

Why Did Jesus Have To Die?

I read a blog once in which the author said he didn't understand why Christians are so obsessed with the death of Jesus on the cross. "After all," he said, "aren't his teachings what's most important?" Someone had told him that Jesus *had* to die to pay for our sins, but he said, "If God wants to forgive us, why doesn't he just say, 'I forgive you.'"

Our messages, leading up to Easter, are going to focus on the cross of Christ. In **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**, the apostle Paul says, *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* When he says this is of *first importance*, he is saying it is crucial for us all. We have been in a series titled *Deeper*. Would you consider that your understanding of, appreciation for, and experience of the power of the cross can go even deeper, and if it did, it would be good. We begin this morning with the question, *Why did Jesus have to die?*

The truth at the heart of this passage is that...

I. JESUS HAD TO DIE SO THAT GOD MIGHT BE JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER OF THE ONE WHO HAS FAITH IN JESUS.

Romans 3:23-26 is a rich passage full of interwoven interlocking truths. So, let me try to just take us through it in four steps to pull out some of the key threads of truth. **1.) Verse 23** begins with an all-inclusive diagnosis of our sinful state in relationship to God. It says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, **2.)** But then **verse 24** moves immediately to declare God's grace. It says *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, To receive *redemption* is to be delivered from bondage by a payment that sets you free. **3.) Verse 25** introduces an uncommon but crucial word. It says, *whom (Christ) God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.* The word *propitiation* means a

satisfaction. So the redemption price has to satisfy a need, a demand, a requirement. 4.) In the second half of **verse 25** through **verse 26**, he tells us what was at issue. The word “righteousness” appears twice. It says *This was to show God's righteousness because, in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

The satisfaction required for our redemption was a satisfaction that meet the demands of righteousness. The righteousness of God had to be satisfied for us to be redeemed.

A. What this is telling you is that Jesus had to die to provide God's gracious but righteous solution to a profound problem.

God is a righteous judge. In a permissive society where tolerance has become one of the primary values in the culture, it's easy to forget or to downplay the fact that the Bible says God is a righteous judge. **Psalm 75:7** says he is the *God who executes judgment*. The book of **Hebrews 12:23** speaks of God as *God the judge of all*.

Here, we're told not only that God forgives our sins when we believe in Jesus but that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. To justify someone is not only to forgive all their sins and wrongdoings but also to declare them righteous. I think we struggle to understand the awesomeness of what the Bible is saying. God, the only judge you need to care about, says, *You are now righteous in my eyes, and you will be thought of and treated as righteous as Christ is righteous for Christ's sake because of the gospel*. He gives you the crown - the only trophy that matters; it's like you get the Medal of Honor, the Nobel Prize, and the Miss Universe tiara as a gift of grace!

Dr. William Lane Craig is one of the leading philosophers of religion in the world. He says that in giving such amazing grace to sinful people, God faces what legal theorists call *the dilemma of a merciful judge*. What it means is that *although a judge has a certain freedom when it comes to sentencing a convicted criminal, a judge is not free to simply ignore the demands of justice and let a wrongdoer go free because a*

judge does not act as a private person.

As a private person, if you offend me, hurt me, destroy something of mine, or steal from me. I can choose to forgive you. That doesn't mean it doesn't cost anything. It means I am willing to absorb the cost. A judge has to address the issue of what would satisfy (*propitiate*) justice. And a righteous judge cannot exercise mercy in a manner that simply compromises justice. 1

God shows forbearance, and God offers forgiveness, even declaring sinful people righteous in his eyes. How can he do so and be just?

Rebecca Pippert tells the story of a trial she witnessed. She said:

Once in a courtroom, I heard a person being sentenced for a crime... On the one hand, a crime had been committed, and the person had to pay... Just as the judge was giving the sentence, a middle-aged man suddenly broke into sobs. He was clearly the father of the person on trial... This was somebody's child grown up, a child still treasured by a father. Even the judge paused, but he had his job to do and resumed sentencing. The judge's job is to sentence. 2

Holiness and love are equally part of the essence of who God is.

On the one hand, *God is holy*. He hates sin and moves against it with judgment. On the other hand, *God is love*. He loves people and moves toward them with mercy. There are spiritual laws that flow out of the essence of who God is that are woven into the fabric of the universe that are essential and good. To suggest God could just set those spiritual laws aside is to assume with incredible arrogance that we understand spiritual reality in a way that we don't. Is it so hard to understand or accept that there is a real spiritual world ruled by a perfect God and that in that world, there are spiritual laws of justice that can't just be set aside without consequences? One way to think of this is that the Bible is telling you that we could have been lost, or *hypothetically*, God's justice and righteousness could have been lost. Or, and this is the crucial message of the cross, God could make the

payment, the sacrifice that would satisfy justice. God could send his own son. Christ could give himself as the sacrifice to pay for our sins so that, as the end of **verse 26** says, God could be *just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus*.

Don't miss the incredibly powerful positive message here.

B. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross completely satisfies the demands of God's justice so that you can be declared righteous through faith in Jesus.

Grace, in its fullness, came into our world in Jesus and went to the cross. Because God is the lawgiver, the final judge, and the ultimate offended party in our sins, He can allow the sacrifice of Jesus to stand as full payment that satisfies (or propitiates). Jesus, being God incarnate and the one and only perfect human being, offered, in himself, a sacrifice of infinite value, sufficient to cover the sins of the world, for the expressed purpose of saving his people from their sins. In **Isaiah 53**, Isaiah says *The LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all*. At the end, on the cross, Jesus said, *"It is finished."*

Ultimately, it isn't necessary or even possible for us to ever fully comprehend all the depths of God's plan of salvation. In **Isaiah 55:9**, God speaks through Isaiah and says: *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*. The Bible tells us that we should not expect everyone to understand or embrace the message of the cross. **1 Corinthians 1:18** says, *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*.

This passage teaches two things. First, Jesus had to die so that God might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Second...

II. THIS TRUTH THAT JESUS HAD TO DIE HAS PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS FOR ALL OF OUR LIVES.

Verses 27-28: *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

Here are two important implications. First,

A. That Jesus had to die for our salvation excludes boasting.

Boasting isn't mentioned because it is the most heinous sin but because it is one of the most revealing sins. It reveals the heart. The boasting he is talking about is not friendly banter amongst friends.

There are two kinds of boasting excluded by the cross of Christ.

1. The first is the boasting that tries to build a case that you're a good and worthy person who deserves the approval of God and others. It's an attempt to prop up and defend your sense of value to others but underneath, it is often an anxious attempt to convince yourself, if you could, that you're acceptable to God. That kind of boasting reveals a heart puffed up with self-righteousness and undercut with self-doubt at the same time. That kind of boasting isn't just socially irritating. It is spiritually corrosive.

The cross is the end of that kind of boasting. The cross says you cannot work hard enough or well enough to compensate for sin or earn God's favor. The only thing you can do to be justified is to admit you don't deserve it and can't earn it and place your faith in Christ.

2. The second kind of boasting is a boasting that's just so full of self that it foolishly thinks you can just disregard the commands and the warnings of God. I heard someone tell this story about his friend's daughter. She was a strong-willed little 4-year-old girl with a tricycle. And she kept riding her tricycle where she wasn't supposed to. Her mom got frustrated one day and said, *"All right, Lucy (not her real name), look, here's a tree. Here's the edge of the driveway. Here's the sidewalk. You can ride your tricycle between the tree and the driveway, but you cannot take it beyond that. If you take it beyond those boundaries, I will spank you. I'm going to go inside. We have a big*

picture window. I'll be watching. If you ride past those boundaries, I will come out, and there will be a spanking."

Lucy stuck her little hip out, pointed to it, and said, *"Well, you better spank me now because I got places to go!"* That's not a bad picture, an example of the bent of the human heart, the human condition: willful, ungrateful for the wisdom and the gracious provision we've been given. Foolishly self-confident. What might seem cute in a four-year-old-outlaw-triker-girl is moral and spiritual corruption in relationship to God and his laws of life when it is found in us.

The cross of Christ frees us from foolishness. It tells us, at the same time, that our sins are so serious, and God is so righteous. So the cross of Christ is the only way He could save us. If that doesn't have an impact on us, we don't understand something. Maybe we have such a sentimental view of God's nature, a light view of his holiness, and a naïve and flippant perspective on his righteousness and our sins that we've lost our concern about his judgment. In the Bible, the reason the truth that we can be justified through faith in Jesus brings such a thunderous upheaval of grace and transformation is that it opens the door that leads from judgment, estrangement, emptiness, and wrath into blessing, peace, life and love.

The death of Jesus excludes and frees us from boasting and...

B. That Jesus had to die for your salvation calls you to faith.

Verse 28, *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.* It doesn't say we are justified by faith *plus* observing the law. It says we are justified by faith *apart* from observing the law. We are made right with God by faith and faith alone because of Jesus.

Do you know what the Bible makes such a huge deal about faith apart from works as the means by which we receive the grace of God? It's because it's the *only* way to be declared righteous, *and* it's also the most powerful truth to both ignite and sustain deep spiritual growth. Faith is the most foundational, the most central, and the highest form of our dependence upon God. We never outgrow it or our

need for it. Whatever other expressions of the life of God in us, whatever other beauties, qualities, and spiritual fruit that grows in our lives, it all grows out of faith. In every situation in every season of life with every struggle that you experience *put faith to work*. Ask, *What would faith do? Ask how does faith in the gospel strengthen and sustain me in this situation at this time in this moment?* The Christian life is a life of faith from beginning to end.

Scripture says we live by faith! (Galatians 2:20) In over 50 years as a committed Christian and over 40 years as a pastor, through many in-depth conversations with struggling Christians and experienced biblical counselors, I have discovered that what many people interpret in their own lives and in the lives of others as a failure of spiritual growth, will-power or discipline is actually a lack of clarity and a loss of bearing with respect to what **Romans 3** is teaching us. Christians who do not have the humble confidence to rest in the truth that God loves and accepts them in Jesus apart from their achievements and their performance are subconsciously deeply insecure people. That insecurity shows up in in pride, a self-justifying criticism of other people, and a heightened vulnerability to anything that offers a distraction from the undercurrent of anxious insecurity and self-reproach . 3

Pastors, parents, and friends sometimes lash out at what they perceive to be a lack of commitment to Christ with stinging admonitions, rebukes, and calls for commitment. At times, there is good cause for some of that, but it's often necessary and even more helpful to convince the struggling Christians of the reality of the grace and love of God toward them in Christ before they can even begin to face their problems honestly. And sometimes, that, in itself, goes a long way to bring the healing transformation they most deeply need.

Conclusion

Too often, we live in a gray area in which we sing beautiful lyrics about God's awesome love but feel vaguely rotten about ourselves, distant from God, and overly dependent on people and circumstances for our happiness. God, in Christ, has offered the greatest of all sacrifices to

set us free from that. So put your faith in him. It is not the strength of your faith but the person in whom you place your faith that matters. Commit to faith in him, surrender to faith in him.

Here's the beauty of faith in Jesus. The more you turn in faith to him, the more you are set free from the treadmill of constantly trying to justify yourself. In that freedom, you discover something amazing – gratitude and more than gratitude – a peace that doesn't depend on your performance but on Christ. A peace in Christ that strengthens you against the vulnerabilities of insecurity. A peace that motivates you to follow Jesus not to prove yourself or earn God's love but because you have been given what you could never earn.

Amen.

1 <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/videos/lectures/why-did-christ-have-to-die>

2 I had this quote in an older sermon. I believe it comes from her book *Out Of The Saltshaker*, but I have lost the reference.

3 I have seen all of this in my life and ministry but first began to see it when reading Lovelace *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Pages 211-213, in 1980!