

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS - Fifteen Reasons God the Son Came To Die - Part one - Sunday, January 26th, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

JESUS DIED TO ABSORB GOD'S JUST WRATH AND PLEASE HIS HEAVENLY FATHER

Romans 3:21-25 - “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”

Isaiah 53:10 - “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

Ephesians 5:1-2 - “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

There is only one proper response to the question, “***Who killed Jesus?***” and that is ***God did***. True, there were human agencies ***involved***, but not in the sense that they were solely ***responsible***. Peter and John make this point crystal clear in their defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin:

Acts 4:27-28 - “....for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

Jesus was always possessed by this understanding of His own death. Never once did He view His execution as being the result of a human vendetta against Himself. He never viewed His own end as the tragic conclusion of a revolution gone wrong or a mission failed. Here’s how Jesus described His own crucifixion:

John 10:17-18 - “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Jesus reveals a stunning truth. He pins us to the wall with these words. They’re sent like daggers into the heart of a gigantic, historic misunderstanding. ***“What do you see in My crucifixion? Do you think I’m being trapped by circumstances? Do you think the mob is robbing Me of My life? Is that what you think is going on here?”***

The Scriptures must be given their own voice on this important subject. We mustn't muzzle divine revelation at the point of its most crucial proclamation. In even more striking words, here's how Paul tells of the divine plan activated in the death of Jesus on the Cross:

2 Timothy 1:8-9 - **“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began....”**

The Trinity was planning this divine rescue mission. The **events** took place a around 2000 years ago. The **divine plan** took place before this planet was created. Such is Father God's involvement in the death of Jesus Christ. There was nothing last minute about it.

There's something else quite striking about the Biblical account of the crucifixion of the world's Messiah. Think back about 12 years - yes it's been that long - to Mel Gibson's movie, **“The Passion of the Christ.”** Like most things that get the church all in a knot it came on the scene with a bang and quickly faded to black. When is the last time you heard anyone mention it? Or **“The Shack”**? Or **“Love Wins,”** by Rob Bell?

But I can still remember the religious tussell in the media about the intense violence and the “R” rating for Gibson’s movie. And yet, surprisingly, the Scriptures, from which almost all of our information of Christ’s death comes, ***don’t*** emphasize the physical violence of the crucifixion. In fact, it is amazing to note the sparse descriptions given to the actual execution of Jesus:

Luke 23:33 - “And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.” Period.

John 19:18 - “There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.”

There have always been Christian voices digging deep into the gory details - citing all sorts of ancient historic documents - with the idea that somehow we’d love Jesus more if only we fully grasped how much He suffered on the cross.

And ***if*** that is true, Luke and John missed perhaps the greatest opportunity to generate love for Jesus. If grasping Christ’s physical suffering is the road to deeper love for Jesus why didn’t the Holy Spirit of God fuel our passion with the greatest tool in existence for generating passion for Jesus, the New Testament? How could the Holy Spirit have made such a mistake?

True enough, we are told they placed a crown of thorns on Jesus' head. We are told they spat on Him. We are told they shoved a spear into His side. We are told He was whipped and they pulled His beard. But even these details are told with great **restraint**. There is no mention of His blood splattering the onlookers at the cross. There is no description of His eye sockets being beaten out of shape. There is no mention of the rivers of blood and flesh that remained on the whipping post, or how deeply the shards of metal and glass ripped into His back. All of those details are left to the special effects people. The Bible never delves into them.

Please understand me. I'm **not** saying those things didn't happen in as brutal a fashion as the movie depicts them. That is not my point here at all. My question, and I think it's a very **important** question, is not one of **accuracy** but of **emphasis**. Why are the Scriptures so silent about the physical torture of Jesus on the Cross? Is there something we're missing here? Is the silence of the Scriptures **intentional**, or is it just that those people lived in more delicate times?

That can't be. Let's all admit right now that those days were **not** days of social delicacy. They were days of violence and persecution. **Ours** are the days of criminal **rehabilitation**. Theirs were the days of criminal **execution**. Theirs were the days **before** pain killers.

So why the silence about the gory details of Christ's death in the Scriptures? We really **need** to find a good answer to this question. And, I believe, the answer leads right into the two brief points of today's teaching:

1) **JESUS CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS TO BEAR THE JUST WRATH OF FATHER GOD IN HIS OWN BODY**

In other words, I love Jesus not because of the **nature** of His death, but the **purpose** of it. The writer of Hebrews tells of faithful followers of Jesus who, rather than utter a simple denial of Christ Jesus, were **"sawn in two"**(Heb 11:37).

Think about that for a minute. These were not even the days of quick power saws. Imagine, if you can take it in, a person stretched out on some rack, a large dirty jagged toothed saw resting on his chest. There is a man poised, on each end of the saw, awaiting the signal of the executioner before they begin dragging that saw back and forth.

How much suffering is that? Did Jesus suffer more pain than that? How do you measure human suffering? I just don't know how to answer those questions. What I **do** know is this - ***not one of those poor disciples who suffered such agony died to bear God's wrath for my sin.*** Jesus did. It's not Jesus' **suffering** that draws out my love. I don't love any of those early martyrs as much as I love Jesus. It's the **accomplishment** of His death that draws out my love. That is why I love my Lord. He bore the just wrath of Father God against my iniquity:

Romans 3:23-25 - “....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] ***and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*** [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”

If God were not absolutely just and holy there would be no reason in the world for Jesus to die on that cross. If God weren't absolutely just and holy He could just sweep my sins under the carpet of His universe and no one would be the wiser. But God is just - blazingly just. And I am a sinner. So Jesus had to die, not just for **me**, but perhaps first of all for **Father God**.

Jesus must die on that cross because God's wrath cannot be **withdrawn**. It must be **unleashed**. That's what that currently unused word "**propitiation**" means. Paul says God "**displayed Jesus as a propitiation in His blood....**"(3:23).

I've been reminding my Christian Education class there are two important theological terms that every Christian needs to know. They aren't just academic. The terms are **propitiation** and **expiation**. **Expiation** describes the **cleansing of my sinful account before God. Sins are forgiven and erased**. This is the blessing of redemption **from my end**.

Propitiation describes the **absorbing of God's wrath by a substitute**. It is the effect of Christ's death, not from **my** end, but from **Father God's** end. It is the bearing and satisfying of Father God's holy, pure wrath.

Whether you and I think God needed to do that is irrelevant. Away forever the notion that we, fallen, morally disabled creatures that we are, can adequately make moral assessments of the Almighty. God alone is pure justice. And God said His wrath on sin must fall. Paul says He can't merely **pronounce** that we are justified. He must **be** absolutely just in the process.

So first and foremost I love Jesus, not because He suffered, but because He bore the curse of my own sin in Himself:

Galatians 3:13 - “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree....’”

I honestly believe there is something in humanity, even fallen humanity, that recognizes this transaction taking place on the cross. I still have the quote I wrote down over a decade ago when watching a reviewer on CNN as he was making commentary on his experience viewing ***“The Passion of the Christ.”***

As usual, he was protesting the violence of the movie. When asked why he found ***this*** movie’s violence more disturbing than other equally violent movies he responded like this: ***“This movie isn’t the most violent movie I’ve ever seen. Other movies have had equal amounts of graphic detail as The Passion. But what made this movie’s violence more offensive was the fact that it was all one way violence. There was no one fighting back. This wasn’t a war movie like “Saving Private Ryan.” This was not a gangster movie. This was not “Schindler’s List. This was simply a bloody beating for two hours!”***

Then he said this. ***"I can't quite put my finger on it. But I found this the most disturbing and offensive movie I've ever reviewed."***

I believe he was telling the truth. I don't believe he truly knew ***why*** he found this the most disturbing movie he'd reviewed. But let me give you my personal guess. I think he found the movie disturbing for the same reason mankind has ***always*** found the Cross disturbing.

Like the reviewer said, we all know Jesus was not dying for anything ***He'd*** done. There was no sin in His life. So why is He there on that gruesome cross? ***Whose sin is He dying for? Is my sin really that ugly? I'm a pretty good person. Is there something in me requiring that kind of sacrifice?*** The Cross is a troubling message indeed. But it's not the ***violence*** that should shock us. It's the deepness of our need for redemption.

2) **JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO PLEASE HIS HEAVENLY FATHER**

Ephesians 5:2 - "....And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, **a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**"

Marvel at those last seven words. Jesus' death was not disgusting to God. It was imminently beautiful and lovely. "**Fragrant.**" How can this possibly be? Again, it's because heaven's emphasis is never on the **suffering**, but on the **accomplishment** of the suffering. And the teaching of the Scriptures is that Jesus must never be seen as stepping in **between** us and a God Who is just itching to get His hands on us. No. That's not it at all. The Cross was Father God's idea from the depths of eternity past:

2 Timothy 1:8-9 - "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...."

I said at the beginning of this message that the Cross never would have happened if God were not blazingly just. But it's equally true that the Cross would never have happened if God were not gloriously loving. The Cross has its roots in the love of Father God for the lost. It was **His** plan all along. Jesus said that He came (thinking of the Cross) to do His **Father's** will. Jesus died on that Cross to please Father God.

Remember, if you are to think of the Cross accurately, you must remember these two things first of all. Be moved by them. First, Jesus died to ***bear the just and holy wrath of God.*** And second, Jesus died, not to ***interrupt*** God's plan to punish us, but to ***please the Father by carrying out the loving will of the Trinity from before the foundation of the world:***

1 John 4:10 - "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Both of our two points are married beautifully in that single verse.