

Sermons On The Cross

by

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DEDICATION

TO MY PARENTS

MR. & MRS J. T. WILLIAMS

I know what mother's face is like,
A beautiful sight to me;
It's like the music of a bell;
It's like the roses I can smell--
Yes, these it's like to me.

I know what father's face is like;
I'm sure I know it all;
It's like his whistle on the air;
It's like his arms which take such care
And never let me fall.

And I can tell what God is like--
The God whom no one sees.
He's everything my parents seem;
He's fairer than my fondest dream,
And greater than all these.

-- adapted

The Publisher's Statement

The Cross of Christ brings many things to mind. It reminds us of God's love, Christ's sacrifice, the shedding of blood, suffering, death, salvation, and hope. It also tells us of the price that Christ paid for the church, and we remember the cross every Lord's Day when we partake of the Lord's Supper. Truly, we experience the grace and mercy of God because of what took place at Calvary.

The author of this book brings out all of these great truths as he discusses the various lessons to be learned from the cross. His purpose is to confront us with these facts, prayerful that they will bring us to the point of acceptance and application to our lives.

This is Bro. Steve Williams' fourth book to be printed here in the States, three of which we have published. We have printed two other of his sermon books in New Delhi, India.

Bro. Williams and his family live in Waco, Texas, where he has preached for the past several years. He is presently completing his PhD at Baylor University in the field of ethics.

With these words, we are pleased to present to you Bro. Steve Williams, and his **SERMONS ON THE CROSS**.

J. C. Choate
Church of Christ
Winona, MS
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Table of Contents

Theories of the Atonement	1
The Significance of Blood in the Bible	13
The Day of Atonement and Christ's Atonement	20
The Cross as the Crux of Christianity	27
The Cross as Victory	37
Four Men Tell of the Cross	44
The Suffering Servant	53
The Cross in Psalms 22	62
The Power of the Cross	72
There They Crucified Him	80
Suggested Reading	99
About the Author	100

Theories of the Atonement

"Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

Sin is man's basic problem, and religion attempts to provide an answer to this difficulty. Separation from God is due to our sin. Fellowship between God and man has been broken because of man's shortcomings. Removing this barrier between man and God is what the cross and the atonement are all about.

Very often in Bible studies I have conducted with various individuals, the point where I knew whether or not I would convert the person was when we discussed the cross, the atonement and grace. If they really understood this, if they were truly humbled by what God had done for them, they rarely refused to be baptized. If the cross did not make any impression on them, however, they often did not see any necessity in being baptized. To them the church was like a club, Christianity like simple psychology, and the cross like a sentimental story.

A real awareness of the reason Jesus died for us truly makes a difference. For years I had heard that Jesus died for my sins. Later I decided to become a preacher. One day while studying a tract on the cross, I realized for the first time what the atonement meant. That awareness has made a big difference in my life ever since.

Trying to outline a theory of the atonement is difficult. The Bible has much to say about atonement and the cross of Jesus, but a systematic outline of why Jesus died is not given. Many men have

attempted to provide a theory of the atonement in the centuries since Jesus lived. Each of these theories is useful in that it organizes information and ideas for our understanding. Since they are the theories of men, each of them can usually be faulted as being only a partial presentation of the subject. In this lesson we will examine four theories of the atonement. Each theory will be preceded by an illustration that contains traits similar to the theory under examination.

RANSOM THEORY

S. D. Gordon, a preacher in Boston, aroused the curiosity of his congregation when he walked into the pulpit carrying an old bird cage. He began his sermon by telling the story of a little, dirty lad about ten years old in an alley. He was hovering over the bird cage which was full of several small, tiny, scared birds. Gordon asked the boy how he got the birds. "I trapped them," he said. Gordon then asked what the boy planned on doing with them. "Play with them; have fun with them." "But what are you going to do when you get tired of them," he questioned. The boy thought a moment and concluded, "I have some cats at home. Cats like birds. I'll feed them to my cats."

The preacher then asked the boy if he would sell him the birds. "Mister," he said, "You don't want to buy these birds. They're just plain old field birds. They're ugly." Again he asked if he would sell them and how much he wanted for them. The boy hesitated, calculated, squinted one eye, and then settled on \$2.00. Gordon quickly paid him the money, and the boy ran away down the alley. Further down that alley, in a sheltered corner, Gordon opened the cage door and stepped back. He watched as the frightened little birds all found their freedom.

Then Gordon told this story to his congregation. Jesus and the devil were talking. The devil had laid

a trap in the Garden of Eden and had caught a whole world through sin. Jesus asked the devil what he was going to do with mankind. He said he would tease them, play with them, and cause them to throw bombs at one another. "What will you do when you get tired of them," the Lord continued. "I will kill them. They're no good anyway." Jesus then asked the devil how much he wanted for them. The devil asked Jesus if he was truly serious: "If I sell them to you they will just spit on you and hate you. They're no good." The Lord again asked for a price. "All your tears and your blood," the devil answered. Jesus paid the price, opened the door, and let man go free.

This illustration is very close to the ransom theory of the atonement which is also called the patristic theory or the classic theory. This theory emphasizes that the devil had dominion over man. God regained the freedom of mankind through the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus as the precious jewel of heaven was a prize worth more than all of mankind. Some early exponents of this theory enjoyed portraying the cross as a trap which backfired on the devil. He thought he was winning by having Jesus killed on the cross, but when the resurrection occurred, it became apparent that the cross was actually his downfall. Augustine compared the cross to a mousetrap and Jesus to the bait. Another compared the cross to a fishhook and again Christ was the bait.

There is certainly a lot of truth in this theory. Otherwise motifs found in this theory would not have been so popular for the first thousand years of Christian history. The devil, for example, is pictured as one with power and control in this world. "He who commits sin is of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8). "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (Jn. 8:44). There is a battle going on in this world between the devil and God. The forces of evil and the kingdom of truth are at

odds with one another. In the cross a great victory was won for righteousness. The devil was defeated in such a way that his ultimate downfall was certain. Also the New Testament describes the cross and the atonement in terms of a price, a ransom price: "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). "You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The difficulty with this theory is that we must be careful not to make too much out of the devil. Although he is pictured in the scriptures as a dangerous and powerful being, compared to God he is nothing. While we as Christians should view evil as a very serious matter, we should take our victory in Christ as being even greater. While there is a struggle going on in this world, we must not imagine that the devil is an equal to God in the warfare. The recipient of the ransom price is not clear. To make the devil the recipient might imply that he has a supremacy over God, and nothing could be further from the truth. An equality between Satan and God is claiming far too much for the devil. This problem is partially avoided by the patristic writers who think of the cross as a trap where the devil fooled himself, but would God need to resort to deception in order to conquer the devil? It is an appropriate manner for Satan to fall, though--the deceiver being deceived by himself.

It may surprise some of you to know that forms of this theory were very dominant until the thirteenth century. Certainly there are concepts we can learn from the ransom theory. A sense of struggle and the ultimate delivery from evil is portrayed very vividly in the ransom theory. That is often missing in modern man's view of the cross.

MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY

In a book entitled Magnificent Obsession a story

is told of a wealthy, worthless, intoxicated young man who cared for no one but himself. He wasted his life in dissipation. Eventually his life was changed by a series of related incidents. While sailing in a sailboat he was knocked into the water by the boom. Though unconscious, he was rescued by people nearby. They were told there was an inhalator across the lake that might save his life. They rushed there, returned with it, and saved his life with that equipment.

Meanwhile a Dr. Hudson, the owner of the inhalator, had a mild cardiac attack while swimming. His caretaker rowed to where he was, dived in for him, and pulled him out. He rushed to the house to get the inhalator, but it was gone. In desperation there was little he could do. Dr. Hudson died. Dr. Hudson was an important, influential brain surgeon whose life had been a blessing to many. His life had been sacrificed for the life of a worthless young man through this chain of circumstances. When the young man learned that another man's life had been sacrificed for his, his life was changed. He studied the life of Dr. Hudson. His whole life turned outward to helping others rather than merely pleasing himself. For encouragement he would always turn to the writings of Dr. Hudson.

This illustration has strains of thought similar to the moral influence theory of the atonement. In this theory Jesus did not die to save anyone in any direct manner. He did not satisfy the demands of law or justice. Rather his death was a powerful example of how much God loves us and how much he hates sin. This death was the best way that God could make an impression upon sinful mankind. Some are changed by that impression, and due to his example they become the kind of persons God would have them to be.

There is a lot of truth in this theory. The death of Christ is an example: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow

in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). The cross does show us the amazing love of God in a dimension maybe impossible any other way. The cross does have a powerful influence upon people for good. It is the chief drawing card of Christianity. Jesus said, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:32). Many of us know that the cross and nothing else is able to soften the hearts of some sinners and bring them to their knees in repentance.

There are problems with this theory, however. The cross of Jesus was more than just an example. The death of Jesus was more than a martyr's death. Many other good men have died for good causes in history. If infants are innocent and without sin, then have not even sinless human beings died for others? Throughout the centuries the death of other human beings has inspired and motivated others to do battle, to wage campaigns, to repent, and even to be irreligious. So the question of the distinctiveness of Christ's death is at stake. In what way does his death atone? How is his death different? The answer will partially come in the following two theories of the atonement, but primarily the problem is that the moral influence theory does not say enough.

Jesus was an example, but his death has an actual effect upon our salvation beyond the influence of an example. Rather than just a subjective influence, there is a real objective effect of the blood of Jesus upon one's salvation. If the moral influence theory were pressed too far, it would become a salvation by works of man's merit. Jesus' death would be the catalyst which started man in the right direction, but in the end it would be the change of man himself that he wrought by his own power apart from the grace of God that resulted in salvation. One final criticism of this theory is that it does not take sin seriously enough. Jesus' death was not a punishment for sin that had to be paid. Instead it was merely the best way in which God

could influence man to be good.

GOVERNMENTAL THEORY

In a one room country schoolhouse years ago, a problem arose with someone stealing the lunches of several students. The teacher discussed the problem with the students, and the whole class decided on the punishment that should be given to the thief if he was caught. In time the thief was caught. It was a fairly small and young boy. He was caught stealing the lunch of a much larger boy in the class. The teacher asked the thief to come forward for his punishment. Once he was at the front of the room, the teacher asked him to take off his long coat. It reached down to his knees, and it would be padding for the spanking he was about to receive. He begged her to let him leave his coat on. She insisted, however, so he removed it. To everyone's surprise he had no shirt on underneath it, and everyone observed his very skinny build. It was clear that he had not been eating properly for a long time. The teacher asked him why he did not have a shirt on. He responded that he only owned one shirt and this was his mother's day to wash it.

The teacher did not really want to paddle the young boy even though he had stolen something. She felt sorry for him, but if she did not punish him, what kind of message would that send to the rest of the class. They would think she was not really serious about any punishment in the future. They would think that doing something wrong was not really a matter of concern. Reluctantly she began to paddle the little boy. After two licks, though, the big boy whose lunch was stolen cried out, "Stop". He came forward and took the place of the younger boy and took the rest of his licks for him. She broke the paddle on him, and his actions broke the heart of the young thief. He cried and cried and promised that he would never steal again.

This story has motifs that are found in the governmental view of the atonement. According to this theory, at least as it is presented by some, God could forgive everyone and accept them except for other problems this would create. If God merely forgave us with no punishment being meted out, man would not take sin very seriously. Man would continue in sin that grace would abound. Man would sin all the more saying, "God will forgive me anyway." In order to preserve a respect for law and order, God needed to punish sin before he could forgive mankind. The cross, then, was a warning to man that God takes sin seriously. Now that real punishment has been suffered by Jesus for our sin God is free to forgive us.

There is a great deal of truth in this theory and it has many attractive aspects to it. The cross does show us that sin is serious. Sin is not to be taken lightly. Sin is serious enough that God allowed his only Son to die on the cross. The governmental theory reminds us that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). It reminds us that keeping God's laws and living righteously is important. It reminds us that if we take sin lightly in our dealing with our fellow man, we may see the unfortunate result of people taking the grace of God for granted (Rom. 6:1-2).

There are problems with this theory, however. We should not imply that God could have forgiven all mankind, but that he did not do so in order to maintain law and order. No, God does not forgive us automatically, because God is righteous and holy. God cannot bear the presence of sin. Any effect upon man of maintaining a respect for God's law is merely secondary. If a maintaining of government was God's chief motive in the cross, then the action would be suspect. We would have the right to ask if the death of Jesus was being done just for effect. It could be compared to a mother pretending her feelings were hurt more than they really were by

her child. She would cry and attempt to shame her child into a right course of action. If the child discovered that there was a false emotion involved, the child might feel tricked and rebel. Rather than achieving a respect for law and order, the child might learn to disrespect any rule from that parent in the future.

SUBSTITUTIONARY THEORIES

During World War II an enemy submarine approaches a fleet of ships in the North Atlantic. The captain of one vessel spots the white mark of a torpedo coming directly at his ship. His transport is loaded with literally hundreds and hundreds of young soldiers on the way to the European front. He realizes they will not have time to maneuver to avoid the torpedo. He grabs the loudspeaker and cries out, "Boys, this is it!"

Nearby, though, a little escorting destroyer also observes the torpedo. The captain orders, "Full speed ahead." His ship steams into the path of the torpedo. The destroyer is blown up; it sinks very quickly. Every man on it is lost. The captain of the troop transport ship sadly comments, "The skipper of that destroyer was my best friend." Now one verse in the Bible has an even deeper meaning for that captain: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13).

This illustration is centered around the idea of substitution. There are several theories of the atonement which concentrate on substitution. The principle idea is that man cannot pay for his own sins. Sin needs infinite payment since God's honor has been offended. Sin is so serious that it deserves the death penalty. Jesus came into the world, not just to be an example that would influence us, but to literally take our place and be a substitute for us. His death was the penalty of death that mankind deserved. In this manner God can forgive sinful

mankind and remain both just and loving.

In substitutionary theories the death of Jesus is not only directed at man who comprehends the love demonstrated and is influenced by the example, but it is also directed at God. It is not that God needs to be paid off, but God would not be just if he winked at sin. Many scriptures point to this concept of Christ taking our place as a substitute: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "We are convinced that one has died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Of all the theories we have examined, this is the best. There are few problems associated with it if any. The chief difficulty would be in certain concepts being omitted in a study of the atonement. Some do raise objections to a substitutionary theory, though. Some say such a theory is unjust and immoral. Some cannot accept the idea of an innocent victim suffering for another. Specials on television sometimes portray someone who is innocent yet they suffer in prison. This is unjust; it makes people angry. Many movies have been built around the theme of a person being wrongly accused. Such a theme is extremely powerful, and can evoke strong emotional responses in the audience.

The solution to this seeming difficulty in a substitutionary theory is to remember who died on the cross. First of all Jesus was not forced to go to the cross. It was a voluntary decision on his part. He said, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn. 10:17-18). We must not think of God as an unjust Father who made his

innocent Son suffer for someone else against his will.

There is a second part of the solution. Realize that we are dealing with four parties:

- (1) the criminal
- (2) the offended party
- (3) the judge (law)
- (4) a substitute

The criminal is easy to identify. That refers to mankind, to you and me. The other three parties, though, are all one person--Jesus Christ. As diety Christ is the offended party. Our sin is against him. Likewise he is the judge and our substitute. Why would it be unjust if Christ required himself to be a substitute, so that he might execute justice with love?

Let me illustrate. In Scotland a man was taken before a judge, and he cautiously looked up at the judge to see if there was any mercy in his eyes. To his surprise he recognized the judge. The judge was an old friend of his, a classmate from Edinburgh University. He relaxed and figured he would get off free. He was sorely disappointed, though. The judge gave him the maximum fine for his misdemeanor--five pounds of sterling. As soon as judgement was declared, the judge left his bench and paid the fine. He took charge of the accused man saying the demands of the law had been satisfied. He said, "I paid your fine and you are free." Who could say this was unjust. An innocent person was not forced to be a substitute for the guilty man. Rather the judge who declared judgement was himself the one who paid the fine. Rather than injustice, it was an expression of love and grace.

In Russia during a revolution there was a problem among one band engaging in what we would now call guerilla warfare. One of their number was a thief. The leader of the band declared that the thief would receive forty lashes if he was caught. The thief was caught, and it was his own mother.

He did not want her to be punished, for he loved her. Nevertheless, she was tied down and they began to administer the penalty for her wrongdoing. After one or two lashes, the leader of the band stopped the beating. He ordered his mother released, and he took her place and received the rest of the lashes. Now if he had ordered some innocent soldier to take his mother's place, that would be unjust. But who could accuse him of acting unjustly by voluntarily taking his mother's place himself! Is not this similar to the love of God that was expressed in Jesus' voluntary sacrifice of himself. Because of Jesus' deity any accusation of injustice in a substitutionary theory can be dismissed.

CONCLUSION

All of these theories of the atonement teach valuable truths about the meaning of the death of Jesus. If they are to be faulted, it is primarily because they are only partial views. The most complete of them all would be the various substitutionary views. The final conclusion of this matter is that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the ONLY means and hope of our salvation. Peter declared, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6).

The Significance of Blood in the Bible

Several mountain climbers were climbing in the Swiss Alps. The lead climber in a descent lost his footing and fell. His momentum dragged the next two climbers after him. The other climbers braced themselves for the jolt. As the three went over a cliff and the rope snapped tight, it suddenly broke in half. The others watched in horror as the three fell to their death four thousand feet below on a glacier. Once the others were safely back they examined the broken rope. They discovered that there was no red strand running through it. The special type of rope they usually used had an identifying red strand. It had special strength to withstand the extreme tension they had experienced in their accident that day. The current rope, though, was a cheap imitation. It was a substitute and weak. It cost three men their lives.

Likewise, there is a red strand that runs through the Bible. If we leave that red strand out, what is left is weakened to the endangerment of our souls. It loses its power to save. That red strand is a strand of blood. Blood is a repulsive word or thought to many. There have even been efforts with some groups to remove the mention of blood from songs. Some translations have used the word "death" in various places rather than "blood", and this has raised objections from some quarters.

Blood, though, is a very important Bible subject. References to the "blood" of Christ are three times more numerous than references to the "death" of Christ. Jesus could have died in many different ways without shedding his blood, but there is some special significance in the fact that he did shed his blood. Blood can have a beautiful connotation. One man in Amarillo, Texas was saved by blood. He donated a

rare type of blood to the local blood center. They were totally out of it. The next day a gravel truck ran over him. A transfusion of his own blood helped to save his life.

BLOOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We first know about blood in the animal sacrifices which Abel made unto God. Later Noah offered sacrifices to God. Abraham was tested by God when he was commanded to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. In the end Abraham was stopped and a ram was provided by the Lord for a sacrifice. For the Jewish people the Passover was an important festival related to blood. While they were slaves in Egypt death was going to pass over the land. They were to take a lamb without blemish and slaughter it. Some of the blood was to be placed on the doorposts and the lintel of their houses.

The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you (Ex. 12:13).

In a similar way we are slaves--to sin--and blood can save us from spiritual death.

The Jews were somewhat unique on this point. Blood was not a basic element in sacrifice of other religions in the Mediterranean basin. Blood has no special function or meaning in their rituals at all (Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 1, p. 263). In the law of Moses, though, the Jews were given numerous regulations that involved the use of blood:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life (Lev. 17:11).

The Jews were commanded to perform numerous animal sacrifices. On the day of atonement the blood from a bull was sprinkled at the mercy seat in the tabernacle as was the blood from a goat.

There was only one real problem with the blood sacrifices in the Old Testament. They did not thoroughly and eternally save the Jewish people. While they foreshadowed the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and hinted at it, they were not sufficient for salvation. If a person was poor, they did not have to offer a blood sacrifice at all. They could offer one of fine flour. In such a sacrifice there was no death and no shedding of blood.

The writer to the Hebrews said, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). But this writer also explained in detail that the Old Testament sacrifices did not atone for sin: "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

Modern Jews have a problem here (whether they admit it or not). Since A.D. 70 there have been no Jewish sacrifices in the temple, not that they would have any saving significance if they were renewed. One time a Jewish rabbi's son asked his father what made atonement. He said it was blood and referred to Leviticus 17:11. He was then asked why there were no blood sacrifices in the synagogues. He said they were only lawful in the temple. That posed a serious problem for the young man, because he could see it meant no atonement for the Jews. He began to search for an answer and finally found it when he kneeled at the cross of Jesus Christ where a blood atonement was available. Let us now turn to the New Testament to examine that blood atonement in Christ.

BLOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

At the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:28). The fact that Jesus would shed his blood in his death was of special significance. Men could die in many ways where they would not shed their blood. Under the law of Moses most people were executed by stoning. While various forms of execution might involve the shedding of blood to some degree, certainly crucifixion and related punishments meant a shedding of blood.

Remember that Jesus was scourged or flogged with a whip. The leather thongs of these whips usually had ends that were tipped with lead balls or bits of animal bones. They would literally tear apart the flesh of our Lord's back. Also a crown of thorns was placed upon his head. You have seen art work which sometimes portrays the soldiers using long sticks to force the crown of thorns on his head. It may not have happened exactly that way, but the artist had the idea that such a crown would prick and hurt.

Finally at Golgotha the soldiers stretched out the arms of our Lord and drove a spike into each hand. The spike was probably one third of an inch thick and was driven into the base of his hand near the wrist. A nail through the palm could not support the weight of a body. The feet were nailed too. Often the feet were pulled up under the body somewhat with the knees twisted together to one side. In 1968 a skeleton was found in a tomb near to Jerusalem which still had an iron nail in the heel of the hand. Usually these were removed, but apparently this one was slightly bent and stuck in a knot in the wood. Here, finally, was a definite crucifixion victim for scientists to study.

While on the cross Jesus could be expected to suffer tremendous thirst, cramps, fever, pain and

shock. In order to quicken the death of those on the cross their legs were to be broken. A major factor in the death of crucifixion victims was their inability to breath. The outstretched position made breathing difficult. The victim must pull upward slightly with his arms and push up with his legs in order to breath. Once the legs were broken, suffocation would follow quickly in most cases. Upon examining our Lord they discovered that he was already dead.

To make sure that he was dead a spear was thrust into his side. Blood and water flowed from his side. The cause of this mixture is still debated by scholars and medical authorities. The water may have been from a punctured bladder, or it could have been from the settling of fluid around the heart. One thing should be abundantly clear from even a cursory review of the death of Christ--the shedding of blood was a major factor in his death through the scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails, and finally the spear. So to speak of the death of Jesus and never mention the shedding of blood is to ignore an essential factor--historically, medically, and theologically.

Throughout the New Testament there are theological statements which interpret the shedding of blood by our Lord as having significance in God's scheme of redemption. Paul said, "God put forward as an expiation (propitiation) by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:25). The apostle Peter reminded Christians, "You know that you were ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). In the beautiful fifth chapter of Revelation a scene in heaven is observed where no one is found worthy to open a scroll. Suddenly a lamb, a lamb as though it had been slain, appears. This lamb is found worthy to open the scoll, because this lamb was slain and by "his blood did ransom men for God" (Rev. 5:9).

Paul says we have redemption in Christ "through his blood" (Eph. 1:7). The church is purchased or obtained by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). [Do not use Revelation 1:5 on this subject. The King James is dependent upon a defective text at this point.] "You are not your own, you were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The story is told of a country village where the cottage of a family of four caught fire. The cottage with its thatched roof was in flames as people stood helplessly watching. There was no fire department. One young man asked, "Can't we do anything?" No one answered. He rushed through the blaze alone and came out a moment later with two small children protected under his coat. The young man was badly burned, and seconds later the roof caved in and killed the parents (if they were not already dead).

A kind old woman nursed the young man's burns, and a village council was called to decide the fate of the two orphan children. Two men offered to raise them. One was a rich man in the village who had money, position, and a ready home. The other was the young man who had rescued them from certain death. When the village elders asked what right he had to them or what he could offer them, he simply held up his bandaged, burned hands--scarred for them. So it is with Jesus. He has a multiple claim on us. He is our Lord and creator, but also he merely needs to show his scarred body, given for us. He has paid the purchase price. We are not our own; we belong to Christ.

The apostle John explains that the shed blood of Jesus is the cleansing agent in the life of the Christian, not just when we are baptized, but throughout our life: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). We should faithfully partake of the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis (Acts 20:7) in order to be reminded of the sacrifice of Jesus (2 Pet. 1:9).

CONCLUSION

What is your response to the death of Jesus? Do you honor his death for you by your faith and obedience? Or do you disgrace his sacrifice by your rejection of him? During World War II a young army captain was wounded while dragging a wounded sergeant to safety. The young captain later died. The sergeant recovered. The captain's parents were told of their son's heroism and bravery. After the war was over they invited the sergeant to their home for dinner. He arrived late and half-drunk. He used terrible manners. He never even mentioned their dead son who had saved his life. He gobbled down his food and left without saying thank you. When he left the mother burst into tears saying, "To think that our son had to die for an ungrateful person like that!" God's son has died for you. Are you ungrateful like that sergeant? Or will you give your life totally for him and make him your Lord?

The Day of Atonement and Christ's Atonement

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near" (Heb. 10:1).

The Day of Atonement, **yom kippur**, is the most sacred of all days in the Jewish year. On this day the Jewish people performed "the supreme act of national atonement for sin" (Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, vol. I, p. 604). It has been called "the good Friday of the Old Testament" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. I, p. 327). Philo, a first century Jew, called it "the greatest of the feasts" (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. I, p. 316).

The events that occurred on this day are described best in Leviticus 16. The High Priest would move to the sanctuary one week before the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement he would arise, bathe, put aside his regular high priest clothes, and put on special white linen garments. He first offered a young bullock for his own sins. He entered the Holy of Holies with incense and later returned with blood of the bullock to be sprinkled on the mercy seat. Now he could act as a representative on behalf of the people.

Sacrifices were made for the people. Two goats were presented at the door of the tabernacle, and lots were cast for them. One was to be for Jehovah

and the other for Aza'zel. The meaning of this word is obscure. Once the goats were chosen the Lord's goat was slain and blood from it was again sprinkled. The Holy Place received a seven-fold sprinkling to cleanse it. Aza'zel's goat was then brought to the High Priest. He would lay his hands upon it and confess the sins of the people. It was then sent out into the uninhabited wilderness. Men would be standing by ready to lead it there. This goat is what we call the scapegoat or the removing goat, since it removed the sins of the people and took them out into the wilderness.

There are several comparisons and contrasts between the Day of Atonement and the atonement of Jesus Christ. First let us examine the **high priest**. Jesus is our high priest, yet he has no need to offer sacrifices on behalf of himself year after year before acting as high priest. Christ is without sin. "He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people" (Heb. 7:27).

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:25-26).

The Jewish High Priest wore beautiful, clean, holy linen cloth while performing the rituals on the Day of Atonement. Jesus was clothed with his own righteousness.

Blood provides our second parallel. On the Day of Atonement it was the blood of animals that was used to cleanse and purify. These animals had to be without spot or blemish, but they were really not worth the value of a human being. Jesus came offering the sacrifice of his own blood, and his life

was infinite in worth.

The **scapegoat** provides our third analogy and the most interesting one. The scapegoat is the one that carried away the sins of the people. Likewise it is Jesus who carries away our sins. He makes forgiveness possible, and forgiveness is the taking away of sin. As the Psalmist explained, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psa. 103:12). The way we have our directions laid out on our earth, the distance from the North Pole to the South Pole is a definite, fixed constant. You can only go north so far and then you start going south again. But you can go east or west without changing directions until the day you die. In other words, when God forgives us of our sins, he removes them away from us an infinite distance.

Jesus is pictured as a sacrificial lamb in the New Testament. John the Baptist declared, "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). The laying on of hands is of special symbolic importance. To the Jews this demonstrated the transfer of the sins of the people to the goat. In a similar way our sins were laid upon Jesus. Isaiah predicted, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

The involvement of the people in the Day of Atonement is an interesting story also. As time passed the multitudes got more and more involved. Once the temple was built in Jerusalem and the Day of Atonement was observed there, people would follow the goat through the streets as it was led away. Some would reach out and pull wool from the poor animal. Some would poke at it with sticks. Others would spit on it, urging it to begone. Finally the goat was led across the Kidron Brook into the wilderness. To make sure that the goat did not wander back into an inhabited place, a rock was sometimes tied to the neck of the goat by means of a rope. The rock was then thrown over a cliff, the goat

plunging down afterwards.

While these actions of the people were not commanded by the Lord, is it not interesting that Jesus received similar treatment? At his trial they spat upon him and slapped him. He was mocked at by the soldiers and the crowds. They cried out, "Hail, King of the Jews." They took a reed and hit him and then scourged him. He was led through the streets for all to see. As Isaiah predicted, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted" (Isa. 53:7).

One interesting legend has been handed down about the Day of Atonement, and I emphasize this is just a legend. Nevertheless, we can use this myth like a parable to illustrate a truth. It was claimed by some Jews that at the moment the goat was pushed over the cliff, a scarlet cord tied to the door of the temple immediately turned white. This was a symbol of the fact that the sins of the people had now been removed. Long ago Isaiah said, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isa. 1:18).

One time a group of men were discussing religion. Each was taking his turn in offering an explanation of Christ's redeeming work in the atonement. One of the men gave this explanation: "Jesus was the Great Master Chemist and Artist of all time. He used a bright red to produce a pure white in a dead black." That man then reread the story of the crucifixion to the other men.

Very briefly, then, by way of review, on the Day of Atonement the high priest sacrificed one goat for the people and confessed their sins over the other goat, the scapegoat. The leaving of this goat represented the taking away or removing of the sins of the people. Likewise Christ offered a sacrifice for our sins, but it was his own blood. He is our scapegoat. Our sin was laid upon him, and he removed it from us. Jesus died outside the camp for us to make atonement for our sin.

Let us now turn to another Old Testament story which has similar parallels. In Leviticus 14 the cleansing ritual for a leper is given. This ritual had nothing to do with the sins of the leper and only dealt with a physical disease. Nevertheless, there are categories of thought and expression here which are similar to and useful in understanding the cross of Jesus. A leper who had been healed was to appear before a priest. The priest would make an examination to see if the leper was really cured from the disease. If he was cured, then two clean birds were brought forth. One bird was killed. Its blood was sprinkled seven times over the former leper. He was pronounced clean. The living bird was then dipped in the blood of the sacrificial bird. The priest was then told to "let the living bird go into the open field" (Lev. 14:7). Again the shedding of blood symbolized purifying and cleansing. The leaving of the second bird represented the removal of the disease of leprosy. If we picture sin as our leprosy, we can see that Christ fulfills the role of both of the birds.

As we compare these various rituals and ceremonies with the cross of Jesus Christ, let us never forget one overwhelming difference between them. The sacrifice of a goat or a bird is not a costly sacrifice. In the cross, though, we see God giving his beloved Son! Jesus came not offering the blood of animals, but his own precious blood. As he himself said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13).

The story is told of a war between two tribes in the territory that is now Alaska. One old chief saw that if the war continued, neither tribe would put up its winter supply of food (mostly berries and salmon) and both tribes would die of starvation. Under a flag of truce he pledged that his men were willing to stop fighting. The other chief said, "No," since his tribe had lost ten more men in the war. The old chief then declared, "I am a chief. I am

worth more than ten of your men. You may kill me and let the people have peace." The proposal was accepted. They killed the chief and peace came. It is claimed that years later a missionary came and preached to those tribes. When the cross was proclaimed to them, it made sense to the people as they remembered the kind old chief.

During World War I in France a grenade squad was preparing to make a raid into no man's land. They were loaded down with grenades in a dugout waiting for their orders to move out. Suddenly one of the grenades fell on the floor, its firing-pin drawn. In a moment all knew it would explode. There was no time to pick it up and discard it. In the wink of an eye one of the soldiers threw his body over the grenade. He, of course, was killed, but all the others were saved. Every man that could get away from the front went to his funeral. With guns booming in the distance, their minds were impressed by the great sacrifice of one man for them.

Paul wrote, "Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man--though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die" (Rom. 5:7). We would not want to sacrifice our lives for some worthless individual. For a very good person we might be willing to sacrifice our lives. Certainly it is not hard for us to conceive of our lives being given on behalf of our families. But would we sacrifice ourselves for a group of worthless persons? To take it a step further, would we sacrifice our own child for such useless folk? That is exactly what God did for us. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

At a funeral of a friend who had died at a young age by suicide, his father stood there hugging me, crying, and said, "I would give anything if I could exchange places with him and give him another chance." He would have, too. Oh how the death of his son hurt him. Let us remember, then,

that the cross of Christ is far greater than the Day of Atonement of the Old Testament. It represents not the sacrifice of a goat, but Jesus giving his own life and God giving the life of his beloved Son. Now that is love!

The Cross as the Crux of Christianity

"We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23).

"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3).

"But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

"The death of Christ is the central thing in the New Testament and in the Christian religion as the New Testament understands it" (James Denney, The Death of Christ, p. 156).

"Within seven years of his death--or probably considerably less--a 'doctrine of the cross' was freely and authoritatively preached in the Christian community; it held a primary place in the apostolic preaching; it was declared to be the fulfillment of OT Scripture; it was set forth as the essence of the gospel, and was definitely referred to the teaching of Jesus for its ultimate authority" ("Atonement", Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, vol. I, p. 111).

The cross is central to Christianity. It is the crux of Christianity. Many lines of evidence might be adduced to demonstrate this central position of the cross to the Christian faith, but only two will be examined in this lesson.

FULFILLMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

After his resurrection Jesus reminded the disciples: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Lk. 24:44). Very clearly Jesus saw his life and his death as being prophesied in the Old Testament. At the last supper Jesus explained one of these prophecies: "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'" (Lk. 22:37). Notice the strong word "must" that is used here. It was not a matter of choice. Since God had foreseen and predicted it, it would occur. Paul said Jesus' death was "in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3).

Even though Jesus was crucified at the hands of lawless men, it was not a defeat for God. God had planned the death of Jesus by crucifixion long before. Peter, while charging the Jews with guilt for the death of Jesus, also realized that the death of Christ was a part of God's scheme of things: "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). Likewise Peter mentions the blood of Jesus as the lamb of God and says, "He was destined before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20. "Foundation of the world" here refers to the creation of the world, not the beginning of the Mosaic age, a strange idea advocated by Guy N. Woods, Commentary on Peter, John, and Jude, Gospel Advocate, 1962, pp. 47-48. Cf. Mt. 13:35; 25:34; Lk. 11:50; Jn. 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; and the early church writing Barnabas 5.5).

It should be obvious that Jesus' death was seen as a fulfillment of the Old Testament. This truth is declared so often, you would think it would be a universally accepted idea. Nothing could be further

from the truth. The Jews were not really expecting a crucified Messiah. It was very difficult for most of them to accept Jesus as the Messiah for this reason: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews" (1 Cor. 1:23). The cross was a skandalon, a scandal to the Jewish nationalists. Religious leaders and famous preachers are sometimes troubled with scandals, either in their organizations or in their personal lives. Our Lord was troubled by a scandal also, but it was quite an unusual one. Since he had died on a Roman cross, this was scandalous.

One time a lady was talking to a Jewish lad in Cairo. Although she did not use some scriptures properly, her basic argument was sound. She asked this lad if he believed the Messiah was coming. He responded affirmatively. She then asked if he would have wounds in his hands. He said he did not know. The next day he wanted to know more. "What wounds? Where did he get them?", he asked. The point is that the Jewish people did not expect a crucified Messiah, and such a Messiah was a stumbling block to them. Yet if they had read their Old Testaments as they should have, it would have been no surprise. It was all a part of God's plan from the beginning.

The Old Testament taught that anyone who was hanged on the tree was cursed. How could this happen to the Messiah? For reasons like this the disciples were slow to believe our Lord when he foretold the manner of his death. When Jesus first told them that he must go to Jerusalem to be tried, mocked and killed, "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him" (Mk. 8:32). Much later Jesus said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk. 24:25-26).

God does not always work in the manner we want or expect. He has his own standards. His

thoughts are above our thoughts. His ways are above our ways. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the Jews expected, but he was the kind of Messiah they needed. They were looking for another David. They expected a militaristic, nationalistic conqueror. Instead they got a preaching rabbi who died on a Roman cross.

When Jesus was raised from the dead and the Holy Spirit was given to the church, then the early Christians finally understood that the Messiah was supposed to die. They had to go back and restudy the Old Testament. When they did they found things that had been there all along, but they had misunderstood or passed over them. When they reread passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalms 22 they saw clearly the crucified Jesus. The New Testament is replete with Old Testament quotations throughout the Passion narratives, since they now knew this was the plan of God. Psalms 22 and Isaiah 53 have thoroughly saturated the New Testament text.

THE INTENTION OF JESUS

The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah was to die for the sins of the people, even though this was not understood by the Jewish people. The early church believed and taught that Jesus' death was a part of the plan of God, but what was the intention of Jesus? Was this his purpose? Was this his mission? Was this his vocation? Are we representing him properly? One of the most frustrating experiences in life is to do something and have it totally misinterpreted by someone else. Being misrepresented by others is extremely exasperating. Are we guilty in this regard with Jesus?

I read of a story in a book called The Stickit Minister. I did not know what "stickit" meant, so I had to look that word up. It means a person who begins some work or occupation but is not able to or does not finish it. The story was about a man

who went to school to be a minister. Suddenly, though, he left the school. Some criticized him for this and said terrible things about him. If only they had known the rest of his story. His father had died, and there was not enough money to send both boys in the family to school. The older one decided to go home and work the farm. He gave up his career and his chance for an education in order to allow his younger brother to continue his schooling.

How terrible are our actions when we misjudge someone. How terrible we feel when we do an act with honorable intentions, but they are misunderstood by others. Has Jesus been misrepresented or was his death his intention? Was this his strategy all along, or is all of this atonement theology just an effort to cover up his defeat? So often we teasingly say, when one of our errors has been uncovered, "Well, that is what I meant to do all along." Is that what the New Testament doctrine of the cross is all about? Is it our best effort to cover up for the failings of our Lord and put forward the best face possible?

If one thing is clear in the brief account of the life of Jesus, it is that his mission from the beginning was one that included his dying a sacrificial death. At his baptism the voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11). This statement echoes Old Testament texts which are a Messianic Psalm and a Suffering Servant passage (Isa. 42:1; Psa. 2:7).

"It is fairly unanimous among scholars that a fusion of these two roles was unknown before Jesus. John Wick Bowman's thesis is that 'Jesus and he alone was responsible for the fusion of the two prophetic concepts noted, and everything he ever said or did was motivated by his intention to fulfill the demands of the resultant Suffering Servant, Messiah of the Remnant concept' (The Intention of Jesus, p. 2). Though the Servant passages in Isaiah were occasionally applied to the Messiah before Jesus,

according to Donald Juel 'there is no indication that prior to Christianity the Messiah was expected to suffer after installation or that his suffering was seen as vicarious and atoning in light of Isaiah 53' (Southwestern Journal of Theology, Spring 1979, pp. 7-8). Thus the intention of Jesus was revolutionary. To save your life, you must lose it. To be first, you must be last. The world rejected that notion then and largely still does today" (Steve Williams, "The Cross as the Crux of Christianity", Firm Foundation, 21 December 1982, p. 6).

At the temptation of Jesus the devil teased Jesus with the line, "If you are the son of God." He then offered him the easy way to become the king of the world. That was a temptation, because the devil's path to kingship was much easier than the road to the cross that Jesus saw before him. God's way for Jesus to become a king was more difficult.

During his ministry Jesus "began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed" (Mk. 8:31). He taught, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). At the last supper he offered the cup to the apostles saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26: 27-28). It was clearly Jesus' intention to die.

The gospel of John phrases it very differently. It has Jesus referring to his time or his hour. "My hour has not yet come" (Jn. 2:4). "My time has not yet come" (Jn. 7:6). Then one week before his death Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). John comments, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world" (Jn. 13:1). Finally on the night of the last supper when he was to be arrested, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come" (Jn. 17:1). Jesus knew it was

time when in Gethsemane he could look across the valley in the darkness and see the soldiers approaching with their torches. Jesus could have quietly slipped over the mountain side and hidden, leaving the sleeping apostles to be questioned, but he stayed. He knew his hour had come.

A. M. Hunter explains the intention of Jesus:

What the Gospels tell us is that Jesus saw His death not as a glorious after-thought which would move men's hearts by its splendour of self-sacrifice but as the very soul of His vocation--the thing God sent Him into the world to do (The Work and Words of Jesus, p. 92).

There is a painting of Jesus which shows him in the carpenter's shop. After a long, hard day of work, he is standing up and stretching his arms. The setting sun is breaking through the door. The rays of the sun cast a shadow of his figure on the wall. With the outstretched arms, the shadow looks like it is a man being crucified. Jesus knew he would die a sacrificial death. That is the very reason he came into the world. It was not an afterthought. It did not catch him by surprise. He expected it from the beginning.

INFLUENCE ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The cross of Jesus is the crux of Christianity. It is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and it is the very reason and purpose for which Jesus came into the world. In light of this what kind of effect should the cross have on our Christian lives? Peter said, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). The word for example, hupogrammos, reminds one of a writing tablet which has the example line at the top. The student copies or imitates that

example line in order to write properly. Likewise the Christian should imitate the example of Jesus Christ by taking up his cross and following him. We must remember that to save our lives, we must lose them.

Peter also tells us to "rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet. 4:13). Likewise Paul desires to "share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10). We should be different because of the cross. We should be a changed people. A transformation ought to occur. When we understand what he went through for us, we should be appreciative and attempt to live a selfless style of life in the world.

One time a man was on a fishing trip and was sleeping on his house boat. He heard a splash right between his boat and the one next to his. The man on that boat had been drinking quite heavily and had apparently fallen into the water while drunk. The first man jumped in, found him and rescued him. He gave him artificial respiration, revived him, dried him off, changed his clothes, and got him into bed. An hour later he returned to his own boat, wet and exhausted. The next morning he went back to the man's boat to check on him. The other man told him to go away, leave him alone, and mind his own business. He said, "Why are you being so mean. I saved your life last night." The drunk did not remember. Instead of thanking him he laughed at him and then began to curse him. As this man left, unappreciated and rejected, he thought for a moment of how Jesus must feel when we reject him.

One of the most touching expressions of this is Oscar Wilde's tale entitled "The Nightingale and the Rose." In this story a young man falls in love with a young woman. He wants a red rose to give to her to win her heart. His garden has no red roses, so he pines away about the hopelessness of his love. A nightingale sits in a tree and listens. The bird thinks

she has finally found a true lover, the kind she has sung about for so long. She flies to the rose-tree and asks for a red rose for the young student. The tree says all of its roses are white. Another rose-tree has only yellow roses. Finally the bird flies to a rose-tree under the window of the student. That tree had red roses, but the chill of winter had already nipped its buds. It would not have any red roses that year.

After the nightingale begged further the tree said there was one way to obtain a red rose:

You must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine.

Death was the price of a red rose for the nightingale, but she concluded, "What is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?"

The little nightingale tried to tell the student he would have his rose the next morning, but he could not understand her. The oak tree could, so the nightingale sang him one final farewell song. The student listened to that song and thought to himself, "She is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others." The nightingale, though, pressed her breast against a thorn and began to sing. All night long she sang. A rose began to blossom, petal after petal, but it was pale. "Press closer, little nightingale," the tree urged the tiny bird. She did and sang all the more. Finally the rose had a shade of pink in it, but the thorn had not reached the heart of the little bird. "Press closer, little nightingale," the tree urged again. She did and finally a shot of pain went through her. The thorn went through her heart, but the rose suddenly became crimson red. The night-

ingale's voice grew fainter, and a film came over her eyes. She gave out one last burst of music and fell to the ground--dead!

At noon the student opened his window and said, "Why, what a wonderful piece of luck! Here is a red rose!" He plucked it, knowing it must be the most beautiful rose in the world. He ran to meet the girl who insisted on a red rose if he was to have her heart. He offered it to her, but she said she had already accepted an invitation to the dance that night from another young man who had offered her some real jewels. "Everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers," she said. The student walked away disgusted. He threw the rose into the street where it fell into the gutter. A cart-wheel ran over it. He concluded, "What a silly thing love is."

Unless we are obedient and willing to totally give our lives to Jesus Christ, are we not as unfeeling and inconsiderate as was this young student? Do we not "profane the blood of the covenant" (Heb. 10:29) and spurn the Son of God? Our lives ought to be changed and remade because of the cross: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

The Cross as Victory

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 Jn. 5:4).

All of these passages deal with the idea of victory. What do you think of when the word "victory" is mentioned? What ideas come into your mind? Do you think of military victories like V-E day or V-J day? During a war in Europe in the 1860's each regiment of an army returning to one major city was stopped at the city gate. They were each asked by what right they desired to enter the city. Each regiment would sing and tell of the victories they had won. They would then enter the gate and march through the streets, saluting their leader. Is this the sort of thing that comes to your mind when victory is mentioned? Maybe you think of sports rather than military victory. One famous television commercial refers to "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." Maybe you think of the Super Bowl or the World Series.

As a Christian a very different sort of victory ought to also come to your mind. It is a victory that has been won for you by someone else. It is a victory you are unable to win for yourself. Only by sharing in the victory of Jesus Christ can you attain this victory. This victory is unusual in that it was not won through military conquest or athletic skill. Force and violence were not used to overcome an

enemy or an opponent. Instead this victory was achieved through sacrifice and the power of the resurrection.

The theme of victory is largely ignored in Christian theology today. Gustaf Aulen in his work Christus Victor contends that the theme of victory was much more dominant in the theology of the church for the first millenium. Since then he believes it has been ignored. He believes that we think of the cross and the atonement of Jesus Christ largely in legal and monetary terms, but not in terms of victory. While Aulen overstates his case both positively and negatively, he has done us a valuable service in reminding modern man of the Biblical and Christian theme of victory through the cross of Jesus Christ. How, then, is the cross of Jesus a victory?

VICTORY OVER SIN

The Biblical view of man is that we are in bondage to sin. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (Jn. 8:34). While modern man proclaims his freedom very loudly, he is usually enslaved to his own passions and lusts. He is like a beautiful eagle a preacher noticed one time while visiting in Switzerland. This magnificent bird that could look so magestic floating on air currents in the wild instead was bound with a twenty foot long chain. Likewise man is in bondage to sin.

Once in Iowa a stranger called late at night at the local jail. He was a member of a local theatrical company who was locked in handcuffs and wanted help in getting them off. The key had broken off in the lock. Sin is like that. We can play around with sin, flirt with temptation, and believe we will not get hurt. Then, when we are ready to quit, we find that we are addicted, entrapped, enslaved, and in bondage.

The Bible teaches that all mankind is enslaved to sin. Freedom from bondage to sin does not come merely through more information. Education alone is not the answer. If that is all that we needed, then God could write us a letter from heaven and tell us how to be free of sin. The problem is rarely that we do not know enough, but that we seem unable to do and perform what we know is right. We need victory over the power of sin in our lives.

Freedom from sin and its power comes by yielding ourselves to Christ: "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16). The victory over sin has been won for us by Christ. Some early church writers compared this to the struggle between David and Goliath. It was David who won the victory that day, but the Israelites participated in and benefitted from his victory. It is the same with Christ and the Christian.

VICTORY FROM THE LAW

In Christ we have the end of the old system of law as introduced by Moses for the Jews: "Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

Salvation does not rest on self-effort. If it did, it would be impossible for us to be saved. When we are confronted by law, it merely condemns rather than saves. Since all sin and fall short of God's law, it is a sentence of death rather than life. Only by a system of grace such as Christ instituted through his death on the cross can one be saved. We accept

salvation through faith rather than vainly attempting to earn it by our worthless human works.

VICTORY OVER DEATH

As sinful human beings we are also in bondage to death. Although death is such a universal reality of life which can not be avoided, we still fear it to a certain degree. Most people cope fairly well with death, including non-Christians. There are people dying all the time in our culture who have no relationship with God, and there is no apparent overt fear of death. We have built in mechanisms designed to help us cope with and handle death. Some think we are a Christian nation and that as moral citizens we are surely within the grace of God. Even in our culture, though, I have had funeral directors tell me that those who have no religious roots are those who do not cope with death as well.

In mission work one finds a very different story, though. In some cultures there is a terrible fear of death. One missionary had a Muslim woman come to discuss death with him. Her daughter had been converted to Christianity and had also died recently. The mother wanted to inquire what they had done to her to make her die that way. The missionary said they had done nothing to her. "What do you mean?", he asked. "She died smiling. Our people do not die that way," was her answer.

Christians may not welcome death as a friend due to earthly commitments, but the pagan fear of death should be gone, since Christ came to "deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:15). In one village there was a custom of ringing the church bells once for each year of age of a person who had died. One man said he used to listen carefully to that ringing and count the number of years. If it was seventy, eighty, or ninety he would breathe a sigh of relief. He reasoned that he would probably live many more

years until he reached such an age. If the number was lower, a chilling fear would run up and down his spine when the ringing would suddenly stop. This continued for a long time until he came to realize that in Christ, he had eternal life. He was given victory over the fear of death through Jesus.

Paul explains that in Christ we are also given a victory over death itself: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57). The real fear of death is that we will die lost in sin and suffer eternal torment in hell. Through Christ the sting of death, sin, is removed by cleansing in the blood of Jesus Christ.

VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL AND EVIL

When the time for his death was drawing near, Jesus declared, "Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world, be cast out...He said this to show by what death he was to die" (Jn. 12:31, 33). Jesus saw his death on the cross as a victory over Satan and the kingdom of evil. The writer to the Hebrews agrees: "He himself likewise partook of the same nature [flesh and blood], that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

The so-called ransom theory of the atonement really stressed this victory over Satan during the first millenium of the church's existence. People really believed in a personal devil back then. They had an awareness of the reality of evil more so than the contemporary, secular American. People today joke about Satan and picture him as wearing a red suit and having a pitchfork in hand, but we do not take him too seriously. He makes a good character for a movie from time to time, but we rarely

think of him.

In the first century, though, people believed that Satan had gained power, a kingdom in this world. He is called the "ruler of this world" (Jn. 12:31; 16:11) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Anyone not following Christ was said to be following Satan. In the early centuries, though, it was stressed that the dominion the devil had over man was wrong. He had no right to man. He was a robber, a thief, and a usurper.

When the devil incited men to put Jesus on trial and finally crucify him, many Christians believed this was the greatest irony of all. In the devil's seeming victory he met defeat. The resurrection turned the cross into a gigantic trap which caught the devil and saved mankind. Some of the descriptions of this were quite crude. The humanity of Jesus veiled his deity, so that he was like bait on a fishhook which caught Satan. Another described the cross as a mousetrap baited with the blood of Jesus. Granted these analogies are somewhat grotesque to us, but there is an element of truth in them. In the cross of Jesus the devil was defeated and judged. "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him [or it]" (Col. 2:15). Possibly this is the explanation of that difficult passage in Revelation 20. There we are told, "He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2). Maybe Jesus' atonement is the binding of Satan. The preaching of the gospel, the good news of the cross of Jesus Christ, is a binding power against Satan wherever it is proclaimed.

In Jesus' death on Calvary we have victory over sin, over death, over the devil, and from the law. This is a great message of hope for all mankind. In Christ a once-for-all and a once-for-all-time victory has been won. God is not the victim of circumstances beyond his control. History is not subject to

Satan or chance. Rather history exhibits the careful plan and foreknowledge of God. We can shout, "If God be for us, who can be against us."

Four Men Tell of the Cross

It is said that Ghandi once asked some Christian missionaries to sing him a song. They asked which song he would like to hear. "The one that expresses all that is deepest in your faith," he replied. After briefly consulting with one another, they sang, "When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride." What does the cross of Jesus mean to you? How do you explain it? What analogies are adequate to demonstrate its depth of meaning? Our approach in this lesson will be to bring in four imaginary men. We will pretend that we have converted each of these men. Each of them has his own particular outlook and viewpoint on life. From those varied vantage points each sees a beautiful truth about the cross in a unique way.

THE MORAL VIEWPOINT

Our first man is a poet, a philosopher, and a writer. He is the more sensitive type of person. He looks at things from the ethical, the moral, and the subjective viewpoints. Emotions run strong with him. So we ask this man, "What does the cross of Jesus Christ mean to you?" He would probably answer, "To me the cross represents the love of God."

It is in the cross that the love of God was manifested to the whole world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 Jn.

4:9). In particular the church, as the blood-bought, redeemed institution established by Christ, ought to comprehend the love of God. As Paul reminds us, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).

If we remind ourselves of the love a parent has for a child, we should have little trouble understanding a parent dying for his or her child. Most of us who have children would gladly sacrifice our life if necessary for our children. One young man had a mother who was badly scarred from being burned in her early years as a mother. This young man, though, was never ashamed of his mother or embarrassed about her in any way. When he was a baby he was about to be burned in the fireplace. His mother snatched him away to safety, but her clothes caught fire. She was terribly burned and scarred for life. Those scars were marks of love to that young man. They could never be repugnant to him.

We have little trouble understanding that type of love--of a parent for a child. Another mother was trapped inside a burning house with her two children. She dug a hole in the dirt floor, placed her two young children in the hole and covered it with her own body. She was burned to death, but when others moved her charred body, they found the children safe and sound underneath her. That is sacrificial love. It is admirable. It is costly, but we understand that love. Every parent who loves his or her child more than life itself can relate to such love.

The love shown in the cross, though, is a different kind of love. Rather than a father dying for his son, it is a father sacrificing his son. Upon hearing John 3:16 one man said, "Ah, that was love! I could have given myself, but I could never have given my son." Certainly sacrificing your child would be much more difficult than sacrificing yourself. The cross truly does demonstrate and reveal the love of

God the Father.

This demonstration of love is the appeal of the cross. The cross does not appeal to us due to its physical appearance, for it is crude and rugged. In fact the word "cross" has changed its connotations since the time of Christ. In his day it meant merely a cruel, terrible way to execute someone. Without a knowledge of Jesus our modern references to the cross would sound ridiculous to the uninformed person. Imagine someone saying, "Take up your electric chair and follow me." Or, "The word of the gas chamber is the power of God." Or, "I preach unto you Jesus Christ and the hangman's noose." Without a knowledge of Christ you can imagine how utterly ridiculous the preaching of the cross sounded. Once a knowledge of Jesus Christ is attained and faith is put in him, though, the preaching of the cross becomes the wisdom of God.

To our first man, the poet, the cross demonstrates the love of God. Love can be expressed in words, but love expressed in words only is a mirage. Someone compared words to a fuse in a fuse box. The fuse allows electricity to pass through it, but if you try to send too much electricity through it, it blows out. Words can express love, but only up to a point. Then they are incapable of further communication, and something else is necessary. In the cross God did something more than tell us he loved us. He did more than speak words. He showed us. His love was expressed in action.

COMMERCIAL VIEWPOINT

Our next imaginary witness who will tell us about the cross is a business man. Due to his occupation he concentrates on the cost and the price of things. Buying and selling is his business. We ask him what the cross means to him, and he responds, "To me the cross tells of a terrible price that had to be paid. I think of the horrible cost to God for

our sin."

In the Bible the cross is described in terms of a price that was paid. Jesus said, "The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). Peter explained, "You know that you were ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The church was purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). Paul told the Corinthians, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Some key words in our religious vocabulary reflect a price that was paid on the cross. "Ransom" means to deliver a payment to someone for something. "Redeem" has a similar meaning. We think of a slave being bought out of slavery or a possession being redeemed at a pawn shop. Freedom is obtained by means of a price that was paid. Our freedom was obtained by the price that Jesus paid for us on the cross.

LEGAL VIEWPOINT

Our third witness is a lawyer and a judge. He is an individual who is always concerned about the law and justice. On every issue he determines the legality of an action and the legal obligations of the parties involved. He is very concerned about law and order and people's respect for the law. When we ask him how he interprets the cross and what it means to him, he answers in legal terms: "To me the cross demonstrates that man has broken the law of God. That law says there must be punishment for sin. Jesus took that punishment for us by dying our death. He fulfilled the demands of justice for us."

Mankind often thinks that sin will go unpunished, but if anything in history points out the error of this it is the cross. God hates sin enough and is serious enough about sin that he let his Son die the

death we deserved for our sins. Paul said, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). We were the guilty parties while Jesus was innocent, yet God laid our sin upon him that he might receive our punishment: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The tragic thing is that mankind rarely realizes how awful our sin really is. Let me illustrate. A family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, bringing all their prized possessions with them. Among their belongings was a little figurine. It was worth very little to an antique dealer, but it had great sentimental value to the family. It could not be replaced. The family hired a woman to help with the house cleaning chores. While doing this work she accidentally knocked the figurine off a table and shattered it. She was sorry for what she did and was forgiven by the family. She said, "Don't worry about it. I'll get you another one at the five-and-ten-cent store." She had no apprehension of what she had done, even though she was sorry. Likewise we may be sorry and forgiven by God, but how much awareness do we really have for how our sin has hurt God?

One time a husband had been disloyal to his wife by committing adultery. She was very hurt by this of course. To try to make up with her and set things straight, he bought her a beautiful fur coat. His attitude was very abrupt: "I am sorry. Here's you a fur coat. There that settles it." He forgot about it. He thought that present would make amends. That attitude hurt her even more deeply. It showed that he did not even realize at all how deeply he had hurt her. Are we not that way with God at times? The lawyer with his legal viewpoint tries to remind us that sin is a serious matter, serious enough that the wages for it are death. It is serious enough that God's Son had to die a cruel,

painful death in our place.

SACRIFICIAL VIEWPOINT

Our fourth and last imaginary witness to the meaning of the cross of Jesus is a converted Jew. This individual has been steeped in the Old Testament tradition with its numerous sacrifices to God. When asked about the meaning of Jesus' death, this witness will likely say, "To me the death of Jesus on the cross is primarily that of a sacrifice unto God." He will probably remind us of spotless lambs that were sacrificed in the Old Testament and how Jesus is our Paschal lamb.

Was it not John the Baptist who, upon seeing Jesus approach, declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). The letter to the Hebrews, with its emphasis upon the Old Testament system and similarities (and improvements) in the New Testament, has a strong emphasis upon the cross as a sacrifice: "He (Christ) entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). The death of Jesus is the final sacrifice which is effective for all time and effective for all mankind. This passage alone rules out any doctrine of transubstantiation in the New Testament. The Catholic Mass with its resacrificing of Christ is a denial of the once for all nature of Jesus' atoning death on the cross in the first century.

The death of Jesus is the sacrifice of one life for another. It is the blood of one for another. You may have heard the story of soldiers who were prisoners of war on the River Kwai. At the end of a hard days work, a Japanese guard insisted that a shovel was missing. He ranted and raved, but no guilty party stepped forward. Finally in his anger he

shouted, "All die! All die!" He raised his gun and prepared to start shooting. Suddenly a Scotsman stepped forward and said, "I did it." One guard kicked him. Then they hit him. They bashed his head with their rifles. Soon he was dead. The other prisoners picked up his bruised body to bury it. The shovels were counted and none were missing. The Scotsman, innocent of the accusation against him, had given his life as a sacrifice.

In the newspaper I once read the sad story of Cardona Pineda of Columbia. He was a twenty-two year old man who had been without a job for weeks. In order to support his family he had been donating blood. Eventually he became so ill he had to go to the hospital. They said he had pernicious anemia, but he could not afford treatment or medicine. He went home and went to bed and never got out of it again. In a very literal way he had given his blood as a sacrifice for his family.

CONCLUSION

We have examined the meaning of the cross through the eyes of four imaginary men. The poet sees the love of God in the cross. The business man views the cross as a ransom, a redemption price. The lawyer prefers to remember the cross as an expression of the justice of God for the wages of man's sin. The converted Jew compares the cross to the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Let us remember exactly for whom Jesus died. One man illustrated it this way. Imagine you are sitting on your front porch. A little child is riding a tricycle down the driveway toward the street. The child cannot see that a truck is coming down the road, because his view is obstructed by a hedge. The truck has lost its brakes and is moving very rapidly. Imagine yourself jumping over the rail of the porch, running across the yard, throwing the child to safety, and being run over and crushed by the huge

truck. Just thinking of that possibility made this man shiver.

Then the man changed the situation a little. Instead of it being a little child you love or your own child, imagine a real brat is in the same situation. It is the kid who is always making nasty signs at you, throwing rocks at your windows, and in general is not worth the lead and powder it would take to shoot him. The same truck is advancing. What are you going to do? Would you try to rescue that child too? The man who imagined this story said he would. I am still thinking about it.

Which of these two would show the greater love, though. Would not the rescue of the latter child, the brat, demonstrate the greater love? Let us hear Paul's appraisal of the measure of God's love for us as seen in Christ's death:

While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man--though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us....For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Rom. 5:6-10).

In one of my Bibles which I use in Bible studies with non-Christians I have four words in this passage circled in red. They are (1) helpless, (2) ungodly, (3) sinners, and (4) enemies (of God). If we picture ourselves correctly as Paul portrays us here, we realize we are the brat on the tricycle. We are the ones who do not deserve the time of day from God, much less the sacrifice of his Son for our sins. Nevertheless that is the beauty and the good news of the gospel.

I heard of a story that pictured Jesus on the

cross. It recounted the insults he endured, the cursing and mocking. It vividly portrayed the soldiers gambling below him as he suffered on the cross. Suddenly the patience of Jesus ran out. He jerks himself off of the cross and goes back to heaven, feeling man is simply not worth his life. The story ends, "There is no mediator between God and us." Thank God that is not the way it happened. Jesus did die even though we did not deserve it. There is a mediator between God and man.

We have told what Jesus' death on the cross means to four imaginary men. What really matters is what Jesus means to you. Are you willing to give your life to him if you have not done so? If you have drifted away are you willing to rededicate your life to him?

The Suffering Servant

"Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this:

'As a sheep led to the slaughter
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,
so he opens not his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken up from the earth.'

And the eunuch said to Philip, 'About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8:32-35).

Most of us are familiar with the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Philip is led to teach this devout, religious man about the gospel. The Ethiopian has been to Jerusalem to worship God and is returning home reading a copy of Isaiah. He is studying Isaiah 53, one of the so-called suffering servant sections, but he does not understand its meaning. There have been many different interpretations of Isaiah 53 through the centuries. One Old Testament scholar called it a horrible mess to try to sort through all the different ideas people have had about this scripture. Whatever it may have meant during Isaiah's day, one thing is certain. We have an inspired commentary in Acts 8 that says Isaiah 53 was talking about Jesus Christ.

The cross of Jesus Christ, as portrayed in Isaiah 53, should be central in the proclamation of the church. We should never get too far away from preaching the blood atonement of Jesus Christ. It is said that one of the Roman Emperors commanded a fleet of Roman ships to sail to Alexandria, Egypt

and bring back loads of sand to be used in the arenas of Rome. The commander of the ships said he would bring wheat back no matter what the Emperor said. There were people starving in Rome. How could he bring them sand. Likewise there are souls starving for the pure, simple gospel of the cross. Instead some are receiving sand. I remember one sermon in a book entitled, "The Sweetest Verse in the Bible". Compared to an exposition of the scenes of Calvary, that is awful trivial. In this lesson we will study the death of Christ as Philip might have preached it to the Ethiopian eunuch. Our text will be the same as his--Isaiah 53.

INNOCENT

One difficulty in applying Isaiah 53 merely to the nation of Israel is that they were not innocent. Their sin was severe enough that God would allow them to suffer in Babylonian exile. On the other hand Jesus was without sin:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers
is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth...
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.
(Isa. 53:7, 9b).

Jesus is described as a lamb being led to the slaughter. One painting of the crucifixion concentrates on the actual nailing of the two thieves and our Lord to their respective crosses. The two thieves were fighting. They were scared and angry. Jesus, however, was calmly lying down with outstretched arms. He was not struggling as he was about to receive the nails. He was like a lamb that

is led to the slaughter.

Think for a moment at the anger that is aroused in the human heart over the suffering of an innocent person. This is what makes so many people angry at the wide-open stance on abortion of our society where abortion may be performed at any point of pregnancy for any reason. Many movies and television shows are built around the theme of the innocent suffering. The show "Quincy" had its appeal in this way. Quincy was always right, but to prove it he had to fight against his boss and half of the local government officials. As you watched the show you got angry and felt like you were fighting with him against the apathetic establishment.

Going back a little further many of you watched the "Perry Mason" show. Part of its appeal was that Perry almost always got his defendant off, much to the chagrin of the D. A. Burger and Lieutenant Tragg. When I was in the eighth grade a substitute teacher accused the people in the corner where I was sitting of talking. We had all been quiet. The culprit was a student in the middle of the room. I informed her we were innocent. She remarked that the hit dog always howls. After class I, with steam pouring out my ears, again told her I was innocent and did not appreciate being falsely accused. Imagine my getting so angry over a trivial thing. Yet we get angry when the innocent are wrongly accused. Should we not be filled with a holy rage at what was done to our Lord? Should not that motivate us to proclaim his holy name to the ends of the earth in defense of his honor?

While the innocence of Jesus is vital and essential to our faith, it is not enough. It is not enough that Jesus lived a perfect life. He also had to make a perfect sacrifice. Jesus had to die for our sins. Someone has said, "The doctrine of the atonement is to my mind one of the surest proofs of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Who would or could have thought of the just Ruler dying for the unjust

rebel?"

COMPLETE

When we read of the suffering of the servant in Isaiah 53, we ought to be impressed with the completeness of his suffering. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). "He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people" (Isa. 53:8). "He poured out his soul to death" (Isa. 53:12). The identity of the servant perplexed many of the Jewish people, because his suffering was so complete. Who was this innocent person who was given stripes, wounded, bruised, and finally put to death? Who was this one like a lamb being led to the slaughter? The answer is seen in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Crucifixion was a terrible way to torture and kill a person. Cicero, an ancient Roman author, had witnessed many crucifixions. He said the victims often became raving madmen before they died from fever, thirst, infection, pain, exhaustion, and other problems. Sometimes the tongues of men on a cross were cut out to stop their terrible cries and screams. It was clearly one of the worst methods of punishment ever devised by mankind.

The position of a person on a cross made breathing difficult. Cramps would begin to set in, especially in the muscles of the arms. In order to breathe a person had to push up with his legs and pull up with his arms. The nails would tear your flesh as you did this. Slowly your strength would be sapped, but in desperation you would have to exert yourself again in order to breathe. When they came to break the legs of those on the cross, Jesus was already dead. The breaking of the legs would hasten death, since breathing would become much more

difficult. Why had Jesus already died so quickly? Probably it was the accumulation of suffering from the terrible scourging and the torture of the cross. A scourging alone could kill a strong man. It is very evident that in the crucifixion the suffering of Jesus was quite complete.

PLANNED

The suffering of the servant was not an accident. It was planned by God and fit within his will. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;...the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53:10). Although the Jews never did expect the death of the Messiah, it was not unexpected in God's plan.

God did not merely tell us to be good. We are sinful, so that would do little good. If that is all that was necessary to achieve our salvation, then God could have merely written us all a letter. Instead Christ had to take humanity upon himself and our sin upon himself and then die for us. Imagine for a moment a man drowning in a lake. As he is going under for the third time, a person is standing on the shore, making swimming motions with his arms and shouting, "Move your arms like this and kick your feet!" What the drowning person needs is for someone to jump in the water and save him. Suppose a small child is in a burning house. Do we save them by shouting to them to go down the hall, unlock the door, etc. No, we would break down the door, rush inside, grab the child, and rush out again. Mankind needed a saviour, and sending Christ into the world was God's plan. Jesus' death was a part of this plan. It was the only way.

VICARIOUS

Isaiah saw the suffering of the Servant as being

vicarious or substitutionary: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed...the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all...he...was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:4a, 5, 6b, 12b).

One man supposedly had a dream that he was witnessing a soldier cruelly flogging Jesus. He was disturbed by the viciousness of the punishment and rushed forward to try to stop the soldier. When the soldier turned around to speak to him, it was himself. The meaning, of course, is that our sins caused Jesus to have to suffer. In Norway there is a church building that has the figure of a lamb carved on it. A traveler asked what it meant. Did it refer to Jesus as the lamb of God? As the story went, when the building was being constructed, one man was working high above the ground. He lost his footing and fell. Rather than dying from the fall, though, he fell on a sheep in a flock that was being herded past the building at that moment. It killed the lamb, but it probably saved that man's life by cushioning his fall. It was a vivid reminder to the people of that locale that long ago another lamb had died so that we might live.

In North Carolina two horses pulling a wagon were rushing down the street of a small town. A man ran out and grabbed the reins to try to stop the wagon. The horses dragged him, but he would not let go. Finally he brought them to a stop. He was severely injured and died after a short time, but before he died people were able to ask him why he did it? Why should he have risked his life to stop a wagon? He told them to look in the wagon. In the straw in the back, resting peacefully, was his tiny, baby boy. He died to save his child.

I have read that in certain places in South

America a lamb is sometimes thrown into a river full of piranha fish. The fish swarm around that sacrificial lamb and make it possible to drive herds of cattle through the stream without their being injured by these fish. I do not know how true that is, but it is an illustration of the principle of vicarious sacrifice which Jesus is as our lamb.

One popular song says that Jesus is your ticket to heaven and that he has already paid the price. After being given a speeding ticket, one man was told that he could pay it off in cash or go to the American Red Cross and donate a unit of blood. He donated the blood. His traffic ticket was then stamped, "Paid in Blood." Yes, our ticket to heaven is stamped, "Paid in Blood", the blood of Jesus who took our place and suffered for us.

VICTORIOUS

The death of the Servant wins a victory by gaining righteousness for many: "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities....because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:11b-12). Why do I call this victory? The words omitted from the above reading describe what the Servant did in terms of victory, of a conquerer dividing up the reward of his victory with others: "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." The spoil goes to the victors who share it together. If we are obedient unto the gospel of Christ, then we share in his victory, the victory of the resurrection:

Death is swallowed up in victory.
O death, where is thy victory?
O death, where is thy sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

In our study we have noted that the suffering of the Servant in Isaiah 53 was innocent, complete, planned, vicarious, and victorious. This analysis certainly does not exhaust the themes in this great passage of scripture. The important question now is how will you react to this suffering. When a person gets a cold hearted attitude toward the cross of Jesus Christ, that person is in or near apostasy. If the story of Jesus' death in our place is not able to revive a lukewarm Christian, probably nothing can move him.

Years ago a guard of President Truman was slain in his duty to protect the President. A project was initiated to collect funds for the man's family. In his efforts to assist this project, Truman said, "You can't imagine just how a man feels when someone else dies for him." How do we feel realizing that Christ died for us? Does this move us? Does it inspire us to live a more holy life?

In Africa a long time ago a powerful tribal chief had captured an enemy and was relishing the thought of putting him to death. A British officer who was present tried to persuade him not to execute the prisoner. He offered a ransom of a sizeable sum for the man. The chief said, "I do not want gold or money. I want blood." They were about to shoot their arrows at the man when the British officer stepped in front of him. One arrow had already been released and struck him in the arm. The officer pulled it out and showed it to the chief, saying, "Here is blood. I have given it for this man, and now I claim his life." The chief gave in and released the prisoner to him. That prisoner bowed down on the ground, vowing to be a slave to the

British officer for the rest of his life.

Do you consider yourself a slave to Jesus Christ? He died for you. He has claimed your life from the certain penalty of death. Whether you acknowledge it or now, you belong to him: "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The Roman soldiers shook the dice
As for the stake they vied,
Quite unaware that on the cross
The world's Redeemer died.

The Roman soldiers shook the dice,
As for the stake they vied,
Are we as unconcerned as they
That Christ for us has died?

The Cross in Psalms 22

"David...a prophet...foresaw and spoke...of the Christ" (Acts 2:29-31).

"We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm" (C. H. Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, vol. 1, p. 365).

Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm. It is also a Passion Psalm, telling of the death of the Christ. David is the author. Although we usually think of him as a king and secondly as a writer of Psalms, Peter in Acts 2 calls him a prophet. Peter was referring to other Psalms by David and his prophecy of the resurrection rather than the death of Jesus, but his description as quoted above is appropriate for our study. In this Psalm of David we have a treasure house of information about the death of Jesus. In 1842 a minister in England, John Stevenson, wrote a book entitled Christ on the Cross. He included one sermon in this book for each verse of Psalm 22. That means he wrote thirty-one sermons on the cross of Jesus based on Psalm 22. Obviously this Old Testament passage merits our very careful consideration.

Interpretations of this Psalm vary greatly with many even doubting Davidic authorship. There are four major lines of interpretation, though, that are very useful in understanding this scripture (see A. F. Kirkpatrick, The Book of Psalms, Cambridge, 1891, vol. 1, pp. 113-14). Each approach contains an element of truth. It is possible to see a progression of understanding as you move from one interpretation to the other, each leading to the next and

the last being the final conclusion of the matter. These four approaches are: 1) the personal, 2) the ideal, 3) the national, and 4) the predictive.

The **personal** approach would interpret the Psalm as being a reflection of experiences in the life of the author. Since it is ascribed to David, one might look to the persecutions he suffered when Saul was seeking his death. Or one might look to the terrible tragedies in his life during the rebellion by his son Absalom. Maybe this Psalm is more an expression of what David feared at one point based on past, lesser trials. Maybe this Psalm does tell of David, and we need to allow a measure of latitude for poetic expression.

These experiences would only partially explain Psalm 22. The more we read Psalm 22, the more we are forced to look beyond David. While his personal experiences were apparently the original background of this Psalm, the degree of intensity in this Psalm points beyond David. It is hard to find anything in his life to parallel everything in Psalm 22. As Spurgeon said, "David and his afflictions may be here in a very modified sense, but, as the star is concealed by the light of the sun, he who sees Jesus will probably neither see nor care to see David."

The **ideal** approach interprets the Psalm as pertaining to any righteous person who is suffering unjustly. This view is based upon the experiences of Psalm 22 that appear to transcend those of David. Possibly the Psalmist had in mind his own sufferings along with similar trials of any righteous person. This view would make it a Psalm of encouragement, telling how the Lord will vindicate the sufferer with a marvelous deliverance. We could compare it to Job which was based upon the experiences of a real individual, but it is written with a broad audience in mind--all who suffer unjustly.

The **national** approach is popular especially with those who eschew Davidic authorship and prefer a late date for this Psalm. This school of thought

thinks Psalm 22 is a picture of the Jewish nation suffering in exile in Babylon as they are persecuted by the heathens and apparently forsaken by God. The speaker in Psalms would be a personification of the whole Jewish nation. Of course this view is problematic for those who hold to Davidic authorship if it is stressed to the exclusion of the other approaches or if it is strictly applied to a later historical setting.

The **predictive** approach sometimes takes the whole Psalm as being predictive and as having nothing to do with David or Israel. I prefer a predictive approach which incorporates the previous interpretations. The previous interpretations all have value and provide partial explanations for Psalm 22, but finally we are driven beyond all of them for the ultimate fulfillment in Jesus' death on the cross. There are just too many parallels between the Passion of Jesus and Psalm 22 for them all to be coincidences. There are too many New Testament uses of Psalm 22 to ignore the predictive factor, if we are going to be fair with the scriptures. The sufferings of Psalm 22, whether descriptive of David or Israel or whomever, were so ordered by the providence of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that they foreshadowed in amazing detail the death of our Lord and the circumstances surrounding his Passion.

Before looking in detail at the text of Psalm 22 it is also worth noting what the Psalm does not say. There is no confession of sin as is often found in other Psalms of David. This turns out to be appropriate, since it is predictive of Christ. Also there are no strong, stern imprecations as found in some other Psalms where one is suffering unjustly. Such harsh denunciations of one's enemies, seeking horrible punishments upon them which often startle modern readers, are absent from Psalm 22 (cf. Psa. 69 and 109). Again this is appropriate if it is predictive of Jesus Christ, the lamb of God who did

not resist evil. Jesus showed us the tremendous power of non-violence long before Ghandi or Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the societies of their day for the better with this method (both of whom, of course, imitated Christ in this regard).

One interesting speculation about Psalm 22 at the cross has been made by a variety of individuals. It is possible that Jesus meditated upon Psalm 22 while he suffered crucifixion, maybe even quoting it in totality as he hung there on Calvary. The Psalm begins with the familiar words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" (Psa. 22:1). It is interesting that these words of Jesus are claimed by many non-evangelicals to be among the most reliable words in all the Bible.

They reason that if a statement is difficult to explain, even embarrassing to the church, then it is probably an actual saying of Jesus. Who would have added an embarrassing statement to the text? This text still has interpreters who attempt to water it down. Some say Jesus felt forsaken but he really was not forsaken by God. Other ingenious attempts to remove the literal force of the words could be cited. In the textual tradition of this verse it was softened frequently in Italy, Gaul, and Carthage by substituting the words, "Why didst thou reproach me?" (A. E. J. Rawlinson, St Mark, Westminster, 1927, p. 236).

This is why Schmiedel placed this verse among the "foundation pillars" of a truly scientific life of Jesus (Ibid., and Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, 2nd ed., 1966, p. 594). Neumann described it as bearing "the stamp of genuineness". Cranfield declared, "We are on the firmest historical ground here" (C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark, Cambridge, 1959, p. 458). So even from the viewpoint of many who do not hold a conservative view of inspiration, Jesus must have quoted Psalm 22 while on the cross. It is in-

conceivable that the early church would have associated such a saying with his Passion unless Jesus actually said it.

So Jesus quoted the beginning of Psalm 22 while on the cross. Is that all he quoted? Maybe and maybe not. We may have just a skeleton outline of what he actually said. It is possible that he quoted the ending of Psalm 22. John tells us that right before Jesus died he said, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). While this may have been an independent saying meaning that his suffering was finished, it is possible that it is the ending of Psalm 22. It ends with the words, "he has wrought it" (Psa. 22:31). You can translate that "He has done it", "He has finished it", or "he has performed it" (NASB). While they sound very different in English, in the original they are very similar expressions. Now we do not know if Jesus quoted the whole Psalm or even meditated on it as he suffered on the cross, but we do know he thought of it enough to quote the opening verses. As we study this Psalm I think you will see that the whole Psalm would have been a very appropriate meditation or quotation for our Lord on Golgotha.

What did Jesus mean when he cried out that God had forsaken him? Many explanations have been offered to try to soften the tone of these words. These words are difficult to explain in light of the doctrine of the trinity. It is a statement difficult to fathom. Some have said Jesus felt forsaken but was not. Others say he is just using the words from a favorite Psalm, but we are not to apply them too literally. In light of God's hatred of sin and Jesus' bearing our sin on the cross, though, only one answer seems appropriate no matter how difficult it is to explain. If we take the cry of Jesus seriously, it must mean that God did forsake him. For a brief period of time symbolized by the darkness, God withdrew his presence from Christ that he might completely suffer for our sins.

Think how horrible it must feel to be forsaken. At some point in your life you have been forsaken by someone--friends, relatives, or a mate. Being forsaken can leave you with an empty feeling inside that gives life a bad taste. Many poor souls have committed suicide after being forsaken by an important person in their life. One pathetic piece of verse tells of the sorrow of being forsaken: "When he's forsaken, Wither'd and shaken. What can an old man do but die?" (Hood, Ballad). Let us not forget that Jesus was forsaken by God for our sake.

Psalm 22 can conveniently be divided into two parts. The first half (verses 1-21) is the cry of a persecuted saint. The second half (verses 22-31) speaks of deliverance and hope. The full text will not be reproduced here, so please open your Bible to Psalm 22 and study it along with the exposition.

In verses 1-2 the Psalmist expresses his forsaken feeling. He then appeals as high as he can, to God's moral character. God is pictured as being enthroned on the prayers of praise of Israel (vs. 3). The point is that God has been worthy of praise in the past. God has rescued his people in the past so that they have sung his praises. Surely he will do the same again for this persecuted saint. Verse 4 is a clear reminder to God of his past actions.

In order to bring forth the mercy of God the Psalmist compares his value to that of a worm (vs. 6). His life has as much value as the life of a worm. How much do we value a worm? We step on a worm, but we lose no sleep over it. We take worms and go fishing with them, and it does not bother us in the least. Have you ever thought about what we actually do to a worm when we put it on a fishhook? I asked that exact question of a congregation once, and I got lots of snickers and laughs. It really did not bother them too much. I doubt a single one of them has stopped fishing with worms. Can you imagine that being done to you? Can you imagine a huge piece of steel being run through

your body from end to end? That is what we do to worms! The Psalmist feels like a worm. He is treated as nothing. He is shown no mercy. He is defenseless.

Verse 7 recalls the scenes of the cross where the spectators taunt Jesus, daring him to come down from the cross and save himself. The very Greek word used in the LXX translation of this verse is also used by Luke in his narration (Lk. 23:35). Verse 8 is a remarkable parallel of what was said of Jesus (Mt. 27:43). Verse 11 gives us the agonizing cry of the righteous sufferer pleading to God for help.

In several verses of this Psalm the plight of the Psalmist is compared to that of one surrounded by wild or dangerous animals. The picture is that of the strong circling and closing in on the weak. Bulls in Palestine, and everywhere I guess, are in the habit of circling close to an object that arouses their curiosity. Then at the slightest provocation they might attack. Bashan is a geographical area famous for its rich pasture land which would mean lots of bulls.

Verse 14 could describe the scourging of Jesus or his thirst. It tells of his terrible thirst and the sapping of his strength and energy, maybe even of strain on his body joints while on the cross. A potsherd is a dried up piece of pottery (vs. 15). When I was about eighteen years old I used to rush down to the bank of the Tennessee River near Huntsville, Alabama after a hard rain during plowing season. There is an area there of several acres which is great for hunting arrow heads. There are also lots of pottery fragments. These are so common and worthless that after you save a few of them, you quickly ignore others. They are hard and brittle, even after hundreds of years of exposure to the elements. Jesus' strength was dried up so that he felt like a potsherd.

The mention of dogs in verse 16 returns to the imagery of ferocious animals. The text and trans-

lation are uncertain here, but the idea of piercing is most likely. This would fit the context of ferocious dogs moving in on a weak victim, piercing his body with their bites. Yet, it is a remarkable prediction of the very method of Jesus death. The visible bones of the sufferer might refer to the baring of the body of Jesus for scourging and crucifixion (vs. 17). More likely it means his strength is gone, so that he is reduced to a living skeleton. Verse 18 is another remarkable verse which details small events surrounding the cross of Jesus, the dividing of his garments by the soldiers casting lots.

Verse 19 repeats the prayer for help and finally the persecutors are described as wild oxen in verse 21. The word does not mean "unicorns" (AV). The word might refer to a rhinoceros, to a certain antelope, or the bison. The idea of a one-horned animal comes from the LXX. The Hebrew word seems to have implied an animal with two horns (Deut. 33:17). Many are of the opinion that the actual animal is now extinct. The animal referred to here was apparently much stronger and ferocious than the common ox, thus "wild ox" is probably the best rendering (cf. Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody, pp. 65-66 for a concise review of the pertinent data). This verse brings to a close the first half of Psalm 22. It is primarily a cry for help coupled with a description of the horrible plight of the righteous suffered designed to evoke the mercy of God.

Once the prayer for help has been made, the Psalmist changes the tone drastically. Rescue and deliverance by God are so certain that praise must be offered. The writer of Hebrews puts the words of verse 22 into the mouth of Jesus. The glory of it is that we are called brethren of the Lord if he is the speaker. Verse 25 may allude to a common practice among the Jews when God answered a prayer. If a person had prayed to God for help and the prayer had been answered in an affirmative manner, a

sacrifice would be offered and a feast given from the meat provided. During the time of this feast the host would repeatedly declare the mercies of God and detail the deliverance God had given him. Christians might think of the kingdom of Christ and the great wedding feast.

In verse 27 there is a notable change of perspective from a personal hope to a worldwide hope. The sovereignty of God over the whole world is declared. This is a truth that it is easy for us to distort. We can limit God to certain areas of our life. Franklin Camp has a marvelous sermon on this concept. He shows that God is not a God of the hills only or a God of just the valleys. He is a God of the hills and the valleys. We must not limit the truth and the gospel by saying that God's word has no relevance or application in any institution. God's word is relevant to all of life, because God is God of the whole world. God's word has application in economic, political, educational, and family structures. God's word must not be hemmed into the structure of a church building or limited to the eternal destiny of the soul.

The Psalmist declares the deliverance of God as not only having worldwide proportions but as reaching yet unborn generations (vs. 30-31). This deliverance is one accomplished by God. He has done it. It is hard to read this great passage of hope without seeing in it the blessing that all mankind received through the death of Christ. Through Christ God gave deliverance to all mankind.

The personal approach to this Psalm is useful in helping us see how David may have felt when he wrote these words. The ideal approach is valuable in that every righteous person who has suffered can find meaning in this Psalm for himself. The national approach is also valuable in that corporate suffering breaks the heart of God too. Finally, though, in the predictive approach we see new meaning. It is as if the writer of this Psalm was standing at the foot of

Calvary observing the crucifixion of Jesus. Certainly
"David, a prophet, foresaw and spoke of the Christ."

The Power of the Cross

"You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 3:14-15).

"Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

"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" (1 Cor. 1:18).

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

The cross stands central in Christian preaching. It holds a key position in the teaching of the Bible. The cross is also the power of God. To stand on the cross is to stand on the power of God. This does not make sense to the world, because the cross looks like weakness. It looks like helplessness. To the world the cross means a man was arrested, given a quick trial, and executed. It appears to the world, if Jesus was really God's Son, that God was unable to do anything. That is why Paul says the

"word of the cross is the power of God." Paul says the "gospel", which is basically the proclamation of the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus, is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16). In our study we will examine how this seeming non-sensical statement of scripture is really true. (For much of this lesson I am indebted to a sermon by the powerful evangelist Jimmy Allen, Persuading Men to Receive Jesus, 1982, pp. 83-102).

GOD'S POWER TO REVEAL SIN

The cross shows us exactly what we are--sinners. Notice the frequent use of pronouns telling man he is in sin: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:4-6). In this short passage "our" appears five times, "we" appears four times, and "us" and "his" are each found once. Repeatedly Isaiah tells us that Christ was bearing **our** sins, not his own. The cross very clearly reveals that we are sinners. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

One question that has created much discussion over the centuries is "Who is responsible for Jesus' death." In recent years such a question has raised nationwide newspaper headlines as the discussion got mixed with charges and denials of anti-Semitism. Who is responsible? Let the Bible speak: "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). Here Peter is speaking to the Jews and says they were responsible for the death of Jesus. He also lays guilt upon the

Gentiles, the Roman soldiers or "lawless men". Actually every accountable person who has ever lived or will ever live is responsible for the death of Jesus, because it is our sin that put him on the cross.

Not only does the cross reveal that we are sinners, but that as sinners we are unable to attain our own salvation. We are unable to save ourselves. The cross strikes a deadly blow at the sin of human pride. The cross tells us that our lives are incomplete, insufficient, and inadequate without Christ. The cross tells us that every man is a colossal failure if he tries to live apart from God. So the cross reveals man as a sinner and man's poverty in sin.

TO PRODUCE CONVICTION

It is not pleasant to have our sins and faults pointed out to us, but the cross does this. When Peter preached his great sermon on the first day of Pentecost, he laid responsibility for the death of Jesus at the feet of his listeners. When many of them realized this truth, they were "pricked in their hearts" or "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). In other words, they were convicted of sin.

In 1816 Alexander Campbell preached a sermon on the law. Among other things he taught that the Old Testament law was imperfect, because it was unable to portray the hideousness of sin. Lifting up the Son of God on a rugged cross, though, does show how terrible sin really is. When you are forced to form a mental picture of the sinless Son of God, bleeding from his head, his back, his hands, his feet, and his side, your excuses seem trivial. Your selfish rationalizations are no good any more. We ought to be humbled before God.

The cross is an offense to many people for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, though, it is an offense because it strikes at man's pride. It shows

us that we are not able to save ourselves. It exposes our weakness. It tells man he is a sinner and lost. It is said that many years ago a European was captured by a Mohammedan tribe in North Africa. Several people noticed and delighted in his ability to draw and sketch. They were so impressed that they promised his freedom if he would help them by redesigning the mosque they planned on building. All went well until near the end someone noticed that the floor plan of the proposed mosque was in the shape of a cross. The young man was put to death very quickly. The cross was offensive to those people. In various ways it is offensive to much of mankind, but chiefly because it accuses man of being a sinner.

TO FORGIVE

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). Even though they had some benefit for mankind, the offering of blood sacrifice of animals was not able to bring about man's salvation. "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats would take away sin" (Heb. 10:4). The shedding of blood was necessary, but the blood of animals was not sufficient in and of itself to atone for man's sin. As a result the exact relationship between the death of Jesus and sinners under the old and new covenants has been a confusing issue for many a Bible student. For whom did Jesus die?

You have heard expressions like "the sins of the people in the Old Testament were rolled forward" or some similar idea. The best illustration and explanation I have ever heard of this came from the wise, self-taught Gus Nichols. He received the following letter on this question:

I am teaching the Book of Romans in an adult Bible study and have run into the problem of explaining the degree of forgiveness which God granted to the people before Christ died. When were they justified, forgiven, and to what degree were they granted this forgiveness? In other words, did God keep a record of sins under the law and still not account the people's sins to them?

My understanding of this is that the people's sins were forgiven on the same basis that ours are, namely by a faith in God that produced obedience....

When God said he would forgive sins, I feel that he did not lie to the people. It is true that the blood of animals could not take away sins--but rather only the blood of Jesus could.

According to Rev. 13:8, Christ was the lamb slain before the foundations of the world....Do we not limit God to operate within the bounds of time when some say that the sins of the people of the Old Testament were not fully forgiven until Christ died?...

How can God justify Abraham and not forgive him?

This question shows a fine grasp of Bible truth by the author. Brother Nichols agreed fully with the querist and shows his approval with a marvelous illustration:

Yes, God forgave those people who met his terms of pardon back there under the Old Covenant, as he promised in the Old Covenant.... Figuratively speaking, they were saved on credit and Jesus finally came and "Paid it all".

The scriptures teach that the death of Jesus redeems not only those under the New Testament but those under the law of Moses (Heb. 9:15. See

the excellent discussion on this verse by Robert Milligan, Hebrews, Gospel Advocate, pp. 256-57). God "passed over former sins" of the pre-Christian era, but this was not due to indulgence on his part (Rom. 3:25). It was because in his perfect plan he put forward Christ as our atonement (Rom. 3:24), thus proving himself to be righteous (Rom. 3:26). We can compare this to promissory notes or use the expression "rolled forward". Imagine a man who owes one thousand dollars to a bank and is unable to pay it. The bank might roll that loan forward and defer the payment until someone comes along who can pay it in full. The Old Testament sacrifices were like deferred payments, merely postponing the payment-in-full which Jesus made when he died on Calvary.

Back to the main point we can now see how the death of Jesus is God's power to forgive. The wages of sin is death. Justice demands this. Jesus paid this price as a substitute in our place. God can forgive us completely and no accusation of slackness on his part can be sustained. In the Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, an Englishman is caught trying to flee France during the French Revolution. He is to be put to death on the guillotine. One hour before his appointment a friend visits him in jail. He insists that they swap clothes. The Englishman refuses. The French friend tells him that at that moment his wife and child are waiting in a carriage at the door. Moments later guards led the wrong man to his execution. Although the parallel is defective at many points, in a similar way we were living under the certain sentence of death. Christ came and took our place and died our death for us, opening our lives up to the forgiving grace of God.

TO CREATE LOVE

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is

love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:9-10). John sees the source of love among us as being the love of God. God showed us what real love is by giving his Son and made it possible for us to share and experience that love: "We love, because he first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). Prior to our being able to love, God loved us. God acted first. Anything we do is merely a response.

I remember a class at Harding Graduate School of Religion where the professor asked us how we can show our love to God. He challenged us to cite an example that falls outside of the realm of obedience to God. We cited lots of examples, but they all were related to obedience. The way we show our love to God is by obeying his will. Suppose you show two men Mark 16:16 and encourage them to be baptized. One might say, "I love God, so I will be baptized." The other might say, "I love God, but..." "To say, 'I love you but' is to take on a billy goat disposition and 'but' God's commands out of the New Testament" (Allen, Persuading Men, p. 96). As John put it, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:3). Our obedience is a "proof" of our love (2 Cor. 8:24).

There is a beautiful story of two seraphim lingering behind a little longer than other heavenly beings at the scene of the cross. Each of them was thinking about the meaning of this wonderful event (1 Pet. 1:12). One of them, though, was troubled and said, "Men will have more reason to love God now than angels do." "Do we not love God?", the other asked. "Yes," he replied, "but not as man shall." Because of the cross we have all the more reason to love God, to love our fellow man--to be able to love.

CONCLUSION

In Arizona an Indian boy was out plowing corn while his sister was playing in the mud hut in which they lived. She turned over a rock and a rattler crawled out, coiled up, struck, and bit her. She screamed loudly, and her brother came running. Quickly he killed the snake and squeezed his hands around her leg. He sucked the blood and poison out and may have saved her life. Due to a sore in his mouth the poison entered his blood system, though, and he died shortly thereafter.

Long ago back in the Garden of Eden mankind was bitten by a poisonous snake called the Devil. We received the poison of sin which would surely bring about death if something was not done. Jesus came running from heaven and took that poison into his own body, dying on the cross for our sins. At the same time he struck a death stroke against the ancient Serpent, Satan.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

There They Crucified Him

"There they crucified him" (Lk. 23:33).

These are four short words in English, only three in the Greek text. They are brief but so full of meaning. These four words sum up one of the two most important events in human history. The cross is the symbol and source of man's salvation. It is venerated. It is worn as jewelry. It is used in architecture, but in the first century the cross meant something entirely different. Paul said, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). The idea of the Son of God dying on a Roman cross was a scandal to the Jews and ludicrous to the Gentiles.

In the quarters of the imperial page boys on the Palatine Hill of Rome a very interesting drawing has been found. It dates back to the third century. It is a picture of a crucified man with the head of a donkey. Beneath is a boy worshipping him. The inscription reads, "Alexamenos worships his God." Clearly one of the pages was a Christian and the other boys were teasing and taunting him, ridiculing the fact that the Lord of Alexamenos had been crucified. The marvelous part of this picture, though, is that a second inscription is also found there. It is written with a different style, so it was done by another person. It says, "Alexamenos is faithful!" In spite of peer pressure he stood firm and boasted of his crucified Lord (see a reproduction of the drawing in Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church, Eerdmans, p. 174). In this study let us examine the cross as outlined in Lk. 23:33.

THERE

"And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him" (Lk. 23:33). Calvary is the Latin word for skull. Golgotha is from the Aramaic word for skull. Why is this place called the skull? Jerome, an early Christian author (A.D. 400), said it was a place of public execution where lots of skulls were left lying around. Others have identified the location as a certain hill at Jerusalem. The cliff below this hill has caves in it which make it look like a skull to some people, but this is extremely doubtful. The caves which form the skull figure are of very recent origin. Whatever the actual location or meaning, it means a cruel place to us. It was a place of death, pain, suffering, anguish, and execution.

The place where Jesus was executed was a shameful place: "there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left" (Lk. 23:33). To many standing nearby Jesus was just another criminal. To the soldiers he was just another despised Jew, another worthless subject in an occupied country to be eliminated. It was a shameful place to think that the sinless Son of God would be associated with such ideas.

It was shameful because Jesus was probably crucified naked. Remember that the soldiers gambled for his clothes. They divided them up, but one item had no seams. It would probably ruin it to divide or cut it up, so they gambled for it. Since his clothes were taken by the soldiers, it is likely our Lord was crucified naked on the cross. Our art work through the centuries usually leaves a small cloth wrapped around Jesus for modesty sake. It is too shameful to us to portray him that way.

It was a conspicuous place. The implication is that the place of crucifixion was near to a road where lots of people were passing by. Many of them stopped to mock him, make fun of him, and taunt

him. Many, though, merely stood in stunned silence and watched: "And the people stood by, watching" (Lk. 23:35).

It was an appropriate place. Jesus was crucified outside the walls of first century Jerusalem. The author of Hebrews 13:11-12 makes a point of this. His readers were tempted to fall back into Judaism. He tells them of Jesus being crucified outside the gate and says, "Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him" (Heb. 13:13). The meaning is that they can no longer find salvation in the old forms and rituals of Judaism. The animal sacrifices of Judaism will not save. Instead his readers must go outside of Judaism to Jesus for salvation.

THEY

Who crucified Jesus? The immediate answer is that the Roman soldiers crucified him. He was crucified in a land under Roman rule by the orders of a Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Legally it was a Roman execution. Earlier when Pilate had tried to evade responsibility, he was rebuffed by the Jews: "Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.' The Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put any man to death'" (Jn. 18:31). Although the Phoenicians had probably invented crucifixion, the Romans had used it quite well. Their public parading of a criminal, making them carry a cross, and then public crucifixion was designed to stop and squelch rebellion and dissent. It did not work any more than capital punishment works today (worth reading is F. B. Huey, "Capital Punishment," Crises in Morality, edited by C. W. Scudder, Broadman, 1964, pp. 74-90), but it was used frequently throughout the Roman Empire. It is quite plain that the Romans, then, were responsible for the death of Jesus.

The Romans, however, crucified Jesus at the

prompting and instigation of the Jewish people. They are at least indirectly responsible. Jesus had come to his own home and his own people had received him not (Jn. 1:11). At the trial Pilate symbolically washed his hand of the responsibility for the death of Jesus, and the Jews eagerly accepted that responsibility: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). In the early preaching in Acts the guilt for the death of Jesus was laid at the front door of the Jewish people by Peter: "This Jesus...you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).

For centuries some have used this theme for an active anti-Semitic appeal. The Jews have been called "Christ killers". Some have charged the whole nation with deicide. Martin Luther is a tragic example of this sort of thinking. He became a bitter old man during the last fifteen years of his life. He wrote some terrible things which luckily his contemporaries did not take seriously. In 1543 he wrote On the Jews and Their Lies and said things such as the following: "Set fire to their synagogues or schools and...bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn...raze and destroy houses; take away their religious books; give them no safe-conduct on the highways." Thankfully such words did not enjoy a wide acceptance (see Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand, Abingdon, 1940, pp. 379-80).

In the Nazi Holocaust, though, such concepts were carried out. For example in the Spring of 1945, three trucks dumped eight or nine tons of human ashes in a canal to try to cover up the massive killing of the Jews. At the Nuremberg trials a German general was asked how such a horrible thing could have happened. He said, "I am of the opinion that when for years, for decades, the doctrine is preached that Jews are not even human, such an outcome is inevitable." Clearly anti-Semitism is wrong, immoral, and unrighteous. Instead of vengeance, we ought to remember the words of

Jesus at the cross for those responsible for his death: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Not only are the Romans and the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus, though, all of mankind is responsible. You and I are responsible. Jesus did not die due to the authority of a Roman governor or the crafty schemings of a few Jewish leaders. He died according to the plan of God because of the sins of the whole world: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Our sins put Jesus on the cross. Our sins make us, everyone of us, responsible for his death.

Ned Wright tells the story of his sitting in a bar in London--more drunk than sober. A man came in and asked him if he wanted to join the army. In his drunken stupor he said, "Yes." The next morning he woke up hung-over and enlisted. He was in a uniform and in the barracks. "You're in the army now!" Soon the Boer War broke out in South Africa. He was assigned to go there, but he did not want to go. A friend of his wanted to be in the army, but the doctors had rejected him. They were about the same size and build, so the two friends decided to exchange uniforms right before he was scheduled to leave. Later he received news that his friend had been killed while serving in his place. Though a drunkard and a thief, he decided to reform his life. He spent his time addressing church groups, telling of his friend, saying, "He died for me." Well Jesus died for you and me. We can not really blame the Romans. We can not really blame the Jews. Our sin put him on the cross. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Even God had a part in crucifying Jesus. The cross of Jesus was a divine cross. In the first sermon in Acts this is the explanation for why Jesus died: "This Jesus, delivered up according to the defi-

nite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). In Gethsemane God told Jesus that he must drink the cup. When Pilate boasted of his power, Jesus told him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (Jn. 19:11). Throughout his ministry Jesus spoke of his hour, his God-appointed time to die (Jn. 7:6, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 32).

CRUCIFIED

It is difficult for us to get an authentic view of the cross from a twentieth century perspective. We have executions in our society, but we also have a prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. Some say the death penalty is just that, but at least attempts are made now to execute a person quickly and as painlessly as possible. We have idealized and sentimental ideas about the cross. The demand to "carry our own cross" has no shock value today. To get a handle on the meaning of bearing our own cross, we must be reminded of what crucifixion really meant.

Paul said, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). There was an ancient horror and revulsion at crucifixion. The idea that a Saviour-God was the subject of crucifixion had a special shock value. One author claimed that crucifixion was an offensive affair, "obscene" in the original sense of the word. It was a method of subjecting a person to the utmost indignity and pain. It was such a humiliating way to die that Roman citizens could not be executed by crucifixion.

Even before the actual crucifixion of our Lord he was humiliated:

And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right

hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail King of the Jews!' And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head" (Mt. 27:28-29).

There were many varieties of thorns in Palestine. We do not know what type was used and it is unimportant. Certainly it was very painful, though. It might have more symbolism than mocking his royalty, though. One of the curses placed upon the earth because of man's sin was the cursing of the ground with thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18). Jesus was bearing the curse of our sin, wearing a crown of thorns.

His scepter was a reed, designed to make fun of him as a king. They adorned him in jest and then spat on him. Here they descended to the level of animals. In zoos there are certain cages of monkeys and orangutans to which you should not get too close. Some of them are very good long distance spitters. I remember going outside once and seeing a little three year old boy standing in our front yard covered with spit. Two older boys were running past him, spitting on him over and over again. The look on his face was pitiful. He was frozen there, but he was shaking like a leaf in horror. I got a damp wash cloth and made the two boys clean him up. I then marched them over to the grandfather of one of the boys and reported their deeds to him. He gave his grandson a good paddling and reported the other boy to his parents. Hopefully he got the same. What they did was cruel and horrible. It hurt that little boy deeper than I could ever express with words. Imagine how the Son of God felt when he was spat upon by his own creation.

Then they hit our Lord with the reed. The reed might be compared to a switch. As big as a fifteen-hand high horse is, you can get its attention quickly with a switch or small whip. It can hurt! Imagine the pain from being struck on the head with a stick,

the blows driving the thorns deeper into our Lord's flesh. Then they slapped him. A slap is painful, but even worse is the insult you feel from a slap.

What may have hurt the most from all of this was not the physical pain, but the mockery of that which was true and holy. When people make fun of what you treasure very highly, something you cherish very deeply, something you hold very sacred, then that mockery hurts beyond words. In the movie "The Man From Snowy River" a young boy is left to make his way in the world when his father is killed in an accident. He gets a job on a ranch where some of the other hands make fun of him and attempt to make life miserable for him. His horse was a special present to him from a close friend. The other hands, though, make fun of it and call it a half-mule. He bristles and says, "He is a mountain horse."

Later they mention the name of a famous horseman and speak glowing words of admiration of him. The young man jumps into the conversation and says that his father used to be mates with him. They laugh. They mock him. You, of course, are not surprised that this young man gets into lots of fights with these other ranch hands. Their remarks hurt him deeply. They made fun of his horse and of his father, and he was not able to hold back his anger.

I took a course entitled "Women and Religion" at Lexington Theological Seminary some years ago. There were about seven female ministerial students and one other male student in the class. Although I had to listen to lots of things I did not agree with, things went fairly well until one day when a woman was a guest speaker. She was the most sarcastic, nauseating speaker I have ever heard in my life. She made crude, cutting remarks about Augustine. Then she said similar things about the apostle Paul saying his problem was that he never got married. Her vulgar innuendoes along with her grammar school level

feminist theology was too much for me.

I was shaken for several days. I did not return to class for a few days. One of the female students in the class thought I had dropped out right then. I almost did. She said she looked at me several times during the lecture and said my chin was scraping the floor. Well I did drop out of that school at the end of that semester. Any school that condoned such mockery of persons and things that ought to be precious to a Christian did not merit my continued study there. My point here is to try to get you to imagine how Jesus felt. He was the Son of God. He was truly the Davidic King of the Jews, yet look how they ridiculed and mocked him. That must have hurt more than the actual physical pain he suffered.

The scourging of Jesus was also very cruel. The whip used to flog prisoners usually had a short wooden handle. Leather thongs were attached to this handle, and the ends of the thongs often had bits of metal, bone or other sharp objects attached to them. Stripes were laid across a person's back by the thongs, and the flesh would be ripped open by the sharp ends. Sometimes two men would flog a person, one from each side. The lacerations of the flesh that would result could be very deep, even cutting into deep-seated veins and arteries. At times internal organs were exposed. Before a person was scourged they were placed in a bent-over position in order to pull the skin tight. This was such terrible punishment that Roman citizens were not to be scourged. On one occasion Paul was beaten publicly. Later the officials discovered that he was a Roman citizen: "The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them" (Acts 16:38). The scourging that Jesus received before his crucifixion did not usually kill a person, but it was undoubtedly severe enough that it greatly weakened our Lord. It was a terrible prelude to what lay ahead.

Next Jesus was forced to carry his cross through the streets as long as his strength allowed. This usually meant carrying the cross bar only which would later be hoisted up on a pole already in a fixed position at the place of crucifixion. As Jesus went through the streets of the Via Dolorosa ("Way of Sorrows") there were many who were sympathetic to his plight, and many who looked upon him with scorn or mockery.

At Calvary Jesus was crucified. Artists have given many different portrayals of how Jesus was crucified. In the first century there were many different types of crosses. Some people were even crucified upside down. Crucifixion itself, though, was designed to torture a person without immediately injuring any vital portion of their body. In this way there was usually no brief suffering. It would be protracted over several hours or days. The hands and feet were nailed to the cross. Sometimes the arms or the chest were tied with ropes. You could not move very much on a cross. If insects got on you and bit you, you could not get them off. If the heat of the sun was beating down on you, you could not move into the shade. If it was a cold winter night, you could not find warmth. A loss of body moisture plus the fixed position of the body would cause the muscles to cramp. Any football player who has had to play on a warm day can imagine the horror of such cramps. Fever, infection from the wounds, and a loss of blood were also complications common to death by crucifixion.

In spite of all we know about this Roman practice there is still some mystery and uncertainty about Jesus' crucifixion. In recent years, though, some new information has helped our understanding a great deal. In 1968 in an archaeological dig on the North side of Jerusalem some graves were found. One was the grave of a victim by crucifixion. The date when this man was crucified was probably between A.D. 7 and A.D. 70 according to the

pottery found with the body, the most useful item in dating archaeological finds. The name written on the container holding the body was Jehohanan or John. This man was almost five foot, six inches tall. It is thought that he was between twenty-four and twenty-eight years old.

These bones were studied for two years before the archaeologists told the world of their discovery. Up to this time all of our evidence about crucifixion was documentary. We had no actual physical evidence to examine. Crucifixion was outlawed in the fourth century by Constantine, and no remains of victims were known before this discovery in Jerusalem. Bones had been found with holes in the heel of the hand or in the feet or ankles, but such injuries might have been from some other source. The remains of Jehohanan were unique, though. A four-and-a-half inch nail was still in his heel! The cross had been made of olive wood, and the nail had been driven into a tough knot in the wood. Probably it had become bent and the soldiers were unable to remove it for reuse, thus this rare discovery was made possible.

Another piece of wood was found between the nail and the heel. This was acacia wood. Thus in the crucifixion of Jehohanan the nail was first driven through a piece of acacia wood and then through the heel. This was done to obtain a better support of the body weight. Sometimes another piece of wood was attached to a cross which provided a small seat to support the body weight. The knees were frequently twisted to one side and the feet were pulled up under the hips before being nailed to the cross. This uncomfortable position would make cramps more likely. It also made breathing difficult. The victim would have to pull up with his arms and push up with his legs in order to breathe. Thus the horrible pain and agony of crucifixion was coupled with a constant struggle to breathe freely.

The legs of Jehohanan were broken. This final

shock would hasten death quickly. One reason it brought on death in a brief period of time is breathing was made almost impossible, since a victim could no longer push upward with his more powerful leg muscles. The arms simply could not do the work. We know that when the soldiers came to break the legs of Jesus and the two thieves, our Lord was already dead:

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs (Jn. 19:32-33).

If the soldiers had broken the legs of Jesus then his death would have followed very quickly primarily due to suffocation. Since our Lord was already dead, the specific medical cause of his death is not as easy to determine. We are probably safest in saying it is a combination of factors from the scourging, crucifixion, and other afflictions which he suffered.

While it really would benefit us very little to know the specific cause of death, hopefully this review of the sufferings of Jesus is beneficial in another way. If we wonder if Jesus loves us, all we need to do is look at the cross. If we wonder if God really cares about us, all we need to do is look at the cross. If we wonder if God really expects anything from us other than mere lip service, all we need to do is look at the cross and remember the words of Jesus, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). The cross of Jesus was not padded. It was a cross with splinters, that is, it was a cruel, rugged cross. Jesus gave his life for us and he demands nothing less than our whole being in return.

HIM

"There they crucified him" (Lk. 23:33). Our study of this great passage is not complete unless we remember the meaning of the last word--"him". Many great men have died in the past. Many great men and women have given their lives for others. The story of the church is also a story of many martyrs. Many of them have even died painful deaths similar to that of our Lord. Many martyrs have been innocent. They may not have been sinless, but most were innocent of the charges for which they were killed. One argument used against capital punishment is the danger of putting to death an innocent person. If you find that a convicted person is really innocent and they are in prison, you can not give them back the lost years, but you can give them freedom with the rest of their life. On the other hand if they have already been put to death, there is nothing you can do except apologize to the family. There have been men on death row who were later proven to be innocent. There may have been men executed who were actually innocent. Yet the death of such an individual has absolutely nothing to do with our salvation.

The "him" that died for our sins on Calvary was not only innocent but sinless. The apostle Peter who spent several years observing the life of Jesus declared, "He committed no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22). Peter then discussed the cross of Christ. Yet part of the Restoration heritage has been our rejection of the hereditary, total depravity of Calvinism. Is it not possible, then, that an innocent baby might be sacrificed for others? Would not this atone for our sin before God? Of course it would not. Then again, why is the death of Jesus different?

An artist once portrayed the Calvary scene in a very interesting way. The two thieves were shown in agony on their respective crosses. Between them the center cross was enveloped in a sunburst of glory.

The mystery of the cross is not just that a man died. It is not just that a man died by crucifixion. It is not just that the man who died was innocent of the charges against him. It is not just that he was sinless, although that is very vital. The complete picture is not drawn until we realize **who** the **him** was, the sunburst of glory.

In order to be reminded of who was crucified there, let us briefly examine the Son of God in the gospel of Mark. It can be argued that Jesus as the Son of God is the theme of Mark. The book begins with these words: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1). At the baptism of Jesus the heavenly voice proclaims, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11). As the narrative in Mark progresses curiosity about Jesus increases. People are more and more amazed at him and wonder who he is.

When Jesus taught at a synagogue at Capernaum they "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority" (Mk. 1:22). "They were all amazed" (Mk. 1:27). The demons, though, revealed Jesus' identity: "You are the Son of God" (Mk. 4:11). Some would pass that off as crazy talk from demon possessed people, and the wonderment about Jesus continued unabated. Even the disciples did not always know what to think of him. After the calming of the sea during the storm they were perplexed: "And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'" (Mk. 4:41). When he walked on the water they "were utterly astounded" (Mk. 6:51).

There is a dramatic element here in the gospel of Mark, as it must have been experienced in the life of those confronted by this man Jesus. All knew he was special. He was different. But who was he? The suspense has been built up to a climax in the gospel of Mark. Half way through the gospel of Mark there is a dividing point. Everything up to that point has been concentrated in Galilee. In the

second half Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem and begins his journey toward the cross. What occurs at that dividing point is extremely important. It is a key theme in Mark. Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" (Mk. 8:27-28). The whole first half of the book has people asking that question. Various answers were being given such as John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. He then asks, "But who do you say that I am?" The answer was, "You are the Christ." He was a different Christ than they expected, because from that day forward he began walking a road leading to the cross.

At the end of Mark the high priest asks Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus replies in the affirmative, "I am" (Mk. 14:61). The people had wondered. The apostles had wondered. In time the apostles realized it. Here Jesus openly confesses it. Then the climax for this theme is reached in the statement at the cross by the centurion. When Jesus died, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk. 15:39). We can not know just what that soldier meant by those words. He may have merely meant that Jesus was a good man. He may have meant that surely Jesus was innocent rather than guilty. He may, though, have followed the events closely and meant much more.

One thing is clear, though. Mark uses those words as a confession of who Jesus is. They provide Mark a fitting climax to his theme of Jesus' Sonship. Jesus is declared the Son of God in Mk. 1:1. At his baptism God calls him his beloved Son (Mk. 1:11). At the half-way point of the gospel Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ (Mk. 8:28). While on trial Jesus confesses he is the Son of God (Mk. 14:61). Finally the centurion makes the same confession. The progression goes from God, to apostles, to Jesus himself. It ends with a Gentile, a man who would normally have little concern with such matters making the final confession. To a

Roman audience which Mark was probably intended for, this would be most significant.

That centurion had likely watched many men die in the course of his career as a soldier. He might have helped to crucify more men than he could remember. Why should not this death be just another death? Why should it be different? He witnessed Jesus' composure and the events surrounding his death and he knew something was different. This man was not just another worthless thief or Jewish insurrectionist. When this man died even the heavens did not remain silent as darkness covered the land. Surely this man was the Son of God.

The "him" that died on Calvary by virtue of who he is is able to make a difference in our salvation. Since Jesus was more than a man, he can be more than an example. If he was only a man, then he can be merely an example. Let me illustrate it this way. Paderewski was one of the greatest pianists of all time. He is a great example to others of how to play the piano brilliantly. For me to learn how to play the piano well, though, I need more than an example. I can watch him for years and try to imitate him, but that will not make me a great piano player. Likewise we need more than a mere example in order to be saved. We need someone who can achieve our salvation. That is why it is important that the "him" of Calvary was the very Son of God.

CONCLUSION

Why did Christ come to earth? Why did he endure the horrible agony of Calvary? He had to endure that pain, because sin had made a separation between us and God, and it was necessary for a Saviour to appear for us to have any hope (Isa. 59:1-2). Once we sinned we fell into a state where we were unable to help ourselves.

Imagine that you are climbing up a mountain. A

friend is helping you. He takes the lead and is always reaching down to pull you up over the difficult places. Suddenly at one point you pull your hand away. He continues to hold out his helping hand, but you refuse to grasp it. Suddenly you slip and begin to fall. You go over the edge of a thousand foot cliff. Now as you fall you have a change of heart and reach out your hand, but it is too late. You are no longer free to grasp the helping hand of your friend. You are fallen. You have lost the position you once held.

Imagine a child with two dollars to spend. The child tries to decide between a toy and a book. After spending a lot of time trying to decide, the child buys the toy. A few days later, though, after having grown tired of the toy, the child changes his mind. He takes the toy to the bookseller and tries to exchange it for the book. The bookseller will not make the exchange, because the toy is worthless to him. He does not care that the toy originally cost as much as the book. The child is stuck with the toy.

Imagine a knight that suddenly appears between two armies about to wage war. Both armies bid for his services. The knight finally chooses Army A. As the war is waged it becomes clear that Army B is going to win. The knight sneaks away from the battle and sends a message to the leader of Army B saying he has changed his mind. He has decided that he would prefer fighting for Army B. The king of Army B responds that the conditions are different now. Before he had a free choice. Now he has none. At best he can become a prisoner of war. He could have chosen differently, but now everything has changed.

All three of these parables (two of which come from the writings of Soren Kierkegaard) illustrate the plight of man. We had a choice at one time and we chose sin (Rom. 3:10, 23). We are not in a position to bargain with God. We do not stand before

him in the same state as we once did. In spite of our complete absence of any right to appeal to the mercy of God, God has responded from heaven with mercy--even before we appealed for it: "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly....While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, 8).

Christ has died for you. He has made possible eternal life for you. The choice is now yours. If you have never accepted Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then your decision for him will mean rebirth and forgiveness of sins. A decision against him means you will remain in a lost state. If you merely decide to wait, that is in reality a decision against him. The choice is yours. Will you accept him or reject him?

In the Alps a Saint Bernard dog was making what would have been his sixty-ninth rescue. He had sniffed out a man mostly covered with new falling snow. He uncovered him and then laid his body over the man's to give it warmth as he had been trained to do. Slowly the man started to revive and regain consciousness. When he did he mistook the dog for a wolf. Reacting in his half-conscious stupor he reached for his knife. He stabbed the dog and killed it before he realized he was killing his saviour. You may not like the analogy, but if you reject Jesus you are doing the same to him. He has already given his life for you. Rejecting him, though, is like crucifying him all over again (Heb. 6:6).

A missionary in India was preaching to a crowd about the crucifixion of Jesus. A Hindu priest was listening and becoming more restless all the time. He suddenly sprang to his feet. He pleaded with the missionary to leave. When the missionary inquired why, he said it was because of this crucified Jesus. He admitted that they had no one like him in Hinduism for sinners. He was afraid the people would forsake their Hindu temples and follow this Jesus. In this lesson I have attempted to paint a

mental picture of Christ crucified as Paul did before the Galatians: "...before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" (Gal. 3:1). The choice is now yours. There is no neutral zone. You can accept him through faith and obedience, or you can reject him by unbelief. If you do nothing you are rejecting him by default. If you have not given your life to Christ will you not do that today?

Suggested Reading

The literature on the cross and the atonement is immense. The following is a very brief listing of some works that have been especially useful to me.

"A Death In Jerusalem." Time, 18 January 1971, pp. 64-65.

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About the Author

Steve Williams grew up in Huntsville, Alabama, attending Mayfair Church of Christ. He graduated from Huntsville High School and attended the University of Alabama for three years. Upon deciding to become a preacher he transferred to Harding College and graduated with the B.S. degree in 1972. After several years study in Memphis, Tennessee he graduated from Harding Graduate School of Religion with the M.Th. degree. During these years he worked with the Alton Church of Christ in Alton, Missouri, the Tupelo Church of Christ in Tupelo, Arkansas, and the Jackson Avenue Church of Christ in Memphis.

After working with the Boone Plaza Church of Christ in Frankfort, Kentucky for three years, he began doctoral studies in ethics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas where he is now a Ph.D. candidate. For the last seven years he has preached for the Robinson Church of Christ in Waco. This book is his fifth such effort. His first book was The Death of a Child (Firm Foundation, 1977). His second, What You Always Wanted To Know About Your Preacher, But You Never Cared Enough To Ask (Choate, 1979), marked the beginning of his friendship with missionary and publisher J. C. Choate. Brother Choate also published his third book (A Thorn In Your Flesh, 1985) and a fourth book in Asia (Grace, Faith, and Obedience, 1986).

Steve is married to the former Anita Dail Boyd of Little Rock, Arkansas. They have two daughters, Christi (age 12) and Stephanie (age 9).