

Why Jesus?

Folk in the big wide world with little knowledge of the Church and religion very soon pick up that Jesus Christ and His death on a cross are central to Christianity. They discover that Christians wax eloquent and become excited about the topic, and those unfamiliar with the depths of Christian faith are somewhat puzzled by this. They often see Jesus as a good example to the human race, but what has His most unpleasant death got to say about anything nowadays? Even those who are seeking after the truth might think it a little strange, and wonder whether there might not have been another and easier way. Why the necessity for the death of Jesus?

To understand this most clearly, it is helpful to consider what the situation will be when space and time terminate having fulfilled their intended function. What will we have then? The Bible tells us that there will be a new heavens and a new earth in which there is the new City of God – New Jerusalem. These will not exist within time, but in eternity, which we may imagine as a sort of everlasting time, though the sense of progression might not obtain. So we have, existing in eternity, two entities and only two, being Heaven and Hell. The first is likened to a golden city, and the second to a smoking fiery pit. God, the good angels, and those of humanity whose names are written in the Book of Life will dwell in Heaven, and Satan, the evil spirits and the rest of humanity will be cast into Hell to face everlasting torment. Furthermore, we are told that a great gulf exists between Heaven and Hell. Those in each will be aware of the other, but there is absolutely no possibility of any being, human or spirit, transferring between them. The awareness will neither disturb the bliss of those in

Heaven, nor alleviate the suffering of those condemned to Hell.

Here then, beyond time, we have the ultimate contrast, black and white with no shades between. God will be worshipped under conditions that are happy beyond our wildest imaginations, while those excluded and cast into the pit will suffer and experience pain and misery that is likewise unimaginable. Thus, only two conditions will endure, to be with God or to be banished from Him. The former is likened to Life, and the latter to Death. In this context, we are referring to the second death, not the relinquishing of our mortal bodies which is regarded as the first death. Hence, in God's terms, life and death are the only alternatives.

Now sin, being rebellion against God, can only be punished by exclusion from His presence for eternity, *i.e.* death. There is no intermediate punishment like a sort of prison to which sinners are sent for a specific or limited period of rehabilitation to be restored thereafter, because 'specific or limited periods' only occur within time which will not exist. The whole of humanity, with one exception, have sinned. It is not necessary to break the whole law of God to become guilty – breaking the least of God's laws in thought, word or deed is enough to make a person a sinner. If God, acting as supreme and righteous Judge, condemned all but Jesus to eternal death, His action would be fully justified. That is nothing more than what we all deserve. If God merely overlooked sin without punishing it, He would not be true to Himself. In order to be just, he must penalize sin by passing sentence of death.

The next thing to note is the connection between life and blood. When we talk about a person's or animal's lifeblood, it is

just that! Without blood, there is no life. Again, we talk about bleeding to death. The Bible itself also associates blood with life. Hence, the shedding of blood, leading to death, is the righteous retribution to be exacted from every sinner. This is what lies behind the Biblical statement to the effect that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

But consigning the whole of humanity to Hell would defeat God's ultimate purpose in creating us, because those in Hell are not going to celebrate God's righteousness. Hence the need for a way to redeem sinful mankind without offending His righteous justice.

God's solution demonstrates His tremendous love towards human beings, His special creation. That one should pay the penalty in order that another may go free is acceptable to justice. If one totally innocent, *i.e.* sin-free, man could be found, his death would enable another guilty man to go free. Sadly, such a spotless man cannot be found, 'for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'. In any case, it would only be on a one for one basis – one perfect man atoning for another who is guilty of sin.

God solved the problem of sinlessness and the 'one for one' issue in a most self-sacrificing way. Firstly, the man to bear the punishment for many must be truly man for the sacrifice to be acceptable. Therefore, his flesh must be derived from a human source. Secondly, for the sacrifice to cover many and to open the possibility of living a totally pure, sinless and godly life, the man needed to have the multifaceted nature of God Himself. The divine solution was that God's only begotten Son, sent incarnate into the world as Jesus, would pay the penalty required of all those who sin. Jesus

derived His fleshly body from His mother, Mary, but there was to be no human father. Instead, the Holy Spirit would cause Mary to conceive, thus providing the divine aspect of the nature of Jesus. Mary was a virgin up to and including the birth of Jesus, which is why we speak of the virgin birth. Thus, Jesus was truly man and truly God.

Naturally, Satan did his best to defeat God's solution, tempting Jesus under trying and difficult circumstances, but without success. It is worth noting in passing that Jesus, when tempted in the desert, was able to resist the enticements of the Devil by quoting from the Scriptures on three occasions. This indicates the enormous power of God's revealed word when faced by appealingly cloaked evil, and this power is available for our use when needed. Satan failed, and Jesus did live a perfect life pleasing to His Father in Heaven. He gave up that life to a horrendous death on a Roman cross in order to accomplish the work given to Him to do. Obeying the will of His heavenly Father was more important to Jesus even than His own mortal life.

The blood of Jesus drained from Him through the wounds in hands, feet and side, which was probably the cause of death. Because He successfully lived a life free from sin and also embodied the essence of the Godhead, God the Father was able to accept the death and spilt lifeblood of Jesus as an adequate redemption for all those who turn to Him in repentance and faith. Thus they are able to claim the death of Christ as their substitute to receive the awful fate that should have fallen upon them.

There is so much more that can be said on this subject, but I hope that the thoughts presented above may assist you to see more

clearly why the birth, life and death of Jesus was necessary. Happily, the story doesn't end with the grave. As the life of Jesus was sinless, death and the grave did not have the power to retain Him, having no just claim, and after three days He was resurrected to life. Following this, He was seen by hundreds of His disciples and others over a period of weeks, before finally returning to His Father in Heaven, where He now lives and reigns. Best of all, He has promised to return with power and great glory. Christians eagerly await the day.

One final observation. The Old Testament in the Bible seems rather gory at times. It needs to be remembered that the shedding and sprinkling of blood and the sacrifice of lambs, goats, bulls, etc. were a sign pointing to the sacrifice of God's Son, which in those days was a future event. Now that we have the sacrifice of Jesus as a historical fact, animal sacrifice is no longer required. Instead, we have the sacrament of Holy Communion which serves a similar purpose for those born AnnoDomini as the sacrifices fulfilled to those born BeforeChrist.