

WHY JESUS CHRIST CHOSE TO DIE

Introduction

The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary was an unjust, unmerciful and unlawful killing of an innocent Man, who, knowing full well what was to befall Him, yet “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” – Luke 9:51.

How was it, then, that this tragedy was, in fact, the greatest act of love of all time – the Redemption of man by the selfless giving of the life of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, in order that all who will may go to Him for eternal life?

This booklet has been written to bring to the reader’s attention a few portions of the Scriptures which give an account of how the death of Jesus Christ brought about this Redemption.

I am grateful to the person whose name I do not know who’s essay enlightened me with much of the teaching in this little booklet over 40 years ago. My prayer is that it should be a guide to others helping them to understand and appreciate the great love of our heavenly father and of His well beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Russell Gregory.

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Let us begin our subject by making four observations, or foundation statements, upon which to build; four statements which must surely be acceptable to all students of Scripture.

They are:

1. Adam was offered eternal life as a reward for perfect obedience, but he failed.
2. Adam was then offered eternal life as a reward for faith.
3. We too, are offered eternal life as a reward for faith.
4. Jesus Christ as Son of God had a right to eternal life by birth, which could have been forfeited by disobedience, but He did not fail.

In the second chapter of Genesis we read of Adam being created a natural being, dependant on food from the ground for continuance of life, and placed in the Garden of Eden with but one commandment, which to disobey meant death. It is reasonable to say that to obey meant life, that is,

eternal life at some time after a period of probation; and as Adam was created a natural being this would necessarily mean a change to incorruptibility and is expressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:46 in this way, "That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterwards that which is spiritual," and again in verses 44 and 53, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body..." when "this corruptible must put on incorruption."

There can be no doubt that Adam could have remained sinless and that his sin was his own fault, for he had no need to disobey the commandment given him by his Creator; neither would God pass a harsh punishment upon Adam for doing something he was unable to avoid; but failure to keep a commandment of God is sin - and Adam failed.

Reward for Faith Replaces Reward for Obedience

Having transgressed the one and only commandment given him by God, there was one of two things that could now follow, either,

1. Adam could be put to death for his sin, as God had said, or,
2. Adam could be released from the judicial sentence by redemption.

It is clear Adam did not receive the judicial punishment required by the law for his transgression of the Divine commandment. This was because God, in His great mercy, provided a sin-offering revealing the way to eternal life by faith.

Adam had no need of redemption until he had sinned, but after his transgression redemption was essential, otherwise he would die and perish for ever, for by his disobedience he not only lost the opportunity of the reward of eternal life for perfect obedience, he also lost hope of his natural life beyond that day; for God had said to him, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

Had Adam not been redeemed on the day of his transgression there would have been no offspring of his to people the earth and the human race would have been at an end, but through love and compassion for His creatures, God released Adam from the sentence of death, giving him further opportunity of eternal life, not on the basis of perfect obedience, but as a reward for faith. The first indication we have of this plan is in Genesis 3:15, where God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." We see this as a reference to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was to suffer a temporary 'bruising' on Calvary's Cross, but, would in turn, destroy the devil, i.e. the power of sin, that by faith, forgiveness and obedience to Jesus Christ, we should not come under the law of sin and death.

The time of Adam was not the time for the Son of God to come into the world, so the death of an animal in the day Adam sinned provided him with a covering for his sin, foreshadowing the day when Jesus Christ would give His life on the Cross. But this covering for Adam did not confer on him incorruptibility; the animal's life was sacrificed in order that he should have further opportunity to live, in faith, and while "the blood of bulls and goats" could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4) it could and did provide the necessary covering for sin until such time as it was right in the sight of God to send His Son into the world to take away sin.

Imputed Righteousness

The continuation of Adam's life meant life also for his descendants, for he had no children while in the Garden of Eden; so on what basis could the offer of eternal life be extended to them? It could have been in one of two ways, either,

1. Adam's offspring could each in turn be given the opportunity of eternal life as a reward for perfect obedience, or,
2. They could be given the opportunity of eternal life as a reward for faith.

If Adam's descendants were to be rewarded with eternal life for perfect obedience and failed in that obedience, as did Adam, then it would be necessary for a redeemer to die for each sinner, in order that the sinner be given the opportunity of eternal life as a reward for faith, as was Adam. Quite clearly such an arrangement would be unsatisfactory; therefore Adam's descendants were offered eternal life on the same basis as was Adam after his transgression, i.e. as a reward for faith. Here we see that, although these descendants of Adam were not born sinners, they were counted as such, and dealt with as though sinners; i.e., they had sin imputed to them; and this was done for the purpose of salvation. Paul expresses this thought in Romans 5:19 where he writes, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." All born of the will of the flesh come under this imputed sin of Adam so that they might be saved. The Apostle, in writing to the Galatians, in chapter 3, verses 21 and 22, says, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." The law, then, could not give life because it could not give righteousness, but faith in Christ Jesus is counted for righteousness, and so, for the faithful, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to them that they "might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:5).

Sold to Sin

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses the illustration of sin being a slave owner to whom the human race has been sold. "Sold under sin," we read in Romans 7:14, while in chapter 6, verse 16, he writes, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness;" so when Adam sinned in Eden he sold himself to sin and became the bondservant of sin; and we, his offspring, are born into that same bondage.

Our position is vividly illustrated in the Law of Moses where provision was made for bondservants, for if anyone in Israel fell on hard times, the law allowed that man to sell himself to a wealthy neighbour and become his bondservant, or slave, his wife and children also being taken into bondage. This was done in order that the poor man and his family might have some means of livelihood though lacking the freedom previously enjoyed. The law also made provision for the bondservant to redeem himself if his circumstances should, by some means, improve sufficiently for him to buy his freedom. If this should prove impossible then all was not lost if a near kinsman should come forward who was both willing and able to pay the redemptive price. Such a relative was not bound by the law to pay the price of redemption, but he had the legal right to redeem, and it was up to him to exercise that right if he so wished. Most certainly, if the near kinsman had love and compassion for his less fortunate relatives it would give him great joy to see that family freed from their bondage.

The Purchased Possession

Jesus Christ was the only one both willing and able to redeem Adam and his family (the human race) from their bondage to sin; for being born of a woman He was the near kinsman required by the law, and, as Son of God He was born free of the imputed sin of Adam. It was for this very reason that Jesus Christ was the Son of God by begetting, He had His life direct from His Father and was in a similar position to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and with a right to eternal life provided He remained sinless. He did not forfeit His right by transgression at any time and never came into the bondage to sin. Jesus Christ was "made under the law" (Galatians 4:4) and never broke the law, for we read in

Galatians 3:10, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,” and as Jesus Christ did continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, then the curse was not on Him. He was the only man who had the power to retain His life or give it as the ransom price for the sin of the world, as He said, “I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:18). Our Lord and Saviour, unlike the rest of the human race, was born of the will of the Father and lived a life of perfect obedience to the whole law; and even more than this, for He went the extra mile by fulfilling His Father’s wishes, for He received eternal life as His birthright and for His perfect obedience to the law, but that law did not demand of Him that He lay down His life for the sin of the world. This He did to please His Father and for the Joy set before Him. “Therefore doth my Father love me,” - for voluntarily offering Himself as the Lamb of God without spot or blemish, who “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2), not in obedience to any commandment, for His was a free-will offering of His life.

Baptism

The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross does not confer eternal life on us, for our present life is our redeemed life, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the essential step in the plan of salvation which He took for us because we could not take it for ourselves, that we might remain on probation, having the opportunity of eternal life through faith in Him. It is for us to respond to His unsurpassed love, showing our good conscience towards God by baptism into Jesus Christ wherein we die in symbol and rise again to newness of life in covenant relationship with Him, becoming sons of God by adoption.

Propitiation

As the slaying of the animal in Eden provided a covering for Adam’s sin, protecting him from the law of sin and death, so the covering provided by Jesus Christ protects us from judgment. For the explanation of this let us go back to Moses and the giving of the law at Sinai. Moses went up into the mountain to receive the law, but at the same time he was given the pattern of the Tabernacle (Hebrews 8:5). Prior to this the people had said, “All the words which the Lord hath said we will do” (Exodus 24:3), but here, too, God had anticipated their failure, and so, with the law which condemned the sinner, He provided also the means of salvation in the pattern of the Tabernacle which pointed to Jesus Christ.

Moses, on coming down from the mountain, saw the people dancing, and in his righteous anger he cast the tables of stone to the ground and broke them in pieces, showing what Israel had already done by their worship of the Golden Calf. Before Moses could present them with the tables of the law, the people had already broken the law, but in His mercy, God had provided, again, a temporary covering, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the transgressor might not perish; for the pattern and instructions for the Tabernacle was God’s answer to the judgment of the law.

Every part of this Tabernacle pointed to the Lamb of God and was focused on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. The two tables of stone which Moses broke at the foot of the mountain were replaced and these were hidden in the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:20). The Ark was the central object, the very heart of the Tabernacle teaching. It was a box overlaid with gold and covered by a lid of gold with two cherubim overshadowing it. In this box, or Ark, were placed these second tables of the law, which cried out for justice, so God placed over it a lid called the “Mercy-seat.” Within the Ark, the law pronounced the sentence of death upon the sinner, but God provided a covering, the Mercy-seat, which was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans 3:25 Jesus Christ is called our “Mercy-seat” where we read. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” The word translated “propitiation” is *hilasterion* and means literally, “Mercy-seat,” and is so translated in Hebrews 9:5. Upon this Mercy-seat covering the law which called for the death of the sinful nation, the High Priest, once a year, on the Day of Atonement,

took blood from the altar in the court of the Tabernacle and sprinkled it upon the Mercy-seat over the (broken) law and when God descended in the clouds of *shekinah* glory into the Holy of Holies, He did not look upon the broken law but upon the blood, for God had said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13).

Christ Has Made Us Free

What the law could not do Jesus did, for during His lifetime in the flesh He condemned sin in precept and example. At the same time He provided atonement, by His suffering and death for the sinner who will go to Him in faith. The Throne of God, which by the law, was a throne of Judgment and death, had now become a throne of grace, mercy, and life. The law stands as the pronouncer of death on all who fail to accept, by faith, God’s plan of salvation. While the law is powerful in condemning the sinner, it is powerless to save the sinner. It is also powerless to condemn the faithful in Christ Jesus, for the child of God is free from the judgment of the law; for there is no judgment to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. (Romans 8:1). There may well be a chastening of the Lord; this is present judgment, for God has made provision for our sins to be forgiven after we have been baptised into Christ, for He is our High Priest interceding for us, so when “we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). We have “passed from death unto life” (John 5:24 and 1 John 3:14).

In the Gospel of John, chapter 12, verse 24 we read “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Jesus Christ, this “Corn of Wheat,” had the choice to either abide alone, or die and bring forth much fruit. He chose to die.

In the first instance, the fruit which Jesus Christ brought forth through His death is the Elect of God, who, being made incorruptible at His coming, will reign with Him in the Millennium Age; then will be fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 72, which is a picture of the age to come, and verse 16 tells of the “handful of corn in the earth, upon the top of the mountains” - the Elect ruling over the peoples of the earth, upholding the law of God for the King of Righteousness; “and the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon,” - which is the final outcome of the travail of Jesus Christ upon Calvary.

Why did Jesus choose to die? It was to free the faithful from their bondage to sin, that they may share His glory when “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11).

“Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends,” says Jesus, “if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:13, 14).

All praise and thanksgiving and honour and glory to God, who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” and to His Son, who need not have given His life for us but chose to do so that we may share in His glory.

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