

What Really Happened at the Cross?

Synopsis: Drama of man constructing a cross and his thoughts with an offstage voice. I come up on stage to talk about Jesus' death. Man comes back and places hands on the cross acknowledging his role in crucifying Jesus. I invite people to trust in Jesus. People come up later to nail stuff to the cross.

Carpenter comes on stage and stands near his workbench and the cross and visibly sighs.

Voiced thoughts: *I really didn't want this job, but the money is gone and I have to feed my family.*

Carpenter begins to saw or plane the wood.

There's no skill or craftsmanship in these instruments of torture, nothing to take pride in this thing that will only cause pain. The centurion says this one could be for Jesus. Why Jesus? He's done nothing to deserve this stake.

I heard him once, preaching about the kingdom and the need to repent. I thought the kingdom belonged to us Jews. Why do we need to repent? The religious leaders were furious with him for suggesting they needed to repent. I'm sure they're behind this execution somehow.

Elizabeth didn't want me to take this job because I would be working for the Romans and making these horrid crosses. She doesn't realize that I'm not as young anymore and can't work as fast as the younger carpenters. The jobs are growing fewer. I'm lucky to get this work. Jeremiah and Anna are growing so fast. It's getting harder to keep them fed.

I saw wood and hammer nails. I don't hang people from crosses and force them to die under the hot sun. I'm not responsible for what the Romans do with these things after I make them. The blood of the guilty is on their hands, not on mine.

Carpenter stops to hold his hands up and looks at them.

A woodcarver fashions a walking stick that a man uses to beat his neighbor in a fit of anger. Is the woodcarver responsible for that assault because he made the stick? A metalworker produces a knife that a thief later uses to cut a man's throat. Is the metalworker responsible for that murder? A seamstress makes a carrying bag that a burglar uses to steal valuables from a home. Is the seamstress responsible for that robbery? I make crosses. I'm not responsible for what others do with them. My hands are clean of others' blood.

Carpenter wipes his hands on his garment before he goes back to work.

I heard Pilate sent Jesus to Herod this morning. Smart move on his part. I wouldn't want to be the one responsible for executing Jesus. Jesus healed lepers, restored the sick, and gave sight to

the blind. Many think he might be the Messiah. I don't know about that. He doesn't seem to be much of a king, doesn't have an army, comes from the dirt-poor town of Nazareth. A good man and a prophet, but the king? I don't see it. Still, he's a good man, a righteous man, and a great teacher. He doesn't deserve to die.

I need to finish this work so I can take the Passover Lamb to have it killed in the Temple. It's a shame the Romans are going to crucify Jesus at the same time the lambs are being sacrificed. It takes away from the meaning of the sacrifice. We celebrate our freedom from Egypt while under the boot of Rome. Ironic isn't it? The blood of the Passover lamb saved the first-born Jewish son from the Death Angel, but Jesus will not be saved from death. His death will be a tragic waste of innocent blood.

There, it's done. Still time for me to attend to the Passover Lamb.

Man rises and leaves the stage. Pastor Mark enters the stage.

[Slide 1] What really happened at the cross? The simplest answer is that an innocent man died a horrific death. The Gospels agree that several times the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate declared Jesus innocent of any crime worthy of death, and yet to appease the Jewish leaders he finally ordered Jesus crucified.

Crucifixion was not a quick end. It was designed to be a slow, lingering death. The nails that were driven through the wrists and feet in order to secure the victim to the cross were not fatal wounds. The condemned would be hoisted up on the cross and left there for days until they finally died either from exposure or from suffocation.

As the victim slumped down from exhaustion the diaphragm would be pushed up against the lungs making it harder for the person to breathe. They would have to push themselves up by using their leg muscles to push down on the nails in their feet, producing excruciating pain but allowing them to clear their lungs to breathe. As they tired they would slump down again and begin to suffocate, necessitating that once more they had to repeat the same painful process. The victim continued in this ordeal until they were too weak to lift up to clear their lungs. Then they suffocated.

They would hang semi-naked or completely naked in the hot Judean sun, their skin burned and their mouth cracked dry from lack of water.

Jesus was crucified on a Friday, the day before the Jewish Sabbath which began at sundown on Friday. It was offensive to the Jews to have men hanging on crosses on the Sabbath, so the Romans sent a soldier to break the legs of the condemned to hasten their death. Only when the soldier got to Jesus he saw he was dead already, so just to confirm the death the man stuck a spear in Jesus' side and water and blood came out, a separation of the serum from the red blood cells, indicating death.

[Slide 2] The significance of the crucifixion is not in the mechanics of death, it is in who died on the cross and how God the Father used the death of Jesus to pay the penalty for sin. To understand the need for a payment we must first understand the problem we face. Our problem is that we have sinned or disobeyed God.

Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is a conclusion the apostle Paul reaches after considering a number of God's statements on the subject from the Old Testament. No one is exempt. Everyone has disobeyed God. We can conduct a simple

experiment to prove the truth of the statement. Jesus said the greatest commandment of all is that you should love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. So, I would ask you: Have you always loved God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength? If you have not, then you have violated God's greatest commandment. There is no greater offense that you could commit against God and you have committed it.

Paul says that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. The glory of God represents God in all his perfection. Are you perfect like God? If not, then you are a sinner. You are guilty of failing to meet God's perfect standard.

The consequence of this failure is spiritual death. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. What you have earned for your sin is spiritual death. It is the opposite of eternal life which is found only in Christ Jesus our Lord. Spiritual death is eternal separation from God in Hell. Every person has earned spiritual death for their sin and if they have to pay for their sin themselves, then they will pay for it throughout eternity in Hell.

God offers us a different destiny. He offers eternal life as a gift in the person of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.

Jesus has paid your penalty by dying for you on the cross.

While he was dying on the cross Jesus called out in Matthew 27:46, "Read." Why would the Father forsake the Son in his moment of greatest need? What would cause the Father to do such a thing? Both the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul claim that while Jesus was dying, the Father assigned all the sins of all mankind for all time to his son, so that his son's death paid the penalty for all sin. When Jesus was covered with all the sins of the world, the holy Father had to turn away.

Look on your sermon outline at 1 Peter 2:21-24 and let's read those verses. Let me point out some key statements in those verses. First in verse 21 Peter says that Jesus Christ suffered for you. His suffering on the cross was undertaken on your behalf. Jesus voluntarily went to the cross for you. At one point he told his disciples that if he wanted to, at any time he could just give the call and 10,000 angels would rush to his side rescuing him from any harm. No humans could successfully execute Jesus without his willing consent. He agreed to suffer for you.

Verse 22 says that Jesus committed no sin. He was completely innocent. This was important because the only sacrifice acceptable to a holy God is a holy sacrifice, one that is free from the taint of sin.

In verse 24 God's word says that Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross. The only way this was possible was for God to declare by legal fiat that all the sins of mankind were assigned to Jesus Christ so that his death could pay for them. Jesus died for us that we might die to the rule of sin in our life and so that we might live unto righteousness and be healed in our broken relationship with God. Jesus's death makes all those things possible.

The apostle Paul writes much the same thing in Romans 5:6-8 but adds that love motivated God to do this. Read. God loves you. God does not want you lost to him forever. He has provided in the death of his Son the means whereby he can maintain his holiness and forgive you of every wrong you have done. There must be a payment for sin. A holy God cannot forget disobedience. But he can pay the penalty himself so that those he loves do not have to pay that penalty in Hell.

In a graphic way Paul pictures the legal complaint against us being nailed to the cross. Listen to what he writes in Colossians 2:13-14, also listed on your outline. Read. God has forgiven all our transgressions. He nailed to the cross the written account of the full debt we owed him for

having broken his Law. His righteous decrees were hostile to us because we could not keep all of God's commandments. So, we had this huge debt we could not pay. God took all that legal record and nailed it to the cross, canceling out our debt by allowing Jesus' death on the cross to be the all sufficient payment.

In John 19:30 Jesus speaks from the cross and says, "It is finished." The Greek word is tetelestai. That was a financial term. It meant, "Paid in full." The word was written or stamped over a bill once the bill was paid. Paid in full. When Jesus spoke those words on the cross he was announcing that the whole debt to God owed by every one of us was paid in full by his sacrificial death. Jesus did everything that needed to be done to reconcile us to the cross.

Each of us is responsible for Jesus dying on the cross because it was our sin that had to be paid for. The carpenter tried to rationalize that he wasn't responsible for Jesus death because he only made the cross. He wasn't the one who forced Jesus onto it.

Likewise we can argue that we're not responsible for Jesus death. We weren't there at the time. We had nothing to do with it, but the truth is that if you were the only person who had ever sinned, Jesus would have gone to the cross just for you. Our sin, each of our sin, is why he had to die.

[Slide 3] On Easter we celebrate his resurrection from the dead. His resurrection proves many things but two are especially important. His resurrection proves that Jesus is God. He claimed to be God. He predicted he would be crucified and rise on the third day. His resurrection validates his claim to be God. How else could Jesus predict his own crucifixion and resurrection? Even more importantly, if Jesus had lied about being God, God would have never vindicated him by raising him from the dead.

Jesus resurrection also proves that his sacrificial death was acceptable to God. God put his public stamp of approval on Jesus' atoning death so that you might know with certainty that Jesus death on the cross was effective to pay for your sins.

Pastor Mark sits down. Carpenter returns to the stage visibly shaken. He kneels beside the cross and touches it.

I couldn't watch the crucifixions on Friday. They're such gruesome and ugly affairs. I'm told that Jesus asked God to forgive those who killed him. Does he also forgive those who let him be killed? How about the one who built his cross . . . this cross?

Now I hear that Jesus' body is gone, leaving Joseph's tomb empty. Some are claiming to have seen Jesus alive.

He raises his hands and looks at them.

I keep washing my hands, but I can't escape the feeling that Jesus' blood covers them, that I bear some responsibility for what happened to him.

The man lowers his hands and looks up.

God, have mercy upon me. Forgive me for my part in his death. I want to believe that he was more than just a man. Help my unbelief.

Carpenter walks off stage.

[Slide 4] How do you receive the forgiveness of sins that God offers you through the death of Jesus Christ? How do you receive God's gift of eternal life? On your sermon outline I have printed Romans 10:9-13, one of many passages that explain how you can be saved from God's judgment and receive his salvation. Let's read that passage. Read.

Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. The word "confess" means "to agree with". Who are you agreeing with? You're agreeing with God that Jesus is Lord. You're confessing to God that Jesus is your Lord.

What does it mean to confess that Jesus is Lord? What does Lord mean? Look at verse 13. Read. Verse 13 is a quote of Joel 2:32. Who is the Lord in Joel 2:32? It is Yahweh or God. You agree that Jesus is God.

Verse 9 says that if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. What does it mean to believe in your heart versus believing with your mind? Believing with your mind refers to intellectual agreement. I agree that something is true. Your heart represents not just your mind. It represents your emotions, your will, your attitudes, your desires. In short, your heart represents everything internal about you. You believe with everything you have that Jesus is raised from the dead, that he is your living God, the one you follow and trust.

Verse 13 uses a comparable expression to believing in your heart. It says that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. You call upon Jesus to be your God, to be your Savior, to be the one who provides you with forgiveness and eternal life. If you trust in him you will be saved.

If you have never called upon Jesus to save you, I invite you to do that right now. Tell him that you are ready to follow him and to trust him to forgive you.

The decision to trust Christ is what saves you. I am going to close with a prayer of faith in Jesus Christ. If you would like to trust in Jesus, I invite you to pray along with me. There is nothing magical about the words, they are merely a means of expressing your faith in Jesus Christ. It is your decision to trust Jesus that saves you. Let's pray.