

## **Connecting Minds**

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

### The Gospel of John

Chapter 19:18,30

**"They crucified Him... He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."**

I want us to focus for a while on the key phrases from these two verses with regard to the Atonement. In verse 18 we are told Jesus was crucified - "They crucified Him..." In verse 30 we are told that the work of Christ is finished - "It is finished..."

Almost all who grow up in a church know that "Christ died for them." Even some who are outside the church, though the number is dwindling, know vaguely that the Christian message is that Jesus died for them. But what good does it do to know that is true if you don't know what it means? I read an excellent small story that illustrates this: "A man is sitting on a pier fishing on a calm summer day. Suddenly another man comes running down the pier, dives into the water, and drowns. Having witnessed this, I explain to the fisherman, 'This man died for you!' The fisherman, however, has great trouble understanding why the man needed to die for him. After all, he was in no danger that he could see."<sup>1</sup>

John tells us that Christ was crucified, "and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center..." If the cross of Jesus was physically placed at the center of two criminals in His death, so His death has been the center of Christianity ever since that day and we need to understand what it means if we are to help people to see the danger that they are in. The challenge for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the explain to our post-Christian world what it means and why it is important that Jesus died, in fact, had to die for sinners to be saved and what sinners are saved from.

Verse 30 - "It is finished..." In the Greek this phrase is only one word –Teleo – and it means "end or goal, to make an end or accomplishment, to bring to perfection or to its destined goal." When Jesus says "It is finished..." He means

<sup>1</sup> Tell the Truth, Will Metzger (quote from James Denny), pg. 111

three things. One, His life in it's at-the-time human sense was finished, for "He gave up His spirit..." Two, His sufferings on the cross were finished. But thirdly, and most importantly for us, His work of securing salvation was finished.

Lest we think this is a simple and uncontroversial understanding, I want to highlight three of the more common false teachings surrounding the death of Christ, and in particular His words from the cross.

- Jesus' death was a tragedy - As if He were saying "I have performed my best in this world; I tried to convince them of the love of God, but I have failed... it is finished." And people say, "What a tragedy. The leaders and crowds of Jesus' day did not understand."
- Jesus' death was a martyr's death – As if He were saying "See how much God loves you; I have taught you and demonstrated these loving teachings; my life is now finished but you are to carry on the message."
- Jesus' death was a great sadness. R.C. Sproul says "According to Albert Schweitzer, Jesus had expectations that God would deliver Him, but God let Him down in the final moments, so Jesus died as a disillusioned, tragic Shakespearean Hero."<sup>2</sup>

Any cursory read of the New Testament will be sufficient to rebuke these false teachings. Was Jesus' death a mistake, a shock, an unplanned event? Not at all. Jesus understood the Cross as His one mission – "For this purpose I came..." (John 12:27). In fact, Jesus had forewarned His own disciples many times of what was to happen. The Bible points strenuously to the fact that it was a planned, purposeful event.

## TableTalk

Read Mark 8:31-33; 10:32,34 and John 12:27,32,33. Note the details Jesus gives His disciples about what was to happen. Is this the picture of a defeated Man who did not know what was happening? Or even more, is it a picture of a depressed Man who was losing the argument on showing God's love?

How would you describe Jesus' own understanding of the Cross?

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<sup>2</sup>The Truth of the Cross, R. C. Sproul, pg. 132