valleys, the hearts of people have, not only been gathering around that grave, but they have caught a glimpse of its rising inmate who ascended in all His glory to heaven.

The song of jubilee has gone forth, and old men are saying, "*The Lord is risen from the dead!*" Young men and women have, also, caught the glowing theme, and the little children, scarcely comprehending the source of their joy, with glad hearts are now joyful, because Jesus is risen from the dead. All over the earth tidings of joy have gone forth, as on this Sunday morning, hearts are singing, "*He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!*"

Why this change? What has produced such a wonderful difference in public feeling concerning that grave? This malefactor once cursed, now honored; the obscure and despised, now sought after; the one, once not then regarded by man, now so universally worshipped. What is the cause of this great change? What brought about such a transformation?

Jesus Christ is remembered in the annals of the church because our faith rest on **facts**. We are standing on firm ground. Christ's resurrection is the foundation of our Christian faith. Paul said, "*If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith ...And if Christ*

has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" [1 Corinthians 15:14, 17]. If Christ be not raised from the dead we will never see our mothers or fathers, who have fallen asleep in Christ, again, nor our little ones who have gone to be with the Lord.

Notice how God arranged the evidences of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, in order to give the knowledge of this fact, clearly, to mankind.

LET'S DRAW ATTENTION TO THE FACT OF CHRIST'S DEATH

If the fact of Christ's death is not clearly established, then it is, of course, vain to try and prove that He rose from the dead. Christ could have suffered for man in some obscure place; he could have laid down His life as a ransom for mankind, and yet there would not be any *legal* evidence of it. However, God allows the wrath of men to become an instrument for praising Him in that He allowed Christ to be taken by *legal* process.

1. Christ was arrested by the great council of the Jews and, also, by the authority of the Roman Governor, in order, that His death would be matter of public record and a legal transaction.

The highest power, both Jewish and the Roman Government, united in this fact of Christ's arrest, trial, condemnation to death and His crucifixion.

2. God wisely arranged the **TIME** of Christ's death. It was at the feast of the Jews when, from all over the country...through which the Jews were scattered...they had come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Jerusalem could not hold all that came together; they pitched their tents all around Jerusalem, on the hills and in the valleys. God's timing was planned in order that the crowd would be there to witness Christ's death.

It was also at the time of full moon, when there would be brightness all night. The multitude were there to witness that scene, in order that this deed would be attested to by people from all parts of the country. Nothing was overlooked in God's planning.

3. The **MANNER** of Christ's death was such as not to be a sudden one, but, rather, one involving many hours of torture. Had His execution been a sudden one, while the efficacious result would have been the same, however, it would not have been witnessed by so many; but as Jesus hung those dreadful hours - six, long, hours - it gave ample opportunity for the those passing by, to be impressed with the scene!

The circumstance attending Christ's death were such as to invite universal attention. God had designed that His death not be a private one. The crucifixion was near the city...the crowd was there...the temple worship was in process...great streams of men, women, and children passed by that cross. It was not a matter soon over, but it was a protracted, agonizing, spectacle. One that would be seen by the multitude.

4. And, in addition to all the above mentioned, in order that man's attention would be drawn to that scene, God called on the heavens, the earth, the air, the graves, and the temple, itself, to give testimony to what was happening here. Matthew 27:45, 51-53 state, "*Darkness came over all the land...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."

In olden time, before a coronation of a prince - [and in some kingdoms the custom is still observed] - a herald was sent out **three days in advance** to announce his coronation - and to issue a challenge to anyone who dares to claim the kingdom, to come and prove his right.

It was such a challenge, God gave to all the powers of humanity and all the powers of darkness. There hung suffering on the cross the Son of God, dying for humanity and God was about to crown Him King of kings and Lord of lords on the morning of the third day!

THE VOICE OF THE EARTH

God sends forth His voice of challenge, and, as He speaks, the earth rocks, the ground shakes and is in convulsion, calling man to witness what was occurring.

THE VOICE OF THE HEAVENS

Not only was there a voice from the earth, the sun clothed herself in sackcloth for three hours, as much to say, "*Just as there will be darkness for three days as the great source of light veils Himself, so darkness will hang for three hours. However, as, out of the darkness the light shines forth, so, at the end of three days shall the Sun of Righteousness shine out again.*"

The "*Herald's voice*," passing through the heavens...speaking through all the orbs of light...saying, "*Give attention ye created beings to what is happening here.*"

THE VOICE OF THE TOMBS

Not only the earth and the heavens proclaimed their tidings, but, look over in yonder valley, the tombs are there; the prophets have been buried there. The hillside is full of the resting places of the dead; generation after generation have been buried there; friends are walking in it, and they are saying, "*Yonder is a mighty judge in Israel; there is the tomb of a prophet.*" They are passing to and fro through the valley of death when the earthquake's tread is heard, and behold the tombs are opened, the graves give forth their bodies.

Think of what feelings must have stirred the hearts of those who stood by those monuments and saw the graves thrown wide open, the doors bursting, and the rocks giving way, and they see the forms of death coming forth! The herald's voice is heard, "*Hear, o sons of men, look on yonder hill, Calvary, and see the mighty Judge of Israel dying on the cross!*"

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPLE

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Christ died. The sacrifice was, at that very hour, being offered. A multitude of pious people were gathered in and around the Temple. The outer court was full; the doors and gates which led into the sanctuary were crowded; the sacrificial lamb was before the altar; the priest, in his vestments, had the sacrificial knife in hand; the blood was about to be shed at the hour of three; the multitude was looking, straining to catch a view.

Behind the priest hangs the beautiful veil, with its colors of scarlet, gold and deep blue, hiding the inner sanctuary; there the cherubim, with their wings over spread- ing the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant where God, Himself, in His shekinah glory, dwelt. The people are bending to look in; no one enters beyond that veil, save the high priest, and he, only once a year with the sacrificial blood of the lamb. The eye of every pious Jew was directed toward that veil.

The hour of three came and, as the priest takes the sacrificial knife and is about to slay the lamb, behold, *at that very moment*, an unseen hand takes hold of that veil and tears it apart from the top to the bottom and the mercy seat, never before seen by man, stands in view. The crowds look into the Holiest of Holies. The cherubim, over the Mercy Seat covering the Ark of the Covenant, are there.

Does the priest drop his knife? Does the sacrificial lamb go free, as the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, suffers for mankind?

The way into the Holy of Holies is open - a new, and living, way into the presence of God. Man can never close the veil again. Never again does just the priest enter into God's presence to represent man; but a way is open whereby all humanity, oppressed and down-trodden, from all parts of the world, may find their way to the mercy seat of God.

The voice of the temple seemed to cry out, "*An end to all sacrifices, an end to all suffering victims, an end to all the sprinkled hyssop, used in purification, because One has come to do the will of God and on Him the burden of man's sin was laid.*"

**ALL THESE...THE HEAVENS, THE EARTH, THE TOMBS, AND THE TEMPLE...
ANNOUNCE THE GREAT TRANSACTION WHICH IS TAKING PLACE ON
CALVARY'S HILL.**

While all this were occurring, Christ was on the Cross, suffering the agony of crucifixion. How deep that agony, I need not attempt to tell you. He heard the multitudes revile Him and saw the crowd wag their heads; He remembered that even His own disciples had fled from Him. *All* left Him! He trod the wine-press alone, drinking the cup of bitterness alone, yet no complaint escaped His lips. He bore the sins of the world in His own flesh on the tree.

CHRIST'S DEATH DEMANDED PUBLIC INVESTIGATION

To all this was added further proof of the fact of His death. John 19:32-33 state, "*The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. but when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.*"

John 19:34 states, "*Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.*" This peculiarity of sacred writings...[that is, an incident mentioned without fan fare]...yet, it offers, not only the fact of Christ's death, but also the nature of His death. When this sentence was written by John, the human frame, with its circulation of blood, was not understood. The great science of pathology had not be taught. Anatomists [*those who study the structure of the body*] had not then, as it has now, unveiled the human system; yet, in that sentence we have a world of meaning. For it is well attested now that when a person dies from violent mental emotion [*what is termed as dying of a broken-heart*], there is always formed

a *watery* secretion around the heart. It was not known to the soldier who lifted his spear and pierced the body of Jesus, and saw water, unstained by blood, issuing forth from Christ's pierced side, nevertheless, this, seemingly insignificant fact, shows that a great heart had been crushed by agony within His soul.

CHRIST'S BURIAL

Jesus was taken from the cross and put in the sepulchre. His friends had given Him up, His disciples had forsaken Him, however, His enemies, remembering that He had said He would rise on the third day, put a guard around Him. The Roman soldiers were there; the king's seal was on the stone which had been rolled over the mouth of the sepulchre. Every- thing was made secure. Here again, God ordered that man would have abundant proof of Christ's death!

Then came the first day of the week. Heaven had been gathering around that grave. Angels had been watching and had seen the Roman guard's shining spears and polished shields. Christ's body was being held as a prisoner by the greatest powers on earth! Angelic host gather around the throne of God and ask, "*How long shall human power exalt itself? How long shall man triumph? How long shall the powers of darkness hold their jubilee? Let us frighten away the Roman guard, and roll away the stone.*" They waited until permission was given and then came down the steps of glory, hastening to the sepulcher. When the guards see the angels they are shocked and become as dead men. One of the angels rolls away the stone and sets himself at the mouth of the sepulcher. Christ, girding Himself with all power of divinity, rises from the grave and tears the crown from the head of death.

What a moment! Hell was preparing for a jubilee and the powers of earth were preparing for a triumph, but, the grave yields its pray, Christ, charged with being an imposter, proved Himself, by the power of His resurrection from the dead, to be the Son of God.

To give the amplest proofs possible of His resurrection, Christ lingered on earth to be seen of men. Who did Jesus appear to after His resurrection? He appeared to Mary Magdalene...the mother of James...Peter and John...the men on the road to Emmas...the disciples, within the closed room, and the **500** on the mountain top. There are *twelve* occasions, recorded in Scripture, of Christ appearing to man after He rose from the dead.

The last vision humanity had of Christ was when He was ascending up into the heavens, with His hands outspread in blessing.

What results came as a result of Christ's resurrection?

1. Christ's resurrection establishes all Scriptural declarations.

It had been predicted that He should not stay in the grave and, so, when He arose, it put a seal on the Bible as the Word of God. This prophecy, of the Messiah's resurrection, fulfilled in Christ, gave proof that other parts will also be fulfilled as the Word of an unchanging God.

2. Christ's resurrection gives proof of His divine power.

No mere *man* could be raised from the dead by his own power, however, Christ rose in His own power, conquering death and the grave.

In Greek mythology, it is stated that if all of the lesser gods combined together should endeavor to throw Jupiter down, that is, if all their power was arrayed against him...he, by his own might, would be able to overcome them all. What is fiction with ancient writers, became gloriously realized in Christ's resurrection! Take all the powers of humanity - the Jewish power, the Roman Empire; the powers of learning, of art, of public opinion; take all the powers of hell, death and the grave, and combine them all against the Savior and without one effort, without a single apparent movement - the sleeper who lies in death, His eyes are sealed, and, in an instant, those eyes are opened, His frame rises, the grave yields up its prey, death retires conquered, and Christ demonstrates Himself to be the ruler of the whole universe. He made the earth to tremble, the sun to put on sackcloth, the very air to grow dark, the graves to open, the dead to come forth, and proclaim Himself to be the conqueror of death and hell. Because of this power of the resurrection, all mankind has proof that Jesus, indeed, is the Son of God.

3. Christ's resurrection was proof that He was the "*first fruits*" of the harvest of the coming resurrection.

The Jewish religion was connected with the seasons of the year, with the harvest of their crops. One of their feasts was referred to as, the harvest of "*First Fruits*." Before the grain was crushed, before the bread was baked, they would cut off these first ripened heads and take them up to Jerusalem and offer them in the temple as the "*first fruits*" of the coming harvest. Nothing was done to appropriate that crop to man's use until first those ripened heads of grain were brought up to Jerusalem and presented to the Lord as a *thank-offering* for the coming harvest. They would, then, go back to the fields and, with sickle in hand, begin to thrust, and gather in the reaped grain into sheaves for the *main* harvest.

When the harvest was secured, and bread baked, they would then return to the temple, where the first fruits had been laid, and herald the festive, joyous, *Feast of Thanksgiving*.

Christ Jesus is the *First Fruits*, the first to rise from death. At the *Feast of Harvest* angels will be sent out as reapers to gather all humanity in a glorious harvest. The child of God should not mind dying, because Christ died - and rose again!

Death is not cold, because Christ has warmed it!