

Why Did Jesus Die on the Cross?

Why did Jesus die on the cross? Some claim that Jesus got caught up in an illegal conspiracy against the Roman Empire. He claimed to be a king, and the Roman government did not appreciate that. So they arrested him and killed him. On that view, Jesus was a rebel, a criminal, a Jewish zealot, and he met the end that normally happens to those kind of people. He was just one of many hundreds or thousands whom the Roman government crucified for various crimes.

Others suggest that Jesus was a fraud, a phony, a false teacher. On that view, Jesus died because of his own sin. He claimed to be the Messiah but he was not. He did not bring in his glorious kingdom because he was not the king. He was a mistaken and perhaps an insane false teacher who ran afoul of the Roman justice system. Ultimately, he died because of his fraudulent and mistaken claims about himself.

Muslims claim that Jesus did not really die on the cross. God hid him, and another man was crucified in his place.

If we take the NT seriously, such claims are ridiculous and blasphemous. He was not a rebel against the Roman government, nor was he a false prophet. He certainly did die on the cross. But he did not die because of his illegal behavior or his erroneous teaching.

Then why did he die? Let's consider the intent and effects of Jesus' death.

I. The motivation in the death of Christ

A. God's love for us motivated Jesus' death.

John 3:16

John 15:13 *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

1 John 3:16 *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: ...*

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us..*

Jesus' death was the greatest demonstration of God's love for us.

1 John 4:10 *God ... loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins.*

- B. God's sovereign plan motivated the death of Jesus; his sacrificial death was a divine necessity in God's plan.

Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). The decree of God from eternity past required that the Jews would reject Jesus and that the Romans would kill him; it was all part of God's eternal, sovereign plan.

Luke 24:26 *Ought (δεῖ) not Christ to have suffered these things ...*

Acts 2:23 *Him, being delivered by the **determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

God's "determinate counsel," by his own "foreknowledge," decreed the death of his son to provide for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 4:27–28 *For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.*

This verse mentions both the human actors seeking Jesus' death as well as God's sovereign purpose in using these people to accomplish his plan.

Jesus' death was not a mistake or the result of circumstances beyond his control. Jesus did not stumble into an unfortunate series of events. God planned from eternity past that Jesus would be the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. That plan made Jesus' death necessary.

- C. Jesus' desire to fulfill God's sovereign plan motivated Jesus' death.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, just before his arrest, Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Lk 22:42).

John 10:15 *... I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Gal 1:4 *he "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father,"*

Hebrews 10:5-7 *Behold I have come...to do thy will O God.*

Ultimately, Jesus died in submission to the divine will and plan.

Trans: Jesus died on the cross because of God's love for us and because he had a plan to save us from our sins. That's what motivated Jesus' death; now let's consider...

II. The intent in the death of Christ

The primary goal/aim in Jesus' death was the salvation of sinners.

1 Tim 1:15 ... *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Luke 19:10 *the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

Mt 20:28 *he came to "give his life a ransom for many."*

Titus 2:14 *He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a special people, zealous of good works.*

- A. The purpose of Jesus' death was to deliver us from the evil world, to purge and wash us, to make us holy, zealous, fruitful in good works, to render us acceptable, and to bring us to God.¹
- B. Of course, Jesus' death does not save universally; some people do not want to be saved. Many people reject Jesus' death as a means of salvation. The road to salvation is narrow and few are on it.
- C. But some people are concerned about their sinfulness and their eternal destiny. Each sinner must accept Jesus' death as his own means of personal salvation. Jesus' death becomes effective for sinners when we repent of sin and believe in the person and work of Christ for our salvation.
 1. Repentance is turning from your sin.
 2. Believing is placing your full faith and confidence in Christ alone to be saved.

¹ Some of this is based on the work by John Owen, "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ."

Romans 10:9 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

Trans: God's intent in sending Jesus to die on the cross was to save sinners. And that is exactly what Jesus does—

Heb 7:25 *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, ...*

III. The Effects of the Death of Christ

We know that Jesus came to save his people from their sin. We can describe salvation in very simple terms—*Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

But the Bible expands this definition and explains exactly what happens when a sinner is saved. God describes salvation in various ways and with various terms. We can consider how Jesus' death provides for various aspects of salvation.

A. The death of Christ provides reconciliation.

1. Reconciliation is necessary when a relationship has been severed or broken.
2. Sin breaks our fellowship with God. Sinners are enemies of God by virtue of their rebellion against God and their violation of God's commands.

Isaiah 59:2 *your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

3. God brings sinful man back into fellowship with God through Jesus death. Salvation removes the enmity and brings about reconciliation between sinful man and a holy God.

Rom 5:10 *when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.*

2 Corinthians 5:18–19 *... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, ...*

Have you been reconciled to God through Jesus' death?

B. The death of Christ provides justification.

1. Our main problem is that we are not just or righteous. We are the very opposite—we are unrighteous and lawless.

Romans 3:10–12 10 *As it is written, There is **none righteous**, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

2. Justification is the solution to that problem. When we turn to Christ in faith, God declares that the sinner is righteous. We are made right with God purely by faith, not on the basis of our own good works.

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Galatians 2:16 *... a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*

3. This righteousness is credited or imputed to our account by faith. God declares that we are righteous based on Jesus' death and resurrection for us. When we repent and believe the Gospel, God declares that we are righteous in his sight.

2 Corinthians 5:21 *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Have you been justified through the death of Jesus?

C. The death of Christ provides redemption.

Romans 3:24 *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

Col 1:14 *in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins*

1. The Bible says that we are slaves of sin and in bondage to our own sinful desires.

John 8:34 *Jesus [said] ... Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*

2. Redemption is paying a price to release one in bondage.

3. Christ paid the price for slaves of sin to be set free. His death bought believers out of the slave market of sin and releases us from the authority of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

1 Peter 1:18–19 *... you were ... redeemed with ... the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

Have you been redeemed through the death of Jesus? Do you have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin?

D. The death of Christ provides propitiation.

Rom 3:25 *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins ...*

1Jo 2:2 *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

1. In a spiritual sense, sin is like a debt. Every time we sin, we violate God's commands and increase our sin debt.
2. To propitiate means "to satisfy." A debt is owed, and the payment of the debt pays off the lender.
3. Christ is the propitiation for our sins. That means that he paid the debt by virtue of his death on the cross.

4. We often use the word “atonement” to describe the sin-paying value of Jesus’ death. Jesus paid for our sins by dying in our place on the cross.
5. Jesus’ death was substitutionary—he died in our place. He satisfied God’s wrath against us by being our substitute.
6. God is satisfied/propitiated by Jesus’ payment for our sin.

Isa 53:10-11 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: ...

Has God been propitiated regarding your sin by Jesus’ death?

E. The death of Christ provides adoption.

1. Adoption places a person who is not part of a family into a family.
2. Spiritually speaking, that happens at the moment of salvation. God adopts the believer into his own family. We are the children of God by faith.

Gal 4:4-5 God sent forth his Son, ... to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

3. Adoption gives us great privileges; we are the children of God. We can call upon God as our Father. He looks upon us as his children. And that status can never change.

Are you an adopted child of God through faith in Jesus’ death?

F. The death of Christ provides sanctification.

1 Cor 6:11 ... ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Sanctification pertains to holiness. Being sanctified means being holy. Jesus’ death on the cross makes believers holy.

We should understand two senses in which believers are sanctified.

1. Jesus' death sanctifies us *positionally*.
 - a) That is, at the point of salvation, we are declared to be holy in God's sight.
 - b) God imputes/credits to us the righteousness of Christ. We stand before God clothed in the perfections of Christ.
 - c) So our position before God is perfectly holy and righteous.
 - d) That's why all believers are "saints" – holy ones. We stand before God in Christ's holiness because we are united to Christ by faith.
 - e) Even though we continue to sin and fall short, God considers us to be holy in his sight.
2. Jesus' death sanctifies us *personally*.
 - a) Christians can live a holy life because we are saved. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us by purging away the uncleanness and pollution of our sins, renewing in us the image of God, and supplying us with the grace we need to mortify sin.
 - b) In fact, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin" (1Jn. 1:7).
 - c) Believers are responsible to live a holy lifestyle. We must grow in Christian virtues, and the fruit of the Spirit should be evident in our lives.

Have you been and are you being sanctified through Jesus' death?

G. The death of Christ provides (future) glorification.

Romans 8:29–30 *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, ... Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

1. Ultimately, the death of Christ provides heaven, glory, and immortality forever for those who believe in him.
2. This glorious inheritance is so guaranteed that the Bible speaks of it as if it has already happened.
3. We enjoy God's *grace* now and eternal *glory* in the future.

Do you have the confidence of future glorification through the death of Jesus?

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The most important question to ask is, has Jesus saved you from your sins? The proper response to the death of Jesus is repentance of sin and faith in Jesus. God's intent in sending Jesus was to save sinners.

Hebrews 7:25 *He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, ...*

However, the saving benefits of Jesus' death are reserved for believers alone. Only believers are reconciled with God, justified, redeemed, propitiated, sanctified, and glorified. The saving benefits of Jesus death apply to you only when you repent of your sin and trust in Christ to save you.

These benefits flow from Jesus' death on our behalf. He willingly laid down his life as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

On Good Friday, we naturally reflect on the intent and effects of Jesus' death. The natural result as we consider these things is an attitude of thanksgiving and remembrance.

And in a moment, we will partake of the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of his death for us.