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WHY DID CHRIST HAVE TO DIE?

Couldn't Christ have accomplished more by living a full and happy life? Think of the people He could have healed, the teaching He could have done, the problems He could have solved. Why was He obsessed with dying? Why didn't He defend Himself in court for the sake of His family, His disciples, and all who admired Him?

This booklet, compiled by our staff of writers, takes a look at the reasons given in the Bible why Christ planned and allowed His own death.

Martin R. De Haan II

THE SYMBOL OF THE CROSS

Can you imagine what public reaction would be if a fundamentalist religious group adopted an electric chair as its symbol? Think of what it would be like to see an image of an electric chair on top of their meeting places or as jewelry hanging around their necks.

Yet that's what the cross amounts to. The cross was a means of capital punishment. Crucifixion was the way the Romans put their worst criminals to death. It was horrible—far worse than a gas chamber, firing squad, or even a hangman's noose.

Why, then, do Christians make so much of this instrument of public ridicule and torture? Why are Christians obsessed with this symbol of death? Do they realize

what they are doing?

In many cases, the answer seems to be no. Even Christians fail to realize the implications of the cross. It has become so widely used as religious jewelry, as a symbol of love and hope, and even as a sign of good luck that it

The cross has become so widely used as religious jewelry that it has lost much of its original meaning and horror.

has lost much of its original meaning and horror. It has become so generally accepted, in fact, that everyone from devoted followers of Christ to atheists wear its image around their necks.

THE OPINIONS OF THE CROSS

So what do people think of the cross? More specifically, what do they think of the cross as it relates to Christ? That's where the symbol comes from, and that's where the real discussion begins. Why did a beautiful life have to come to such a terrible end? What was in His mind? What should now be in ours? Here are some of the explanations people give for the death of Christ.

"It's an example of nonresistance." Some people feel that when Jesus died on the cross He was giving us the ultimate example of how to live in a violent, hostile world. They say that His death shows us how to live successfully by being strong enough to let others have their way.

"It means whatever you want it to mean."

Those who take this approach generally believe that Christ did not actually accomplish anything when He died on the cross. Since it has become such a part of our awareness, it can be used to symbolize many different things.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
Jesus, from the cross

"It has no real meaning." Some people say that the significance of Christ was in His life—not in His death. They believe that He came to live a flawless life on earth so that we could know what God is like. But that was

all God sent Him to do. His death, they say, was not related to His mission on earth.

“It represents failure.” Those who hold this view say that Jesus had a noble and global plan for earth, but that He died before He could carry it

Some people believe that Christ’s mission on earth was aborted when He was nailed to the cross.

out. His mission was aborted when the Roman soldiers nailed Him to the cross like a common criminal. When Christ died, these people say, it meant that He had failed.

THE OFFENSIVENESS OF THE CROSS

Some people see so much good in the cross that they fail to see it as a terrible instrument of death. But to others, the cross is so offensive that they fail to see its value.

The apostle Paul said it would be that way. Writing to the Christians at Corinth, he said:

We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).

The apostles’ claim that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah was almost impossible for a Jew to accept. To believe that the Messiah died on the cross was unimaginable—especially since the Old Testament said that anyone who died on a tree was

cursed by God (Dt. 21:23). The cross offended them deeply.

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.”
1 Corinthians 1:18

The Gentiles too were offended by the cross. In their opinion, it was foolishness. They felt that their logical thinking and good living would satisfy the gods. They saw no reason to believe in the senseless death of an obscure Galilean.

And what about people today? Does the cross still offend? Do people still stumble over its simple message?

- If their philosophical

point of view does not include the reality of sin and the need of a Savior, the answer is yes!

- If by their godly living and high morals they expect to win God’s approval, yes!
- If they expect His favor because of their national heritage or family name, yes!
- If they think God is too loving to punish people for their wrongs, yes!

The message of the cross, a first-century “electric chair,” will offend them.

What we need to realize, however, is that the cross is not just something hard to live with. It actually makes life possible. In fact, the cross resolved the greatest dilemma of all time.

THE DILEMMA OF THE CROSS

The cross resolves two great dilemmas—one from God's perspective and one from man's. All parents can understand the dilemma of not wanting to correct a disobedient child with painful discipline, while at the same time realizing that you can't just blink or yawn at his bad behavior.

What do you do? You love that little one. But he has also clearly disobeyed you, and right now he is lying to you in an attempt to cover it up. Sure, you love him. But you also know that you can't just brush off the problem. He has to be punished—and you've got to do it.

The situation caused by our sin was infinitely more complex than that. But there are some parallels. Because God is a holy God,

He cannot just ignore our sin. Yet because He is a loving God, He is not merely willing to let us get what we deserve.

Another illustration might help us to see the dilemma from man's perspective. Imagine a group of people trapped

Because God is a holy God, He cannot just ignore our sin. Yet because He is a loving God, He is not merely willing to let us get what we deserve.

on the roof of a high-rise building engulfed in flames. The only way to safety is to jump to the roof of an adjoining building—30 feet

away! In desperation, people begin to attempt the impossible leap. Some jump farther out than others, but all fall to their death.

So it is with man's helpless condition before God. Our sin caused a separation between us and a holy God that cannot be bridged by anything we do. We are utterly helpless to save ourselves. But the love of God provided a way: the cross of Christ.

We might diagram the dilemma like this:

Holy	GOD	Loving
Sinful	MAN	Helpless

The necessity for Calvary's tree can be traced back to a much earlier tree. All our problems began when our first parents willfully and

disobediently ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had said that

Our sin caused a separation between us and a holy God that cannot be bridged by anything we do.

Adam and his wife would die if they ate the fruit of that tree. And they did. From that time on, no man was the man he was created to be. From that time on, the children of Adam were born physically alive but spiritually dead. Not only was the garden paradise lost, but so was the innocence man was created with.

Every child born from Eden until today has proven that innocence was

lost. Once created to walk with God, man has inherited a nature that causes him to forget God, to hate his fellowmen, and to live a life of self-destruction. Because of this, David the king of Israel went on record as saying, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5).

No amount of self-improvement or good deeds can win back what Adam lost.

And the apostle Paul wrote, “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin” (Rom. 5:12) and “the wages of sin is death” (6:23). In another

letter he wrote, “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22).

This is our condition. When Adam followed the way of the serpent, he didn’t just hurt himself. When he ate of that tree in defiance of his Maker, spiritual and physical death fell upon all men. And so it has come now to us. The proof is, all of us sinned against God the first chance we got.

Furthermore, we can’t do anything to help ourselves. No amount of self-improvement or good deeds can win back what Adam lost. The prophet Isaiah saw this clearly, for he said that our best efforts are nothing better than dirty rags (Is. 64:6). Much later, the apostle Paul expressed the same awareness (Eph. 2:8-9). His words remind us that no man can pull himself up to God by yanking on his own bootstraps.

This is bad news. But the Bible, the most reliable book in the world, claims to be true. We are born into this world spiritually dead. We are born separated from God. We are born into a

The Bible tells us that there’s not a thing in the world we can do on our own to merit a rescue.

world of physical and spiritual death, and unless something happens, we will live out our lives in rebellion against God. Unless something happens, we are destined for the judgment of God—the second death, the lake of fire created for the devil and all of his demons.

And if that were not

enough, the Bible tells us that there’s not a thing in the world we can do on our own to merit a rescue. Without a doubt, we need help. We need rescue. We need to be delivered from our guilt and bondage—before it is everlastingly too late.

THE RESOLUTION OF THE CROSS

When Adam and Eve sinned, God could have struck them dead instantly. And He would have been just in doing so, because His holy nature demands that disobedience be punished by death.

Yet, because God is love, He did not strike our first parents dead. Instead, He sought them out, provided them with a covering of animal skins, and gave to them a wonderful promise

(Gen. 3:15). At that point God announced the good news. Yes, the good news is that God Himself resolved the dilemma—His holiness is counter-balanced by His

God provided a way to undo the terrible damage done to man at that first tree.

love! Love found a way. Love found another tree, the cross (Rom. 5:6). God in His wisdom provided a way to undo the terrible damage done to man at that first tree.

Holy	GOD	Loving
	CHRIST	
Sinful	MAN	Helpless

The tree in the Garden of Eden has now given way to the cross. And on that tree of humiliation, goodness triumphed over evil. Mercy triumphed over justice. The rescue was completed. The mission was accomplished. The dilemma was resolved.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CROSS

How did God do it? What did He see in that ugly tree of execution? What happened as His only begotten and dearly loved Son bled, struggled, cried, “It is finished,” and then gave up His spirit?

Let’s look at two principles of resolution that ended the dilemma caused by our sin and helplessness and God’s holiness and love: (1) the principle of adequate sacrifice, and (2) the principle of necessary substitution.

PRINCIPLE I: The cross provided an adequate sacrifice.

Holy	GOD	Loving
Sacrifice	CHRIST	Sacrifice
Sinful	MAN	Helpless

There can be no forgiveness without a sacrificial death (Heb. 9:22). Through His death on the cross, Jesus Christ presented to God a sacrifice sufficient to pay for the sins of all mankind. The animal deaths of Old Testament days fell far short of that, for they did not actually take away sin.

The Old Testament sacrifices had to be offered every day. Animal after animal was brought to the altar and slain. Each new day brought a new round of sacrificial slayings. The writer of Hebrews,

commenting on this fact, said, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).

Furthermore, those sacrifices were only for sins committed involuntarily, in ignorance, or through human weakness (Lev. 4:2-7). A sacrifice could not be given for a premeditated, deliberate sin in Old Testament days. That is why David, when he repented of his double sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, did not even present a sacrifice. Rather, he came before God with “a broken and contrite heart” to find forgiveness (Ps. 51:16-17).

By His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus provided a once-for-all sacrifice for all our sins (Heb. 10:12). He was the complete and perfect sacrifice. It satisfied every demand of a holy God, and

it brings salvation to all who trust in Christ.

“Now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”
Hebrews 9:26

Christ’s sacrifice was adequate for several reasons:

- ***He became a member of the human family.***
He could truly represent us (something no angel could do) because He took to Himself a human nature.
- ***He lived a sinless life.***
Confronted by physical, mental, and spiritual temptation, Jesus did not sin (Heb. 4:15).

Therefore, when He died, He did so as a perfect human being. Because He did not sin, He could die for our sins.

- ***He remained God.***
Even though Christ became fully human, He also retained His full deity. He was not half God and half man; He was fully God and fully man. His goodness is what gave His sacrifice infinite value, making it adequate to pay for the sins of all mankind.

**PRINCIPLE 2:
The cross provided a necessary substitute.**

Holy	GOD	Loving
Substitute	CHRIST	Substitute
Sinful	MAN	Helpless

Jesus had substitution in mind when He told His followers that He would give His life as a “ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

Whether they recognized it or not when He said it, His disciples would soon learn that Christ was planning to give His life in exchange for their legal release from sin and guilt. On the cross, Christ would die in their place—and in our place. At Calvary, He died the death all of us should have died, taking the punishment we deserved. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). Because of our helplessness, God in love sent His Son to be our substitute. He exchanged His life for ours, dying that we might live (Isa. 53:5-6; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

When Jesus said that He had come to give His life a

ransom for many, His hearers probably realized that He had in mind the Jewish sacrificial system. From early childhood they had seen sheep or oxen or turtle doves brought to the altar and killed. They knew that the animal’s death was associated with their sins.

Because of our helplessness, God in love sent His Son to be our substitute. He exchanged His life for ours, dying that we might live.

As they watched the priest place his hand on the forehead of the animal, they realized that this was a symbol of the transfer of guilt from the sinner to the animal. Then, when they

saw the beast killed and the blood sprinkled around the altar, they understood that this blood in some way symbolized the taking away of their guilt.

The same principle of the substitute was later fulfilled in the One of whom John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29).

“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”
Hebrews 9:28

This principle is illustrated by a story from American history. In a tribe of Indians, someone was stealing chickens. The chief declared that, if caught, the offender would receive 10 lashes. When the stealing continued, he raised it to

20 lashes. Still the chickens methodically disappeared. In anger the chief raised the sentence to 100 lashes—a sure sentence of death.

The thief was finally caught. But the chief faced a terrible dilemma. The thief was his own mother!

When the day of penalty came, the whole tribe gathered. Would the chief’s love override his justice? The crowd gasped when he ordered his mother to be tied to the whipping post. The chief removed his shirt, revealing his powerful stature, and took the whip in hand. But instead of raising it to strike the first blow, he handed it to a strong, young brave at his side.

Slowly the chief walked over to his mother and wrapped his massive arms around her in an engulfing embrace. Then he ordered the brave to give him the 100 lashes.

That’s what Jesus did

for us. In love He became our substitute and died in our place. He overcame our inability to save ourselves

Christ overcame our inability to save ourselves by paying the price for our sins.

by paying the price for our sins. In our illustration, a mother’s life was extended by the substitutionary love of her son; for us, everlasting life was bought through the substitutionary death of Christ.

The death of Christ, therefore, was of tremendous value, for it bridged the gulf between God and man. Look again at what happened.

Man’s Condition:
Condemned by Adam’s sin and his own, and powerless

to do anything to save himself, man was under the penalty of death.

God’s Position:

God was bound by His own holiness to punish evil. To do less would be to violate His own character. But because He is also love, He desired to save man from his sentence of death.

The Resolution:

Christ, God’s Son, became human, lived a sinless life, then died on our behalf. His sacrificial, substitutionary death made possible our salvation.

Look at the complete diagram. It shows you how the death of Christ resolved the dilemma.

Holy	GOD	Loving
Sacrifice Substitute	CHRIST	Sacrifice Substitute
Sinful	MAN	Helpless

THE RESULTS OF THE CROSS

The death of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago was not just a heroic act that caught the imagination of a band of religious idealists. Nor was it an act of weakness.

If we could merit our own salvation, Christ would never have died to provide it.

It was a loving, courageous, death-defying mission of rescue. The result is that the person who trusts in Jesus Christ is changed in his relationship to God. He is changed in his relationship to his own sin. And his future is changed, both

for this life and the life to come.

That change is spelled out in four basic concepts that show the results of what Christ did for us. Here is what is ours once we have accepted the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Christ.

1. RECONCILIATION: We are at peace with God. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He made it possible for us to be reconciled to God and restored to fellowship with Him by faith in Christ. Enmity is turned to friendship, alienation to sonship, hostility to faith, and hatred to love because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross (Rom. 5:1,10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22).

2. JUSTIFICATION: We are declared right before God. When Jesus

Christ died, He absorbed our punishment. Therefore, when we believe in Him, our sins are no longer held against us (Rom. 3:24; 4:5; 5:1,9; 8:30-31; Ti. 3:4-7).

3. REDEMPTION: We are ransomed from our sin and condemnation. The death of Christ also means we have been bought out of bondage to sin and Satan. The ransom price for our sin has been paid in full (Mt. 20:28; Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13; 4:4-5; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Ti. 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

4. PROPITIATION: We are free from God's wrath. This is possible because an acceptable offering has been made on our behalf. The offering has been made to appease God, to turn His wrath from us (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

THE IRONY OF THE CROSS

The irony of all this is that something as ugly as the cross—something revolting enough to cause people to reject the best Man who ever lived—is actually our only hope of rescue from our spiritual helplessness. That's what the Bible says. And that's what Christ confirmed when He rose triumphantly from the dead.

The cross was not a mistake. It wasn't a good life falling on bad times. The irony of the cross is that (1) it is the greatest example of God's love, and that (2) in dying, Christ also showed us how to live. The first point of irony is this:

CHRIST'S DEATH DEMONSTRATED GOD'S LOVE

The great truth of the most familiar and best-loved

verse of the Bible is that the cross was evidence of God's love.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

A parallel passage reads, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16).

Some people look for God's love in nature. But they won't find it guaranteed there, because the message of the created world gives conflicting messages. Sometimes it seems to tell us that God is wonderfully loving. The warm sunshine, the gentle rain, the blooming flowers of the fields, and the watchful care of a cow for her calf all seem to say, "God is love."

At other times, however, the message of nature is

quite the opposite. Sun and drought make the ground hard and unproductive. A killer tornado may roar out of a darkened sky without warning. A nest of young rabbits may be killed by a nightstalking cat or foraging jackal. Or an erupting volcano may wipe out entire villages, killing hundreds and making thousands homeless. No, the love of God cannot always be seen in nature.

***In the cross,
we see God's
love at its best
and our sin
at its worst.***

Nor is God's love clearly evident in history. A family of immigrants to the United States from Vietnam or Korea may say that coming

to the USA proved to them that God loves them. But if you talk to the young mother of three children whose husband was just killed by airplane hijackers, she may scoff bitterly at the idea that a loving God controls all events. Many of the Jewish people who lived through the horrors of Auschwitz or Dachau would also reject the idea that God's love is demonstrated in history.

When Christians talk about God's love being made known, therefore, they must point to something else as evidence. According to the Bible, that evidence is the cross. Because Jesus Christ is God's Son, His death was a profound declaration of God's love.

God has shown His love for us—but at great cost. In the person of Jesus Christ, God became a member of the human family. He lived

His whole life without sin. Then, though innocent Himself, He died a terrible

***Because Jesus
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death to make our salvation possible. Shining through the darkness that surrounded Calvary that fateful day was the wondrous brilliance of the love of God. Think for a moment about what Christ suffered, and remember that it was for us.

Stand in awe as He agonizes before God the Father in Gethsemane until His sweat becomes like great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Follow in horror as He is arrested like a criminal, mutilated by a Roman whip, and tortured, mocked, and derided with a crown of thorns.

Weep for Him as He stumbles under the heavy wooden beam He is forced to carry to His place of execution.

Cringe in revulsion as hardened Roman soldiers pound spikes through His hands, drive nails through His feet, and roughly drop the beam into place.

Listen to Him as He hangs there on the cross, praying for His enemies, talking lovingly to His mother, and promising salvation to the criminal who repents.

Be still as you see the sky grow black at noon, and as you sit through the 3 hours of eerie midday darkness.

Listen to His cry of abandonment, “My God,

My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Remember that on the cross, Jesus endured the agony of hell for you and me. God was His Father. He had existed with Him from all eternity in a relationship closer than anything we could ever know. Yet the Father “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

The second point of irony is:

CHRIST’S DEATH SHOWED US HOW TO LIVE

Not only did the cross give us the highest evidence of God’s love, but it also provided us with a spiritual principle of life. The love that led Jesus Christ to this unparalleled deed of self-sacrifice was an example for us.

We are to love as He loved; to live as He lived. The Lord Jesus had the cross in mind the evening before His crucifixion when He told His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34). Calvary love is to be standard for our love.

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.”
I Peter 2:21

Jesus Christ also had His death on the cross in view when He said this:
Unless a grain of wheat

falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me (Jn. 12:24-26).

This is the law of the harvest: A seed must die before it can produce a plant. Jesus Christ was the “seed” that had to die. Yet His death produced spiritual life for all who would trust Him. We are the fruit of His suffering and death.

But the law of death to bring life did not end with Christ’s cross. Jesus declared that it also applies to His followers. We must take the way of the cross, the way of dying to our own selfish desires, if we are to bear the kind of fruit that God created us to produce (Eph. 2:8-10).

The apostle Paul saw this principle in Christ's death. Time and again he spoke of being crucified with Christ, of dying to self, and of walking the Calvary road. With deep conviction he wrote, "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Because the cross of Christ was Paul's inspiration and confidence, he could write off the world-system as something useless and dead. He saw nothing in it to attract him.

When we live by the law of the harvest, we will be fruitful in our service for Christ. Following His example, we must first die to self. As we do, we will be able to say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;

and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Here again is the irony of the cross. Not only does it bring God's life to us, but it brings our life to God.

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

**The Apostle Paul
Galatians 2:20**

THE BACKGROUND OF THE CROSS

We are fortunate to be able to look back to the cross and see it in perspective. The first disciples of Christ were not so privileged. For them the crucifixion came as a terrible, heart-rending tragedy. Their beloved Leader was dead. Their hopes of a messianic kingdom had evaporated. Their enemies were cheering. They were stunned by the unexpected twist of events. Only later, when Christ surprised them with His resurrected presence, did the disciples begin to understand that the Old Testament pointed to a cross as well as to a kingdom. Only then did they begin to see that Christ had to fulfill the picture of a suffering Servant before

He could return as the promised King.

The resurrected Jesus explained to His astonished followers how the cross was part of the plan of God. First, He showed them His wounds. Then He said, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses

"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

Hebrews 10:14

and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Lk. 24:44). He opened their minds to the Old Testament pictures and

prophecies about His death (v.45). For example:

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES OF CHRIST'S DEATH

- Genesis 3:15—The Seed of woman “bruised”
- Psalm 16:10—Messiah not left in the grave
- Psalm 22:1—Messiah’s cry of forsakenness
- Psalm 22:6-8—Messiah mocked
- Psalm 22:15—Messiah’s thirst
- Psalm 22:16—Messiah’s pierced hands and feet
- Psalm 22:17—The stares of Messiah’s enemies
- Psalm 22:18—Gambling for Messiah’s garments
- Psalm 69:21—Vinegar offered to Messiah
- Isaiah 49:7—God’s Servant despised
- Isaiah 50:6—Messiah physically abused
- Isaiah 52:14—Messiah’s face disfigured

- Isaiah 53:5—Messiah pierced for our sins
- Isaiah 53:7—Messiah silent before His accusers
- Isaiah 53:9—Messiah’s grave among the rich
- Isaiah 53:12—Messiah identified with criminals
- Daniel 9:26—God’s Messiah “cut off”
- Zechariah 12:10—Messiah “pierced” by Israel
- Zechariah 13:7—The Shepherd struck down

OLD TESTAMENT PICTURES OF CHRIST'S DEATH

The imagery of the cross appears in three Old Testament pictures.

Sacrifices. The substitutionary death of Christ is most often pictured in the Old Testament by the sacrificial system. The provision of animal skins for Adam and Eve is seen by many Bible

scholars as God’s initiative to provide for man’s sin by means of sacrifice (Gen. 3:21). The Passover sacrifice is a primary image of deliverance through the shed blood of a lamb (Ex. 12; Lev. 23; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19). John the Baptist connected the animal sacrifice and Jesus Christ when he cried, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29). An extensive explanation is given in Hebrews 9:11–10:18.

**“Behold!
The Lamb of
God who takes
away the sin of
the world!”
John 1:29**

The Bronze Serpent. Israel was afflicted with the bites of serpents because of their disobedience. At God’s instruction, a serpent was made out of bronze and placed on a pole in the center of camp. All who looked at it were healed of their bites (Num. 21:4-9).

Christ would be “lifted up” and all who looked on Him in faith would experience spiritual healing (Jn. 3:14-15).

Jonah. Jesus taught that the experience of Jonah in the belly of the great fish for 3 days and 3 nights was a picture of His own death, burial, and resurrection (Mt. 12:39-41).

By prophecies and pictures, therefore, the Old Testament looked forward to the death of Christ. His crucifixion was not an unforeseen detour in the plan of God. Rather, it was the reason that He came.

THE WORDS OF THE CROSS

Even in dying, Christ was teaching us how to live. The seven recorded statements from the cross give us seven profound lessons on life.

1 “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk. 23:34). Forgiveness is better than revenge.

2 “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43). Faith is rewarded with promise.

3 “Woman, behold your son! . . . Behold your mother!” (Jn. 19:26-27). Our own needs should not overshadow the needs of others.

4 “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mk. 15:34). Anything that could jeopardize our relationship with God should produce anguish.

5 “I thirst” (Jn. 19:28). These words, spoken to fulfill prophecy, remind us of the authority of Scripture.

6 “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). Do not let yourself lose sight of your goal of doing God’s will.

7 “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Lk. 23:46). In your suffering, entrust yourself to God.

THE INDICTMENT OF THE CROSS

In the Bible are astonishing words that will testify forever to the wickedness of man. Describing the execution of Jesus Christ, the gospel writers used the statement, “They crucified Him.” Never before had One so innocent endured such an outpouring of human scorn and contempt. The whole process was a terrifying revelation of human sin.

First, there was the jealous hatred of the religious leaders of Israel. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes joined forces to discredit Jesus (Mt. 22:15-46). They resented His popularity (Mt. 21:45-46; Jn. 12:19). They said His miracles were works of Satan (Mt. 12:22-30). They were appalled at His acceptance of ordinary

people (Lk. 15:1-2). They hated His exposure of their hypocrisy (Mt. 15:1-14). Although they were looked up to as the spiritual leaders of Israel, they falsely accused, illegally tried, condemned, and crucified the One sent from God (Mt. 26-27).

Second, there was the greedy betrayal by Judas. As one of the disciples, he shared in the life and ministry of Jesus. The teachings, the miracles, the very heart and soul of the Savior were his to experience. But in the end, Judas chose to betray Him. As treasurer of the Twelve, he often stole from the common purse (Jn. 12:6). It is therefore no surprise that he would sell his own soul, and the Savior, for 30 pieces of silver (Mt. 26:14-16).

Third, there was the cunning cowardice of Pontius Pilate, the

governor of Palestine appointed by Caesar. He was hated by the Jewish leaders. He knew they were manipulating him into killing Jesus, and he resisted it. All of his counter moves failed. Although he publicly proclaimed Christ's innocence, he did not set Him free. Giving in to pressure, he ordered the crucifixion of Christ.

“Pilate, . . . wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them.

But they shouted, saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’”
Luke 23:20-21

Fourth, there is the fickle desire of the crowd. A few days earlier, the masses had cried, “Hosanna to the son of David,” as Christ entered Jerusalem. But now they clamored for His death, shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Fifth, there was the heartless cruelty of the Roman soldiers. They stripped Him and beat Him. They mocked Him. They spit on Him. They twisted a crown of thorns onto His head. They led Him away, bruised and bleeding, and crucified Him. What monstrous behavior!

Now, it would be easy for us to condemn these people. But let's be honest. Those wicked deeds against the innocent Son of God represent the truth about all of us. They are an indictment of our own sin.

THE CALL OF THE CROSS

Look again at the cross. Look at the One dying there. He never sinned, yet He is on the cross to bear the penalty for the sins of the whole world. He's dying there on your behalf. That should be you on that cross.

It's an ugly scene, isn't it? It shows us how terrible sin really is, and what a horrible price had to be paid to set us free from it. If you are a Christian, coming one more time to the cross should fill your heart with gratitude for what Christ did for you there. As your sacrifice and substitute, He made it possible for you to be forgiven and to be saved from your sin. Why don't you give Him your thanks right now? Then determine to walk in obedience to God.

If you are not a

Christian, won't you trust Him as your Savior? Your sin is real. You cannot do anything at all about it—except to trust in Jesus Christ. Don't wait. Tell

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

Him that you believe in Him as your personal Savior. Ask Him to save you. He will, because it was for you that He died on that excruciating cross. He was your sacrifice. He paid the penalty for your sin. Trust Him now!

THE SATISFACTION OF THE CROSS

by Darlene Lehman
as told to Judith Fabisch

If there was ever a time I didn't want to be accepted by God, I don't remember it. Our home was religious.

“I wanted God’s forgiveness so badly, but He always seemed so very far away.”

Grandmother never had to force me to go to church on Sunday or Holy Days. After

school, I often stopped at the cool, dimly lit cathedral near our house and knelt in one of the empty pews. It was a devotion of agony. I wanted God's forgiveness so badly, but He always seemed so very far away.

When I was about 10, the bishop visited our cathedral. While he was there, he blessed some holy water. Grandmother sent me to get a bottle of it to put in the small vials scattered around our home. I ran all the way to the cathedral, but I walked home much more slowly. I was thinking hard. I wanted so much to be accepted by God. Impulsively, I drank the holy water! Grandmother could not be angry with me, for she understood the guilt and desire that can be in a young girl's heart. But still I was not satisfied.

High school did not remove the thirst that was

in my soul, but I was soon occupied with studies, friends, and dating. Within a year of graduation I met and married Dick. It wasn't long before I was settled into the routine of establishing a home and family.

Although I loved my husband and my home, I longed more than ever for spiritual peace. I increased my acts of devotion to my church, attending faithfully and doing extra things to try to meet God's approval. But I still came away empty. I even went to an evangelistic meeting downtown. But I didn't understand what was being said, so I walked away frustrated. I was ready to do anything to please God.

I begged God. I cried out to Him. I pleaded with Him to reveal Himself to me. And the answer finally came from an unexpected place—through my mother-

in-law. A sense of peace surrounded her, and she was always very kind. So when she asked me to

“I begged God. I cried out to Him. I pleaded with Him to reveal Himself to me. And the answer finally came from an unexpected place.”

attend a Christian women's club meeting with her, I was glad to go. A missionary was speaking. In clear, loving, unmistakable terms, she brought us to the cross.

I understood for the first time the meaning of Christ's death—praise God! I realized that I should have come here—to the cross—a long time ago. I knew that

“I realized that I should have come here—to the cross—a long time ago. I knew that the thirst of my soul would be satisfied here.”

the thirst of my soul would be satisfied here. I accepted the love and forgiveness of God. With tears of joy, I

trusted Christ and His sacrifice for me.

The years have not been easy since. In time I left my church because of the emptiness of its ritual. I grew rapidly in Christ and in my commitment to Him. Dick didn't understand, and eventually he left me. But the Lord has sustained me and the children throughout the years.

The peace and satisfaction I found at the cross has been real—far greater than could ever be found in a bottle of holy water. The forgiveness of sins and acceptance by a holy God can be found only at the cross.