



The crucifixion of Jesus is the key element of the Christian faith. Without the crucifixion there can be no perfect atonement for sin. In other words, the crucifixion was the very mission of Christ. We see this in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (underline added for emphasis).

*<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

This Palm Sunday weekend Jesse Rider, the High School pastor at Crossroads, is going to talk to us about the crucifixion of our Lord and what it means. It isn't a fable and it isn't just some abstract Theological idea that we aren't meant to fully grasp. It's personal and should cause us to love Christ all the more – because thanks to the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary, we are at peace with God the Father.

## Group Study Questions

1. Pastor Jesse pointed out that the Old Testament contains over 100 prophecies referring to Jesus and the events of the crucifixion. Below are just three examples of prophecies found in the Psalms and a corresponding passage showing the fulfillment of that prophecy. Read and discuss these passages.

**Prophecy:** Psalm 41:9

**Fulfillment:** Mark 14:10

**Prophecy:** Psalm 22:7-8

**Fulfillment:** Matthew 27:41-44

**Prophecy:** Psalm 22:17-18

**Fulfillment:** John 19:23

2. Have four people in your group read the different Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus.
  - Matthew 27:32-56
  - Mark 15:21-41
  - Luke 23:26-49
  - John 19:16-30

Just like 4 people witnessing a car accident can provide different, but truthful, perspectives of the same account, here we see the Gospel writers giving an account from his own unique view.

Imagine if you were present at the scene of the crucifixion. How do you think you would feel? What would you notice? What would you do? Discuss as a group.

3. Pastor Jesse showed us how the crucifixion and the subsequent resurrection of Christ was a very personal experience for those close to him. What makes the crucifixion of Jesus personal to you? Discuss.

## Introspection and Prayer

Reflect on the truth that Jesus died so that you would become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Most of the time, we all feel less than righteous. We need to understand that our unrighteousness was nailed to the cross with Christ. We can be joyful knowing that when we acknowledge our sin and confess them to God we are forgiven (1 John 1:9). Ask the Spirit of God to move and direct our hearts and minds so that our actions reflect the righteousness attributed to us at the cross of Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any sin you need to confess. Repent of these sins and enjoy God's forgiveness as you walk in a manner worthy of your calling (Ephesians 4:1) fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## For Further Reference

### The Cross<sup>1</sup>

**[The] cross**, [is] an ancient instrument of execution. Originally the 'cross' was an upright stake to which the corpse of an executed criminal was bound for public display or on which the living body of a condemned person was affixed to await death. During Roman times a crossbar was sometimes added across the top of the stake forming a T (later known as St. Anthony's cross) or intersecting it to form the familiar Christian shape. Later an X-shaped form (St. Andrew's cross) was also employed.

This mode of execution is unknown in the OT, which only reports the practice of exposing the corpse (Deut. 21:22-23). It seems to have originated as an instrument of execution with the Persians, from whom it passed to the Greeks and Romans. Among the latter it was widely employed for its deterrent value, especially against rebellious slaves and seditious provincials.

Though the procedure was subject to wide variation according to the whim and sadism of the executioner, by the Roman period several features were fairly standard. With a placard proclaiming the crime hung around the neck, the condemned prisoner carried the crossbar, not the whole cross, to the place of execution where the upright stake was already in place. There the offender was stripped and flogged. The prisoner's arms were affixed to the crossbar with ropes or nails, and the crossbar was then raised and attached to the upright stake. A small wooden block attached to the stake beneath the buttocks supported the weight of the suspended body, which was bound to the stake with ropes. Often the feet were also affixed to the stake with ropes or nails. Because deterrence was a primary objective, the cross was always erected in a public place. Death came slowly, often only after several days, and resulted from the cumulative impact of thirst, hunger, exhaustion, exposure, and the traumatic effects of the scourging. After death the body was usually left hanging on the cross. Because of the protracted suffering and the extreme ignominy of this manner of execution, it was viewed by the Romans as the supreme penalty, the 'most wretched of deaths' (Josephus), and generally reserved for the lowest classes and the most heinous crimes.

**The Crucifixion of Jesus:** The biblical account of Jesus' crucifixion reveals few variants from the usual procedure. The fact that Jesus was crucified confirms that his condemnation was pronounced by the Roman procurator (Pilate), who alone had the authority to impose *this* death sentence. Further, the wording on the placard ('The King of the Jews') reveals that the crime for which Jesus was condemned was not the Sanhedrin's charge of blasphemy, but the political crime of high treason, generated by messianic claims, which to Roman ears sounded like a threat to Caesar's sovereignty. Thus Pilate pronounced the death sentence reserved for treason, and Jesus was flogged (Mark 15:19) and led away to be crucified. Perhaps because Jesus was scourged *before* being led away and was thus too weak to carry the crossbar, a bystander was pressed into service (Mark 15:21).

The crucifixion took place outside the city near a thoroughfare (Mark 15:29). Jesus was stripped (Mark 15:24) and nailed hand and foot (Luke 24:39) to the cross, with the placard affixed above his head (Matt. 27:37). Following Jewish custom, Jesus was offered an opiate to dull the pain (Mark 15:23), but he rejected it. Death came rather quickly, after only six hours. Jesus' body was not left on the cross; a disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, appealed to Pilate for the body in accordance with the injunction of Deut. 21:23 (Mark 15:43-45).

**In Theology:** When Christians hailed as Messiah and worshipped as Lord one who died on a cross, a central theological problem was posed. How could such high status be accorded to one who died under the vilest death sentence, condemned as a criminal according to Roman law and cursed by God according to Jewish law (Deut. 21:23)? Paul's Letters reveal how foolish and scandalous this seemed to both Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:18-25) and also what an impetus it was to Christian theological reflection.

Quite early, Jesus' death was interpreted as an atonement, a sacrifice to deal with sin. Paul takes over this interpretation (Rom. 3:25) but expands it into a full theology of the cross that stresses its further significance. Thus Jesus' death on the cross, condemned by the Jewish law, marks the end of this law (Gal. 3:13), and participation in the cross through baptism means death to sin (Rom. 6:6) and to this world (Gal. 6:14). Along with the victory over these old forces, baptismal participation in the cross marks the beginning of a new life of grace (Gal. 2:19-21). Because these forces were defeated through a means that the world deemed scandalous and weak, judgment is leveled through the cross against the wisdom of the world while God shows through it that divine strength is paradoxically revealed in weakness (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Finally, the cross is not only a comfort to the oppressed, whose sufferings imitate the crucifixion and who can hope to share in the resurrection, but it also becomes a behavioral model as it symbolizes obedience and other-regarding love (Phil. 2:5-11).

The first three Gospels also use the cross to signify the life of self-renunciation demanded of believers (Mark 8:34). The fourth Gospel emphasizes instead the resurrection, which is paradoxically symbolized there by the raising of Jesus' body onto the cross (John 12:32).

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<sup>1</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). Harper's Bible dictionary (1st ed.) (194). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

OT Old Testament