

Lesson 9: Understanding the Cross (Part 2)

Intro

In the previous lesson, we learned what Christ accomplished through His death on the Cross. In this lesson we want to take a closer look at what Jesus really went through by dying on the cross and all that He was willing to take upon Himself. Of course, He died for us. That is easy to say. But what did Jesus really take upon Himself? What did He have to endure when the sins of the world were placed upon Him? We will start by looking at what happened in the garden of Gethsemane.



Matthew
26:36-46

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples who he wanted to be alone with, so He could gain strength and encouragement for the unimaginable, horrific hours that lay before Him.

What did Jesus ask of His disciples? (Verse 36, see also Luke 22:40)

What state do we find Jesus in at this time? (Verses 37 and 38)

What did Jesus plead three times with God for? (Verses 39-44)

What did Jesus struggle with in this difficult hour? (Luke 22:44)



What was going on here? Why did Jesus suffer so much? Of course we read that He was physically suffering. But was this the real reason for His deep anguish? Fear of death is normal, but many martyrs died for their faith—some were even crucified and persecuted worse than Jesus. These martyrs died with courage and suffered with joy for God—many even sang praise songs because they knew that their lives were held in God's hands. They were also sure of the wonderful resurrection that is to come. Did Jesus have less courage than them? Are there differences between Jesus' situation and that of the martyrs? It says that Jesus' struggled with death. Why? No one had physically abused Him yet. What could it mean? Let us dig deeper to find the answer to this question!



What did Jesus take upon Himself when He hung on the cross?

Isaiah 53:4-6,8,10-12: _____

2 Corinthians 5:19-21: _____

Hebrews 2:9: _____



The Bible repeatedly tells us that Jesus, as God and Creator, became our Savior. He took the punishment that we deserve, and that He could rightfully condemn us to, upon Himself. What was the punishment that we as sinners deserve?

Romans 6:23: _____



The Bible clearly says that the wages of sin is death. The question is, which death is it referring to? How does the Bible describe the first resurrection and the second death?

Revelation 20:6: _____

Revelation 20:11-15: _____

The Bible does not explicitly name the first death “the first death.” But when there is a second death, there most certainly must be a first death. The first death is the death we know—believers and unbelievers cannot avoid it. It is described throughout the scriptures as sleep, because one day we will all wake up to a resurrection (John 5:28,29). The believers will be resurrected to life at the second coming of Jesus. The unbelievers will be resurrected to the judgment at the end of the thousand years. Their sentence is described as an eternal death. This death is the final, or second, death, from which there is no resurrection. It is the wrath of God over sin.



Think about it! Which death is the wages of sin? The first or the second death?

Which death did Jesus need to save us from in order to give us eternal life?

Which death did He have to take upon Himself in order to have suffered the punishment in our place?

The wages of sin is the second death. Paul says, “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life...” (Romans 6:23). The death in this verse is the direct opposite of eternal life. In other words, eternal death. It is quite clear that Paul was referring to the second, eternal death. It is precisely this death that Jesus had to take upon Himself in order to save us. Otherwise He would not have even come close to paying the penalty for our sins. It is like someone who is 1 million dollars in debt. In order to free someone from this debt you would need to pay the exact and total amount. If you did not pay the full amount, they would still be in debt. In the same manner Jesus had to take upon Himself the full amount of our punishment in order to free us from condemnation.



How does Isaiah describe Jesus’ experience on the Cross? (Isaiah 53:8-12)

Isaiah says that Jesus was “taken from prison and from judgment,” that He “was cut off from the land of the living,” and that He “made His grave with the wicked.” Jesus took God’s judgment of the world upon Himself. When did this take place? (John 12:31-33)

The judgment of this world was taking place while Jesus hung on the cross. Jesus was lifted up between heaven and earth. He hung on the cross taking the judgment of all humanity upon Himself.

How does Paul describe what Jesus carried with Him on the Cross? (Galatians 3:13)

On the cross, Jesus bore the curse, or punishment, of the law. The punishment for sin is the second death. The curse of the law is also referred to as the curse of God. What is the curse of God? It definitely does not mean that God had to let out some steam from His wrath. But, it does show us how horrifying sin is from God's perspective! Sin is more than just an act. It is a principle that seeks to destroy the entire universe. It is the opposite of God's character. For God to be able to protect the universe, sin must be eradicated like a malignant cancer. As Jesus was dying on the cross, the foundation was laid for the final extermination of sin.

The blessing of God means that He is here. He comforts, leads, strengthens, and gives hope. It is the greatest wish and privilege that we could have as humans. When we wish God's blessings on another person, we are really saying, "I want God to be with you." A curse is the opposite of a blessing. The curse of God is when He withdraws and is no longer there to help, comfort, and strengthen us. Separation from God results in a life filled with darkness and hopelessness, because hope and confidence can only be given/received in connection with God.

Back to Gethsemane

Now that we have this understanding, let us go back to Gethsemane. Are we seeing more clearly why Jesus was suffering? Why He shrank away from wanting to drink the cup? Jesus was at a major crossroads. He had to choose whether he would take on the sins of the world or not. Praise the Lord, Jesus decided to take the curse of God upon Himself in our stead! The curse of God included the hate that God feels regarding sin and the separation that sin causes in the human-divine relationship. Christ was feeling those very things and the separation was tearing Him apart. Up until this point, Christ had always been with and in the deepest relationship with the Father. Taking the curse of God upon Himself, separated them. The Father was still there, but Christ could not see or feel Him near. It was the pain of separation and the awareness of God's hate for sin that caused him to despair, to break down in tears, and have His heart broken.

As Jesus chose to accept the cup of suffering, He did not have the hope that He would resurrect victorious anymore. When the martyrs died, they had the bright hope of the resurrection before them. It gave them strength and confidence. Christ had nothing before Him. As the last of the sin was laid upon Him, he had no confidence, no light at the end of the tunnel, no hope of the resurrection. Nevertheless, He chose to take our place. **He chose to relinquish His eternal life, so that we could receive eternal life.** While Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world, God's judgment of mankind was tempered through the person of Jesus Christ. In unfathomable despair, He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus suffered the second death. He experienced the despair, the abandonment, the helplessness, the awareness of eternal condemnation—all of what the godless will experience and endure in the judgment at the end of the thousand years because they did not want to accept Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf. It was this pain that broke His heart.

Quote #1

"The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He who had been one with God, felt in His soul the awful separation that sin makes between God and man. This wrung from His lips the anguished cry, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Matthew 27:46. It was the burden of sin, the sense of its terrible enormity, of its separation of the soul from God—it was this that broke the heart of the Son of God." (*Steps to Christ, p. 13*)

Quote #2

“And now the Lord of glory was dying, a ransom for the race. In yielding up His precious life, Christ was not upheld by the triumphant joy. All was oppressive gloom. It was not the dread of death that weighed upon Him. It was not the pain and ignominy of the cross that caused His inexpressible agony. Christ was the prince of sufferers; but His suffering was from a sense of the malignity of sin, a knowledge that through familiarity with evil, man had become blinded to its enormity. Christ saw how deep is the hold of sin upon the human heart, how few would be willing to break from its power. He knew that without help from God, humanity must perish, and He saw multitudes perishing within reach of abundant help.

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that he might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave as a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God...

In that thick darkness God’s presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father’s presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him.” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 752-754)

Quote #3

“Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss. Then we shall cast our crowns at His feet, and raise the song, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.’ Revelation 5:12” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 131)

Quote #4

“Remember that Christ risked all; ‘tempted like as we are,’ He staked even His own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Jesus would have yielded up His life, we may estimate the value of a soul.” (*General Conference*

Bulletin, December 1, 1895 par. 22)

Please re-read through the last two quotes! What did Jesus risk?

But...

Perhaps you are asking, “How can it be that Jesus took the second, eternal death upon Himself when He resurrected three days later?” Jesus was sinless. He did not die because of His sins, but because of ours. Peter says that it was impossible for death to hold Him (Acts 2:24). To put it into a picture: Jesus carried the guilt of the world to death. But because He did not partake personally in this guilt, sin could not cling to Him and death could not keep Him. Think about it. Does the punishment exist in the moments before or after the second death? The punishment exists in the time *before* its execution, because the wicked will no longer exist *after* the sentence is passed and they will no longer feel the punishment. It is the moments before the second death where the awareness of being eternally lost and the weight of the sentence will be felt. This is exactly what Jesus experienced! He felt what it is to be eternally lost! He thought that from then on He would be eternally separated from the Father in death. He experienced the punishment of the second death for us.

We could also say, “But Jesus said many times before that he would resurrect.” That is correct! But He said this while He was in connection with the Father. Hope and confidence is only received when in connection with the Father. In separation from the Father there is not even a glimmer of hope. In His separation from the Father, Jesus did not see the light at the end of the tunnel. When the sins of the world, were placed upon Him, they pressed Him down so much that He could no longer see hope.

What about the thief on the cross? Didn’t Jesus say that he would be with Him in paradise? At least in the moment Jesus had the assurance that He Himself would be in Paradise again. That’s true! I will try to explain it more clearly. There is a prayer that God always answers. It is the prayer of a sinner that is earnestly asking for His help. This thief needed hope and confidence—and at that very moment. So God interrupts the most important event of history to answer that man’s prayer. For a moment the light of hope shown through Jesus to this man. But afterwards Jesus was again engulfed in the deepest darkness where He cried in despair: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!”

A Story

I would like to compare what Jesus did with a story. In his book *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children

