
When Jesus Died

*“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit” (Matthew 27:50);
“And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’
Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46).*

To say that the cross of Christ stands at the center of the story of the Scriptures is in harmony with all biblical thought. We could well say that everything before the cross looked forward to it and everything after it looks backward to it.

Peter said that Jesus, as an unblemished lamb, was in God’s mind before the world was created: “For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you” (1 Peter 1:20). At the dawn of human history, God gave a veiled prophecy concerning the ultimate conflict between the woman’s seed (Jesus) and the serpent (Satan). He said to the serpent, “He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Genesis 3:15b). As we look back now that the plan of redemption has been unfolded, we can see how Jesus dealt a death blow to Satan. This must be the meaning of the prophecy.

Throughout the Patriarchal and Mosaical Ages, every sacrifice that was offered pointed to the complete sacrifice that Jesus would make. The writer of Hebrews said,

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 10:11–13).

When Jesus bowed His head and yielded up His spirit to His Father, the moment of great and eternal significance had come. Jesus had

finished His mission in coming into this world. God proclaimed its profound importance by rending the veil in the temple, shaking the earth with an earthquake, and breaking open the tombs of saints (Matthew 27:51–53). Who could properly describe the depth of the meaning of Mark’s words: “And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last” (Mark 15:37)?

What happened when Jesus died?

At Jesus’ death, God’s redemptive plan reached its pinnacle of accomplishment. His death brought a new age, an age of forgiveness. The Scriptures picture His death as providing the ransom for all sin for all time. We are told, “But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26b). This verse speaks of the ages of time that preceded Jesus’ crucifixion as being consummated through His sacrifice. His death brought to an end all that was old in God’s dealings with man—the blood sacrifices, the keeping of the Law, and the anticipation of the time when God would remember sins no more. The monumental event of His death brought in the new age of forgiveness and direct access to God’s throne through Jesus.

At His death, the ratification of the new covenant was finalized. Before there could be a new covenant, there had to be the death of the author of it. The old covenant was ratified by the blood of sacrifices, and the new covenant was ratified by the blood of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus offered Himself without blemish to God (Hebrews 9:14). He

further said,

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15).

The blood of Jesus went back to the Old Testament periods to complete the sacrifices that had been made and to finalize the salvation process for those who had walked by obedient faith. Its salvational efficacy, in addition to reaching backward, reaches forward to any who will come to Him in the Christian Age.

At His death, the creation of the church came into full view. During the latter part of His earthly ministry, Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18); but He did not tell His apostles how He planned to do so. The Holy Spirit did not reveal how it was to come about until the Day of Pentecost. At that time, the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was proclaimed by the apostles. Those who responded to the message were washed in the blood of Jesus and were added by the Lord to His church. At this point the world could recognize the church that Jesus built as a community of believers that had been created by the cross.

Paul wrote,

. . . Christ . . . loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present

to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25–27).

He asked the elders of the church in Ephesus “to shepherd *the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28; emphasis mine). Only the death of Christ could bring the church of Christ into existence.

It would be impossible for us to grasp the full meaning of the moment when Jesus “bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19:30b). F. J. Huegel wrote, “The very Universe is a poor paltry thing when compared to the cross of Christ. . . . The combined wisdom of the entire angelic hosts can never conceive of anything that could begin to match its glory. It will stand forever and ever as God’s Masterpiece.”¹

Eddie Cloer



“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:50–53).

¹F. J. Huegel, *The Cross Through the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 9–10.