

**THE DEATH OF JESUS
I PETER 3:18**

NEED: TO COME TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST

PROPOSITION: THE DEATH OF JESUS ON THE CROSS OPENED THE WAY FOR GUILTY SINNERS TO COME TO GOD.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD PERSONS TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF THEIR SINS.

INTRODUCTION:

Good people do suffer for doing good. Doing the right thing will sometimes bring suffering to your life. The supreme example of this is Jesus Christ our Lord.

When Peter wants to illustrate that it is sometimes the will of God for us to suffer for doing the right thing, he turns to the death of Jesus. In one brief sentence he reminds us of the nature and the purpose of the death of Jesus Christ. The memory of Jesus hanging naked until He was dead on that Roman cross outside of Jerusalem was forever fixed in the mind of Simon Peter. While at the time of his death Peter thought it was a tragic waste of life, in time his understanding was enlarged. After the resurrection of Jesus he came to understand that the sufferings and death of Jesus had been necessary for his salvation.

As we approach Good Friday and Easter it is well for us to refresh our memory concerning the death of Jesus. This simple statement by an eyewitness of His sufferings

serves as a wonderful vehicle to bring before us the basic realities of His death. There is not a more concise statement in all of the New Testament!

I. HIS DEATH WAS VIOLENT.

It is of interest that though Peter has been instructing us concerning sufferings when he comes to Jesus he speaks of His death. Twice in this simple statement he reminds us of his death. The combination of the two expressions in this statement is a reminder that His death was a violent death.

“He was put to death in the body.” This statement points to the violence of His death. A more literal translation would be “Having been put to death.” This is the kind of expression used for people who died by execution. The death of Jesus was an ugly scene. Death by crucifixion was parallel to what we would know as death in the electric chair of our day. It had such a stigma about it that no Roman citizen could ever be crucified. They reserved crucifixion for enemies like the Jews, those who were especially despised. I am not sure what your feelings capitol punishment might be, but death as a criminal is never something that you would to glorify.

I read with keen interest John Grisham’s book, The Chamber, in which he deals with the problem of capitol punishment in fiction. In his book the accused was Southern white racist who was convicted of bombing the law offices of a Jewish lawyer. When the law offices were bombed two small children of the Jewish lawyer were crushed to death. The jury convicted the accused of the crime and condemned him to death by execution. You are allowed to enter into the agony of someone facing execution as the man participates

with a grandson, a young lawyer handling his first major case, defends him against the system. But in the end the old, tough, Southern racist dies. He dies as volts of electricity are sent through his body. Death by crucifixion was not quite so humane. In this death a man was nailed to an upright and was lifted up between heaven and earth. Usually he would be stripped of all clothing and the place of execution would be near some public roadway to increase the shame and effect of the death. Death usually came as the result of suffocation. Over a long period of time the shoulders of the victim would slump and his lungs would be so impacted that he could no longer breathe. This was the death that was intended for Jesus.

Actually Jesus did not die from suffocation but rather died when He dismissed His Spirit into the presence of the Father. That He did not die from suffocation is obvious from the loud cry that He gave just before His death. But his death was such an ugly spectacle. It was the kind of spectacle that caused the sensitive to hide their faces and to weep. We have made out of the cross a thing of beauty but it was actually an ugly, violent thing that brought Jesus to His death.

II. HIS DEATH WAS SACRIFICIAL.

The language of the Apostle gives emphasis to the sacrificial character of his death. “For Christ died for sins once for all.” This expression is sacrificial language. “For sins” was the technical term used for a sin offering in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The preposition when in association with the word sin almost always refers to a sin offering.

You may be familiar with the Old Testament sin offering. It was an offering in which an innocent animal bore the guilt of the sinner and died for the sin. When Peter indicates that Jesus died, “concerning sins,” he means for us to understand that His death was a sacrificial offering for the sins of the whole world. His sufferings were atoning and propitiatory.

That He was qualified to be the sin offering was indicated by “the righteous.” Peter makes it clear that “the righteous for the unrighteous.” There was no unrighteousness in Him. He met every requirement of the perfect law of God. Every word, deed and thought of His life up to that point had been righteous. So He died as the sin offering for the unrighteous. He died for sinners like you and like me this sacrificial death.

There is a dimension of this sacrificial character of his death that we have difficulty comprehending. In order to become a sin offering and to die for our sins, he had to become so identified with our sins that in a sense they became His sins. He had to be willing for the Father to treat Him as the guilty sinner. None of us are equipped to begin to comprehend this dimension of His suffering.

The word “once” must not be overlooked! This puts His death in contrast to the sacrifices in the Old System. New sin offerings were required for every transgression, and for every new day. But not so with the death of Christ. His death was such that it provided all that was needed for all sin for all time. What a sacrifice! What a Savior!

It is enough if you and I will always keep in mind that it was for “our sins” that He died. It was our sins that made His death a necessity.

III. HIS DEATH WAS SUBSTITUTIONARY.

The other dimension of His death set forth by Peter in our text is this substitutionary aspect. “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body. “For the unrighteous” uses a particular preposition that calls attention to this substitutionary character of His death. The Greek preposition means literally “on behalf of, instead of.” The idea in the word is that He died on our behalf or in our place. He was taking what should have come to us .

The importance of this aspect of His death is illustrated in a story out of the Civil War that I have read different accounts of. Captain Reginald Wallis wrote many books on the Christian life and this was one of his favorite stories. He tells of an incident during the American Civil War when men were drawn by lot to join the army. A man named Wyatt was called up to fight for the South. He was the sole bread winner for his very large family. Realizing this hardship another young man named Pratt volunteered to go instead. He was accepted and drafted to the front bearing the name and number of Wyatt.

Eventually Pratt was killed in battle. Having died as the substitute and in the name of the other man, Wyatt was considered as killed in action. At a later date Wyatt was again called up for service but at the recruiting office he calmly stated that he had died already. When the entry was researched it was discovered that although the real Wyatt was alive

and well, he was dead in the eyes of authorities because he was identified with his substitute. Therefore, he went free. He was not required to go to war.

When we speak of Jesus dying in our stead, this is what we mean. When he died, I died, and therefore, I am free. It is a most marvelous reality to understand that Jesus Christ died in my stead.

IV. HIS DEATH WAS PURPOSEFUL.

Peter touches on the purpose of His death with the words, “To bring you to God.” The word translated, “To bring” actually has in it the idea of opening the way for one to gain an audience before another. It was a technical word used of one who was able to gain an audience before the king or before a court. It has in it the idea of bringing someone near.

Because of our sins, there was a great gulf between God and us. There was a barrier that prevented us from gaining access in to the presence of God. In actuality human kind has been seeking to escape the presence of God ever since the Garden of Eden. It is just too uncomfortable for a guilty sinner to be in the presence of a Holy God. But because Jesus did what He did as the sacrifice for sin on the cross you and I now have access into the presence of God. The cross is the center of our faith.

The bottom line of all of this is that we now can know the forgiveness of sin. An elementary school teacher put it into perspective in these simple, poetic words:

He came to my desk with a quivering lip,

the lesson was done.

“Have you a new sheet for me, dear teacher?

I’ve spoiled this one.”

I took his sheet, all soiled and blotted

and gave him a new one all unspotted.

And into his tired heart I cried,

“Do better now, my child.”

I went to the throne with a trembling heart,

the day was done.

“Have you a new day for me, dear Master?

I’ve spoiled this one.”

He took my day, all soiled and blotted

and gave me anew one all unspotted.

And into my tired heart he cried,

“Do better now, my child.”