

The Lord's Death

His Voluntary Sacrifice for Sinners

We may safely assert in all *“truth and soberness”*, and without being fanciful or guilty of exaggeration, that the death of Christ is of such sublime importance that it fills all time and all space. Scripture reveals that it was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, that it has governed His administration of the ages of time and that it will fill eternity with its fruit and its praise (1Pet. 1:20; Heb. 9:26; Rev. 1:5,6). Scripture also declares that it pleased God, *“having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven”* (Col. 1:20 and see Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 9:23). The eternal effects and cosmic consequences of the death of Christ are as a mighty ocean of divine truth, and we find ourselves but paddling on the shores, partly because of the smallness of our minds in contrast to the vastness of the subject, and partly because so little has been revealed of these things in Scripture, just little

glimpses here and there to suggest the infinite reaches beyond.

One of the difficulties connected with such a study is that the theme is so vast that the alternate features of it are sundered so far as to give the impression of contradiction. Paradoxical these features certainly are, but never contradictory. Spiritual intelligence will seek to ascertain whatever has been revealed, quite content to believe and to adore even when it cannot comprehend.

First of all, we need to appreciate that the death of Christ was a **VERITABLE** death. However unique the death of Christ may have been, it was yet real. It was not a symbolic or idealistic death, a “death” only in name: not even the nearest the Immortal could come to death without actually dying. Rather the absolute necessity for His actual death was the very occasion of the incarnation of the Son of God. See Hebrews 2:14,15.

Scripture is very clear on this point, that the death which was the wage of sin was the death which Christ experienced at Calvary, otherwise Justice could never have been satisfied with His death as tasted on our behalf, nor reckon us as having died with Him if we have believed upon Him. (e.g. Romans 6:1-11; 7:1-4; 8:3; 2Cor. 5:21; Galatians 2:19,20). The whole value of His redemption depends upon this and no language could be more explicit than that which Scripture employs in the matter. Note, for example, in Romans 5:6,8; 8:34; 14:9,15; 1Cor. 8:11: 15:3 – **“Christ DIED”**, John 12:33; 18:32 – **“signifying what DEATH He should DIE”**, 2Cor. 4:10 – **“the DYING (or decease) of (the Lord) Jesus”**, Mark 15:44; John 19:33 – **“He was DEAD already”**, Mark 15:37,39; Luke 23:46 – **“He EXPIRED (lit.)”**.

Scripture asserts, indeed, that the death of Christ was a **VITAL** death. The incarnate Son of God actually tasted death because there was no other way in which the purpose of God could be realised and the

desperate need of mankind be met. We read in Mark 8:31 – **“the Son of man MUST suffer ... and be KILLED”**, John 3:14 – **“even so MUST the Son of man be lifted up”**, Luke 24:26 – **“OUGHT not Christ to have suffered these things?”**, Luke 24:46 – **“thus it BEHOVED Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead”**. This fact will become more apparent as we consider the nature of the death of Christ.

We also learn from Scripture that the death of Christ was a **VIOLENT** death. Apart from the explicit records of all four evangelists, note Daniel 9:26 – **“shall Messiah BE CUT OFF”**, Acts 2:23 – **“ye have taken and ... have crucified and SLAIN”**, Acts 3:15 – **“and KILLED the Prince of Life”**, Acts 7:52 – **“the Just One: of whom ye have been now the ... MURDERERS”**. When Christ was taken by wicked hands and “crucified” or “hung on a tree”, then the process was set in motion, the natural consequence of which was His death. If this were not so then men are not guilty of the charge laid by God against them of murdering His Son. He died because He was crucified. And yet because Christ was sinless, He was not obliged to die. In His Godhood He COULD NOT die, and even in His manhood He NEED NOT die.

So, Scripture also teaches that His death was a **VOLUNTARY** death. e.g. Matthew 20:28 – **“the Son of man came ... TO GIVE HIS LIFE a ransom”**, Matthew 27:50 – **“Jesus ... YIELDED UP THE GHOST (HIS SPIRIT)”**, Luke 9:31 – **“His decease which HE should accomplish”**, John 10:17,18 – **“I LAY DOWN MY LIFE ... No man taketh it from Me, but I LAY IT DOWN OF MYSELF. I have power to lay it down”**, Galatians 2:20 – **“the Son of God, who loved me, and GAVE HIMSELF for me”**, Hebrews 7:27 – **“He OFFERED UP HIMSELF”**, Revelation 1:18 – **“I am He that liveth (the Living One): and was dead (BECAME DEAD)”**.

There have been many who have suffered a violent death, and who have yet in some sense died voluntarily, inasmuch as they have meekly submitted to murder, but the death of Christ is a mystery more

profound than this. We must appreciate that Christ had the power at any time to release Himself: He chose the moment of His decease: and He by a voluntary act dismissed His spirit and became dead. Yet His death was not a suicide, but a voluntary offering which was presented to God in fulfilment of His holy and sovereign will: for the death of Christ was a **VINDICATORY** death. We use the word in the legal sense: Christ died under the stroke of Divine Justice, His death being both demanded and executed by God Himself as the infliction of His vengeance. Read, Isaiah 53:10 – **“Yet it pleased THE LORD to bruise Him; HE hath put Him to grief: when THOU shalt make His soul an offering for sin”**, Psalm 22:15 – **“THOU hast brought Me into the dust of DEATH”**, Zechariah 13:7 – **“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of Hosts: SMITE the Shepherd”**, Matthew 26:31 – **“It is written, I WILL SMITE the Shepherd”**, Acts 2:23 – **“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”**, Romans 8:32 – **“He that spared not His own Son, but DELIVERED Him up for us all”**, Hebrews 2:10 – **“It became HIM ... to MAKE the Captain of their salvation perfect through SUFFERINGS”**, Hebrews 10:9,10 – **“BY THE WHICH WILL we are sanctified through the OFFERING OF THE BODY of Jesus Christ once for all”**.

Christ voluntarily submitted to the will of God and fulfilled it in surrendering to death by the murderous assaults of men, as God Himself had foreordained and foreknown. We cannot plumb this mystery, nor reason it out by natural processes, yet we believe, inasmuch as Scripture teaches it, that Christ died because God willed it, died because wicked men prompted by Satan willed it, and died because He willed it Himself. We might say in some sense that from man’s viewpoint He died as a **VILLAIN**, from God’s viewpoint as a **VICTIM** and from His own viewpoint as a **VOTARY**: i.e. One devoted to God. The

Sinless One, over whom death had no claim, died in accordance with the gracious will of God, that His death might be a **VICARIOUS** death, i.e. a death for others.

He died in the place of those who were under sentence of death, that they might be freed from death and be granted life instead. In this connection Scripture adopts very largely the sacrificial terminology of the Old Testament, for those sacrifices were types and foreshadowings of the sacrifice of Christ. See, for example, 1Cor. 5:7 – **“for even Christ our Passover IS SACRIFICED for us”**, Ephesians 5:2 – **“Christ also hath loved us, and hath GIVEN Himself for us an OFFERING and a SACRIFICE to God for a sweet smelling savour”**, Hebrews 9:26,28 – **“Once in the end of the world (ages) hath He appeared to put away sin by the SACRIFICE of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many”**, 1Peter 3:18 – **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death”**.

Apart from the obvious analogy of the Old Testament types which are said to prefigure the death of Christ (Hebrews Chs. 9-10; 13:12 etc.), its substitutionary character is expressed in a number of ways. The preposition *“huper”* with the genitive case signifies *“on behalf of”* and sometimes *“instead of”* and is often used of Christ’s death. The preposition *“anti”* in this connection signifies *“instead of”* and is used in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, **“a ransom for (instead of) many”**. In 1Timothy 2:6, **“a ransom for all”**, the preposition is *“huper”*, but *“anti”* is added to the noun **“ransom”** (*antilitron*), giving the sense *“a substitutionary ransom on the behalf of all”*. Note the universal potential of the death of Christ and compare Romans 5:18; 2Cor. 5:14,15; Hebrews 2:9; 1John 2:2. The many Scriptures which speak of our sins being laid upon Him, or of His bearing sin, or of

the sacrificial nature of His death teach the same vital truth of its vicarious character. This is twofold – first, positively, He rendered to God all that was due from man (Ephesians 5:2), second, negatively, He received from God all that was due to man (1Peter 2:24).

And that great work was *“finished”*, for Scripture assures us that His death was a **VICTORIOUS** death. Something of the greatness of His triumph is seen in that there are four things He is said to have *“annulled”* by His death.

1. **The Law** – Romans 7:1-7 (*“loosed”* v2; *“delivered”* v6); 2Cor. 3:7-14 (*“done away”*); Ephesians 2:15 (*“abolished”*). Christ endured the law’s just sentence and bore its curse (Galatians 3:13), so meeting its every claim and silencing it for ever.
2. **Sin** – Romans 6:6 (*“destroyed”*). He endured sin’s penalty and so *“put away”* sin, stripping it of its hold upon the sinner.
3. **Death** – 2Timothy 1:10 (*“abolished”*). He endured death and rose victoriously on the other side of death, in an *“indissoluble life”* that death can never touch, procuring the same for all His Own in so doing.
4. **The Devil (Satan)** – Hebrews 2:14 (*“destroy”*). By conquering sin and death, the bands by which Satan kept men under his servitude; by defeating his assaults; and by securing his ultimate doom; Christ has *“annulled”* him.

With what adoring wonder we contemplate this glorious conquest of the cross: our souls should thrill with the sense of the complete rout of those tremendous foes which held mankind in cruel bondage in time, and would have and could yet drag us down to eternal ruin if we have not yet submitted to Him as our Lord and Saviour, having accepted Him as the bearer of our sins on the tree. We can rejoice even now to lift up the grateful song, the theme of which will fill all heaven eternally – the Lord’s death.