



April 3, 33 AD – Day of Crucifixion
Matthew 27

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April 3, 33 AD. The day Jesus was crucified. Based on biblical history, secular history, astronomy, prophecy, and the Bible itself, the best calculated date for the crucifixion of Jesus is April 3, 33 AD.¹ Of course, knowing *the date* is not as important as knowing there was *a date*. The crucifixion was not a myth, fable, or fiction. It actually happened.

Because it did, the cross is the sacred symbol of our faith. The earliest Christians, however, avoided the cross as a symbol.² It was too gruesome and too feared. On the walls of the catacombs – those underground caves where Christians gathered and also buried their dead – were other symbols.³ Such as a peacock as a symbol of immortality, a dove as a symbol of peace, and an anchor as a symbol of hope.⁴ And there was the secret symbol of the fish. The Greek word for fish is *ἰχθυς*, and an acronym for “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.”⁵ If a fish were etched on the door of a person’s house, others would secretly know that person was a Christian.

We admit it’s odd that a Roman tool for execution became the symbol of our faith, yet we proudly identify with the cross. We display it, we wear it, and we decorate with it. Because it is through the cross that we find grace, salvation, and eternal life. As Paul said, we “boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14, NAS).⁶

Yet Paul realized, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV). To the earliest critics, Christianity was considered a “crazy superstition” and lampooned for worshipping a crucified criminal and a dead deity.⁷ On the wall of one Roman school, a crucified figure was drawn with a donkey’s head.⁸ The inscription included the name of the child they were mocking. “Alexamenos worships God.” Roman children were taught to despise Christians and mock the cross. Yes, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,” Paul admitted, “but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV).

On April 3, 33 AD, at 9:00 in the morning, the first nail was struck and Jesus was crucified. The Son of God took our place and sacrificed His life for us. He did not merely carry our sin and nail it to the cross, He absorbed our sin and nailed Himself to the cross. And the cross simultaneously demonstrates the holy justice of God punishing sin and the amazing grace of God forgiving sin. And it happened on a certain date on the calendar and at a certain time on the clock.

Matthew 27 records what happened at the cross for six hours one Friday.⁹ What happened those six hours was a sacred event and should fill us with reverence. What happened those six hours was a gracious event and should fill us with gratitude, all for what Jesus did for us.¹⁰

AT 9:00 AM

According to the gospel of Mark, “It was the third hour when they crucified Him” (Mark 15:25, NAS).¹¹ The Jewish day began at 6:00 AM, so the third hour was 9:00 in the morning. ***On April 3, 33 AD, at 9:00 in the morning, we see the physical agony Jesus suffered.***

The Romans used crucifixion as a visual deterrent to crime. Crosses lined the roads coming into Jerusalem as a visual threat of what would happen to those who broke the law.¹² In Rome, Nero enjoyed strolling around his garden in the evening, which was lit by torching crucified bodies planted around his garden.¹³ One popular Greek play included a mock crucifixion. Performed over and over, the play became boring. So the emperor Domitian ordered a real crucifixion to make the play more exciting.¹⁴ When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Roman general Titus ordered so many crucifixions that historians said there were “not enough crosses for the bodies.”¹⁵ Crucifixion was barbaric, and the Romans used it to threaten people into submission.

Matthew 27 describes what happened to Jesus at 9:00 that morning.

Before Jesus was crucified, Pilate ordered that He be “scourged.”¹⁶ Jesus was tied to a whipping post and the torture commenced by two soldiers called lictors. These lictors alternated strokes by flogging Jesus with a short whip called a flagrum, which had braided leather strips that were tipped with pieces of metal or bone. Each stroke lacerated Jesus’ flesh – His back, His buttocks, His legs. The wounds were deep. The pain was searing. The blood was flying.

Then “the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.”¹⁷ Several hundred ruthless soldiers gathered around Jesus for entertainment and their sport was sadistic.

“They stripped Him.” The Son of God was naked, exposed, and humiliated. They “put a scarlet robe on Him, and twisted together a crown of thorns and pressed it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”¹⁸ The robe, the crown, and the reed were meant to mock His claim to royalty.

“They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.”¹⁹ “Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads.”²⁰ There was no end to the verbal stoning. It just kept coming. They were relentless in their contempt. “After they had mocked Him, they led Him away to crucify Him.”²¹

Archaeological evidence of a first century crucifixion indicates the nails were tapered spikes five to seven inches long.²² To better support the weight of a human body, these spikes were most likely driven through the wrist and not through the palm of the hand.

Historian Frederick Farrar describes what Jesus endured. “Death by crucifixion included all that pain and death can bring, all that is horrible and ghastly ... dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever ... publicity of shame, long continuance of torment.”²³ “Every movement painful ... lacerated veins ... crushed tendons ... incessant anguish.”²⁴ The exhausted victim of crucifixion eventually died of asphyxiation.

Why relive the crucifixion? Not for sympathy for Jesus.²⁵ Yes, He endured unimaginable agony on the cross, but it’s not enough to know what happened on the cross. It’s more important to know what the cross achieved. And this is what Peter said about the cross. Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24, NAS).

At 9:00 on the morning of April 3, 33, AD, the first nail was struck. And for six hours, Jesus hung there, aching, throbbing, and groaning. For six hours, He labored for every breath. And after six hours, when He could endure it no longer, He breathed His last.²⁶ Yet at any moment along the way, He could have stopped everything. At any moment, He could have summoned angels to come and rescue Him. But He didn't. Why? ***Because He cared more about saving us than saving Himself.***

AT 12:00 NOON

At 12:00 noon, we hear a fascinating conversation and the surprising grace Jesus offered.

Jesus was crucified with two other men.²⁷ We do not know their names or their crimes. We simply know they were criminals, robbers.²⁸ They must have been among the worst, because no one was crucified for petty theft. They were guilty and they knew it.²⁹ They were not just condemned to die, they were dying!

The first thief finished life as he lived it – calloused and scoffing. Luke 23 says, “One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him, ‘Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” (Luke 23:39, NIV). He was only feet away from Jesus, but he might as well have been a million miles away.³⁰ He failed to see what was right in front of him.

But the second thief said, “Don’t you fear God (when you’re about to die)? ... We’re getting what we deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40-41, NIV). Notice two things in that statement. One, he knew he was guilty. “We’re getting what we deserve.” He admitted his sin, and that’s the first step of faith. And two, he acknowledged the innocence of Jesus. “This man has done nothing wrong.” The second thief witnessed what Paul would later explain. That Jesus “knew no sin” but became sin “on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NAS).

The thief began to look at Jesus. Something about Jesus touched his heart.³¹ Then between gasps for breath, he dared to ask, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom!” (Luke 23:42, NIV). “In spite of what I’ve done, in spite of what you see, would you please help me?!”

Then the most amazing words from the cross. When we talk about amazing grace, this is it. With surprising grace, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth” – or in other words, “I promise you with all my heart” – “today, you shall be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43, NIV). When? “Today!” Where? “Paradise!” With You? “Yes with Me.” Jesus promised this man, with his last-minute faith, Paradise. The greatest moment in that poor thief’s life came at the last moment.

Pastor Alistair Begg humorously imagines the conversation between the thief and the angel at heaven’s gate. The angel asks, “Why should I let you in?” The thief answered, “I don’t know.” “Well were you baptized?” “No,” said the thief. “Were you a member of the church?” “No,” again the thief said. So the angel asked, “Well, do you understand the doctrine of justification by faith?” “Never heard of it,” the thief said. A bit frustrated, the angel asked him, “Well why should I let you in?” And the thief could only say, “Because of Him! Because Jesus said I could come!”

Alistair Begg reminds us of the old evangelistic question. When you stand before God and He asks, “Why should I let you in?” what will you say? Alistair Begg insists that if we answer with “Because I ...” we’ve given the wrong answer. Entrance into heaven is never “because I was good ... because I attended church ... because I was baptized.” Entrance into heaven is always *because He ...!* Entrance into heaven is never because we did anything, it’s because He did everything.

At noon on April 3, 33 AD, Jesus offered grace to someone who absolutely did not deserve it. And He still does today. That’s the point of the cross.

AT 3:00

Matthew 27 then says, “From the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour” (Matthew 27:45). The Jewish day began at 6:00 AM, so the “ninth hour” was 3:00 in the afternoon. *At 3:00 that afternoon, we see the ultimate sacrifice Jesus paid.*

After hanging on the cross for six hours, Jesus cried out with a loud voice and said, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46, NAS). Jesus was abandoned by His Father. One historian referred to this moment as “the withdrawal of God.”³² The Father abandoned the Son. But why?³³

By going to the cross, Jesus did not merely take our sin and nail it to the cross. He became our sin and nailed Himself to the cross. Jesus absorbed our sin. And when He did, His holy Father turned away.

Most of us tend to understate the severity of our sin. Yet the cross exposes the truth about us. British theologian John Stott wrote, “Our sin must be extremely horrible. Nothing reveals the gravity of sin like the cross.”³⁴ The stinging indictment upon humanity is that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23, NAS). All of us. The Bible says what we already know. “There is no one who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46, NIV).

Sin is not a disease or a disorder or a dysfunction. Sin is a choice to rebel against God. When we sin, we declare our independence and snub our noses at His authority. When we sin, we choose self – self-will, self-reliance, self-indulgence. When we sin, we break God’s law and bring upon ourselves the consequences of His judgment. When we sin, we miss the mark and fall short of what God desires for us. And sadly, when we sin, we spurn the one who loves us the most, we break His heart, and we offend a holy God.³⁵

Sin is not some misdemeanor. It’s not like getting a parking ticket. It’s something far worse. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23, NAS), and those who sin against God are “worthy of death” (Romans 1:32, NAS).³⁶ What a chilling indictment!

But we don’t feel that way. Our sins are not that bad. We admit we’re not perfect, but we’re good people. Yet the cross tells us something different about ourselves. The cross exposes the severity of our sin.³⁷ If that’s not true, then God certainly overreacted at the cross. But He did not

overreact. Cancer is a severe disease and an aspirin won't help. A severe disease requires a severe treatment, and the severity of our sin required a severe solution.

Yes, it sounds extreme, except that this was the plan and work of God. And according to Isaiah 53:10, the plan of God required the unthinkable. Isaiah 53:10 contains one of the most stunning and unexpected statements in the Bible.

“It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and make his life an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10, NIV). Another version says, “The Lord was pleased to crush Him” (NAS). But why would God do that? The Hebrew word for “crush” means to break into pieces, to pulverize into dust. Why would God do that to His own Son?³⁸

Because the holy justice of God required punishment of sin, and the amazing grace of God desired forgiveness of sin. The cross is perhaps the clearest picture of who God is. He is both the judge who condemns us and the sacrifice who saves us. One person wrote, “In the cross of Christ God’s justice and love are simultaneously revealed.”³⁹

When one denomination was publishing a new denominational hymnal, they wanted to include a hymn by Keith Getty, “In Christ Alone.” However, they asked to edit the lyrics to soften the message to align with the denomination’s theology. They wanted to change the lyric “on the cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied” to “the love of God was magnified.” They wanted to remove wrath from the song because liberal/progressive theology rejects the notion of God’s holy wrath toward sin.

But look at any crucifix and the first word that comes to mind is not love. A crucifix depicts a gruesome event. There must be more to it than love. And there is.⁴⁰ The cross displays the holy justice and wrath of God toward sin, our sin. “In the cross of Christ God’s justice and love are simultaneously revealed.”⁴¹

Miroslav Volf grew up in Communist-ruled Yugoslavia. Today, he is a Protestant theologian with international influence.⁴² For most of his life, he rejected the notion of God’s wrath, until he witnessed the horrors of the Bosnian War. He writes, “I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn’t God love? Shouldn’t divine love be beyond wrath? ... But my thinking was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God **not** being angry ... Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God’s wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who **wasn’t** wrathful at the sight of the world’s evil ... (I came to realize that) God is wrathful because God is love.”⁴³

Again, “In the cross of Christ God’s justice and love are simultaneously revealed.”⁴⁴ As gruesome as it is, the cross teaches us about God’s love. He loves us so much that He did the unthinkable. Romans 8:32 says, He “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (ESV). Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NAS).⁴⁵ The Bible says, “Jesus (was) delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” and was “crucified and killed” (Acts 2:23, ESV).

The cross was God's idea ... because it was the only way to save us!^{46/47} ***Thank God for His amazing grace.***

CONCLUSION

April 3, 33 AD. On a certain date on the calendar and at a certain time on the clock, the Son of God sacrificed His life for us. Jesus took our place. He paid the penalty for our sin. He suffered what we deserved. And because He did, forgiveness and grace and heaven are available for anyone who believes in His name.

Ephesians 1:7 sums up the meaning of the Gospel and the purpose of the cross. ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace.”***

NOTES

- ¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), page 74. This date is based upon biblical history, because the crucifixion must fall within a certain range of years when Caiaphas, Tiberius, and Pilate were all three in power. This date is based upon the secular history written by such historians as Josephus and Pliny. This date is based upon astronomy. There were only two viable years when Friday fell on Nisan 14, the years 30 and 33 AD. This date is based upon prophecy. Daniel's 69 weeks prophecy allows us to calculate the date of the crucifixion of Jesus, marking a time from 444 BC to 33 AD, from the time of Artaxerxes to the day of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and thus the date of His crucifixion. See Zechariah 9:9. See Hoehner, pages 115-139.
- ² John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), page 20.
- ³ The graffiti of the catacombs included scenes from Bible stories that we still teach our children – such as Noah's ark, Jonah inside the great fish, and Daniel in the lion's den.
- ⁴ Stott, page 20.
- ⁵ In Greek, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ.
- ⁶ See also 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:2.
- ⁷ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), page 5.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, page 19; also see Stott, page 25.
- ⁹ See Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday: Anchoring to the Power of the Cross* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), page 22.
- ¹⁰ The historian Octavius was correct, when he said, "We do not reverence the cross, nor do we worship it." We do, however, worship the one who endured it. (Hengel, page 4.)
- ¹¹ John 19:14 reads, "It was about the sixth hour," when Pilate sent Jesus away to be crucified, not the third hour as Mark states. See William Hendriksen's commentary for help in reconciling this seeming discrepancy. [*The Gospel of John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), pages 420-421.] See also Hoehner, pages 65-93.
- ¹² Hengel, page 50.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, page 26.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 35.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, page 25-26. See also Stott, page 24. Also *The Works of Josephus*, translated by William Whitson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), *The Wars of the Jews*, Chapter 11, paragraph 1, page 720.
- ¹⁶ Matthew 27:26.
- ¹⁷ Matthew 27:27-28.
- ¹⁸ Matthew 27:28-29.
- ¹⁹ Matthew 27:30.
- ²⁰ Matthew 27:39.
- ²¹ Matthew 27:31.
- ²² William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; and Floyd E. Hosner, MS, AMI; "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of American Medical Association*, March 21, 1986, Volume 255, page 1459.
- ²³ Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands A Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1972, 1979), quoting Frederick W. Farrar, page 197.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Alistair Begg said, "Sympathy for Jesus as a perfect sufferer falls short of faith in Jesus as a perfect Savior." So it's not enough to have sympathy for Jesus. The purpose of the cross is to move us to faith in Jesus as Savior. (Alistair Begg, "The Crucifixion," Parkside Church, Cleveland, Ohio).
- ²⁶ See Mark 15:37.
- ²⁷ This was fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah 53:12, which says he would be "numbered with the transgressors."
- ²⁸ Matthew 27:28, 44, and Mark 15:17 say "robbers," and Luke 23:32 says "criminals."
- ²⁹ One even admitted, "We are receiving what we deserve for our crimes" (Luke 23:41, NAS).
- ³⁰ Max Lucado comments, "So close to the cross but so far from the Christ." [Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), page 126.]
- ³¹ He was so moved that he could not stand the ridicule of the first thief. Pinned to a cross, this second thief defended Jesus. "This man has done nothing wrong" (Luk 23:41, NIV). He argued through his pain, "Don't you fear God (when you're about to die)?" (Luke 23:40, NIV). Oh, he hadn't most of his life. His entire life was a waste. But as the minutes ticked away, facing his Maker was about to become a reality. So he had to admit, "We are getting what we deserve" (Luke 23:41, NIV). This was his first step of faith. He admitted his sin. This thief took responsibility for his pathetic life. He knew whose fault it was – his! He knew he was getting what he deserved. Max Lucado writes, "Slowly the thief's curiosity offsets the pain in his body. He momentarily forgets the nails rubbing against the raw bones of his wrists and the cramps in his calves. He begins to feel a peculiar warmth in his heart." [Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday – Anchoring to the Power of the Cross* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), pages 124-125.]
- ³² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, originally 1883, reprinted), Book 2, page 607.
- ³³ What was going on at that moment between Father and Son is beyond our understanding. Even those who were there did not understand. Matthew 27:47 says the crowd thought He was calling for Elijah. They did not understand that what was happening was the fulfillment of a prophecy made in Psalm 22. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? ... O my God, I cry by day,

but You do not answer ... In You our fathers trusted; they trusted and You delivered them ... Be not far from me ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up ... and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You lay me in the dust of death ... they pierced my hands and my feet ... They look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance ...”

³⁴ Stott, page 83.

³⁵ See Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*.

³⁶ This is not just physical death. It is spiritual death, spiritual separation from God.

³⁷ Gary Thomas dares to say what we need to hear. “The clear teaching of Scripture is that all of us deserve ‘capital punishment.’ ... The fact that anyone will be saved is an act of sheer mercy and compassion on God’s part. We all deserve a spot on death row.” [Gary Thomas, *Authentic Faith: The Power of a Fire-Tested Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), page 244.]

³⁸ Theologian Wayne Grudem writes, “At the cross the fury of all that stored-up wrath against sin was unleashed against God’s own Son.” [Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, 2000), page 575.] John Piper writes, “All the brutality against Jesus ... God was in it ... The lash on his back, the thorns on his head, the spit on his cheek, the bruises on his face, the nails in his hands, the spear in his side, the scorn of rulers, the betrayal of friends, the desertion by his disciples – these were all the result of sin, and *all designed by God* to destroy the power of sin.” [John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), page 119.]

³⁹ Stott, page 131, quoting G. C. Berkouwer. Stott goes on to write on page 159, “The cross was an act simultaneously of punishment and amnesty, severity and grace, justice and mercy.”

⁴⁰ The Bible says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth ... and because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 1:18, 2:5, NAS). Because sin offends His holiness and breaks His law, the Bible says, “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, NIV). Yet, the Bible describes God as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth” (Psalm 86:15, NAS). Meaning, He desires to save us. So much so, that He allowed His Son to die on a cross! And “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36, NIV).

⁴¹ Stott, page 131, quoting G. C. Berkouwer.

⁴² Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale University, and the Founding Director of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture. Volf previously taught at Fuller Seminary.

⁴³ Alisa Childers cites this quote from Volf in her blog, “Is Substitutionary Atonement Just A Type of ‘Cosmic Child Abuse’ that Christians Came Up With in the Middle Ages?” See www.alisachildersblog.com, 3/20/2018. [Original source, Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge – Giving and Forgiving in A Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), pages 138-139.]

⁴⁴ Stott, page 131, quoting G. C. Berkouwer.

⁴⁵ Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

⁴⁶ Redemption is a core concept in the Bible. It’s about being forgiven by God and reconciled to Him. Romans 3 uses three words which give three pictures of the Gospel. Romans 3 says we are “**justified** freely by His grace through the **redemption** that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of **atonement**, through faith in His blood” (Romans 3:24-25, NIV).

The first word is **justification**. It’s a legal term. The context is a courtroom. Our situation was so severe that we were dragged into court and stood before God our Judge as violators of His law. As we awaited our deserved sentence, something incredible happened. Jesus stood as our advocate. The Bible says, “We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense” (1 John 2:1, NIV). Because of His defense, and our faith in Him, we who were guilty are declared not guilty, acquitted, and pardoned.

The second word is **redemption**. It’s a commercial term. The context is a marketplace for slaves. Our situation was so severe that it was compared to slavery. The Bible says we were “slaves to sin” (Romans 6:17). One picture of redemption is the payment to free a slave. Another picture is the payment of ransom to free one who has been kidnapped. God was willing to pay a ransom to free us, and that ransom was Jesus. The Bible says He sent His Son “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). That’s why Jesus is called our Redeemer. So, to whom did God pay this ransom? Did God have to pay Satan like paying off a kidnapper? No. God paid the ransom to Himself! Who demanded the payment for sin? God did. And who paid for it? God did.

The third word is **atonement**. Atonement, and its rare synonym propitiation, refers to appeasement.⁴⁶ The context is a temple. In pagan cultures, people would offer extravagant sacrifices to appease their ill-tempered gods. Our God is not ill-tempered, but He is holy.⁴⁶ And because of our sin, our situation was so severe that we were targets for His holy wrath. The Bible calls us “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). And the Bible insists, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). Yet instead of paying with our blood, it was paid “by (Jesus’) own blood” (Hebrews 9:12).⁴⁶ Jesus became our sacrifice, satisfying God’s holy wrath and demonstrating God’s amazing grace.

Justification – we were violators of God’s law, Jesus was our advocate, and we were declared not guilty. Redemption – we were slaves to sin, Jesus was our ransom, and we were freed from bondage. Atonement – we were children of wrath, Jesus was our sacrifice, and we were forgiven of our sin. This is not abstract, theological talk. This is personal. This is what God has done for us. The cross is about substitution. Romans 5:8 says, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, **Christ died for us**” (ESV).

⁴⁷ Max Lucado writes, “The hand that held the hammer was the hand of God.” [Max Lucado, *He Choose the Nails* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), page 35.]