**Why a Cross?**

As Christians, we rightly understand that Jesus’ death is necessary for us to have forgiveness of our sins. The prophet said, “But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5; cf. 1 Peter 2:24). This morning, I would like for us to explore why Jesus died on a cross; as opposed to some other form of death such as being thrown off a cliff (Luke 4:29-30), stoning (John 8:59), or simply dying of old age. For the first two we might say it wasn’t His time to die, but I will submit to you that it wasn’t the right way to die. By answering the question, *Why a cross?*, I hope that we’ll gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

1. JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES HE WOULD BE CRUCIFIED.
   1. We might say Jesus died on a cross because that’s how He said He would die.
   2. The third time Jesus revealed to the disciples His impending death, He flatly said, He would be “crucified” (Mat 20:17-19).
   3. Luke includes, “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (Luk 18:34). And no wonder, because a crucified Messiah cut against the grain of their understanding.
   4. In Jhn 12:27-35, Jesus said, “‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die.” I see Jesus holding out His arms as He said these words. Again, a crucified Messiah didn’t compute with the people’s perception of an eternal Messiah.
   5. So yes, Jesus died on a cross because He said that’s how He was going to die, but we need a little more.
2. THE CROSS WAS NO ACCIDENT OF HISTORY BUT ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.
   1. A savior on a cross was first foreshadowed by the bronze serpent Moses made (Num 21:7-9). Jesus told Nicodemus, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life” (Jhn 3:14-15).
   2. Psalm 22’s connection with the crucifixion is evident through Jesus’ own usuage of its opening line from the cross. “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me” (Mat 27:46; Mrk 15:34). While much of Psalm 22 is echoed in the crucifixion scene, let’s focus on v. 16, “they have pierced my hands and feet.” I wonder if the Jews, living under the Romans – when crucifixion was a common event – started to think these words sounded a lot like crucifixion. When Psalm 22:16 is combined with passages such as Isa 53:5 “He was wounded for our transgressions” and especially Zec 12:10, “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child…” it’s clear the cross was no accident of history.
   3. Jesus Himself told the twelve “See, we are going to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished” (Luk 18:31). On the road to Emmaus the resurrected Savior scolded two of His followers saying, “O foolish ones, and slow to heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory. And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luk 24:25-27). Later, on the evening of the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the twelve. After proving He was alive, “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses to these things’” (Luk 24:45-47).
   4. And so, in his Pentecost sermon, Peter witnessed to these things when he declared a Savior on the cross was God’s plan. “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Act 2:23; cf. 2 Tim 1:9). Paul would make a similar argument during his travels. In Thessalonica, “He reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer [die on a cross] and to rise from the dead, and saying ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’” (Act 17:2b-3; cf. 1 Cor 15:3-4). While the Jews in Thessalonica rejected this message, those in Berea accepted it because they were “examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed” (Act 17:11-12a).
   5. Jesus dying on the cross was according to scripture confirmed by the Lord Himself and the apostles, but this still doesn’t answer the question; *Why a cross?* For that let’s look at what happened on the cross.
3. ON THE CROSS…
   1. HE FULFILLED THE CURSE OF THE LAW.
      1. Jesus said He did not come to abolish the law, “but to fulfill” the law (Mat 5:17). We often think of this in terms of fulfilling the moral laws and the sacrifices. Speaking of Jesus fulfilling the Law, Paul said, “These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17). But He also came to fulfill the curses.
      2. We often think of honoring father and mother as the first command with a promise, that is there is, a special blessing for those who obey the command (Eph 6:2). But on the other hand, what’s the first punishment with a curse? It’s hanging on a tree, that is there is a special cursing for those who hang on a tree. “If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God” (Deu 21:23).
      3. The only way for Christ to fulfill all the law – all its commands and curses – was to die by hanging on a tree. When writing to Christians seeking salvation through the Law, Paul reminded them, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14).
      4. The only way for Jesus to fulfill the curses of the Law was to hang on a tree. This could not have been accomplished through being thrown off a cliff, or stoning, or dying of old age. One might be stoned for cursing God’s name, but God’s curse was not associated with stoning, that is reserved for hanging on a tree.
   2. ON THE CROSS, HE BORE THE CURSE OF OUR SINS.
      1. Jesus did all the do’s and avoided all the don’ts. Yet, by hanging on the tree Jesus becomes cursed by God – not for His own sins but for ours. Paul will say it this way, “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). Later to the Colossians 2:13-15, Paul will say it was on the cross Jesus canceled the “legal demands” of the law. “This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Jesus took the curse of the Law and nailed it to the cross.
      2. With 1 Pet 2:22-24, Peter makes it clear that Jesus was not cursed for His own sins but for ours, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.”
   3. WITH THE LAW FULFILLED HE RECONCILED US TO GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.
      1. Finally, with all the Law fulfilled – both its blessings and curses – Christ reconciles us to God “By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, the He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph 2:11-22).
      2. Paul’s explanation of his ministry of reconciliation and his appeal to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God through Jesus (2 Cor 5:14-20) ends with a call to remember, Jesus wasn’t cursed on the tree for His own sins but ours.
4. JESUS WILLINGLY ACCEPTED THE SHAME OF THE CROSS FOR US.
   1. Jesus willingly accepted the shame of the cross, as the Hebrew writer called of his audience to look to Jesus, “the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, thinking nothing of the shame” of being cursed by God “and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).
   2. Paul echoes Jesus’ determination when he stated, “And being found in human form, [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Php 2:8). No doubt the physical horror of the cross is in view, but I would suggest enduring the curse of God is also playing in the background of Paul’s mind here.
   3. The Christians, no doubt faced ridicule for following a Messiah, who in the Jewish mind was accursed by God because He died on a tree. “Therefore, I want you to understand,” Paul warned, “that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, ‘Jesus is accursed!’” (1 Cor 12:3a). Jesus willingly accepted the shame of the cursed cross and so should we.
5. THEREFORE, WE BOAST IN THE ACCURSED CROSS.
   1. Even though some ridiculed Jesus’ death on a cursed cross, Paul would say, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:16-17; cf. 2 Tim 1:8).
   2. Even though “the word of the [cursed] cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18ff). Paul was so bold as to make his boast in the cursed cross, “But far be it from me to boast 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).
   3. Our boast as Christians, is not in ourselves or our good works but in the fact, Jesus went to the cross, endured the curse for our sins – and not only our sins but the sins of the whole world.

The cross will always be offensive to the world. Is Christ crucified a stumbling block for you, or is Christ crucified your only hope of salvation? The benefits of the cross are infinite. From Calvary’s tree flowed the gracious blood of the lamb that “exceeds our sin and our guilt.” However, the demands of the cross are expansive. “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” May our prayer be that the “old rugged cross, so despised by the world” would have “a wonderous attraction” for us all the days of our lives.

You can watch a video of this sermon here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/sdbPt4S77Qc?si=qLGlXwaQZ_uGQHhp&t=2639>