

HIS MOST UNUSUAL DEATH

On a Thursday evening almost 2,000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth was arrested and that same night, in violation of the law, was put on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin to face the charge of blasphemy.

Witnesses were suborned to give perjured testimony to substantiate the charges and the next morning Jesus was taken to Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea. But before Pilate He was charged, not with blasphemy, but with treason.

Because there was no evidence to support the charge, Pilate would have released Him. But Pilate allowed himself to be pressured by the Jewish leaders and finally he succumbed to their demands that Jesus be crucified.

And so, that same day, Pilate had Jesus scourged and then taken outside the city to the place of execution where He was crucified.

So, almost 2,000 years ago, in the city of Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified.

1. Of His crucifixion and death there can be no reasonable doubt.

Jesus really did die a death by crucifixion in the city of Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago -- it really did happen.

His closest friends say it happened.

- a. Peter: “. . . who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree . . .” (1Pet 2:24).
- b. John: “And he, bearing his cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him, and two others with him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center” (Jn 19:17-18).
- c. Matthew: “. . . and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.” (Matt 27:26).
- d. Mark: “With him they also crucified two robbers, one on his right and the other on his left” (Mk 15:27).
- e. Luke: “And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left” (Lk 23:33).

Saul of Tarsus says it happened.

- a. Paul: “. . . he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Php 2:8)

His enemies say it happened.

- a. Cornelius Tacitus (a Roman historian of the 1st century): “*But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the Prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be pre-*

sent to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence, to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.” (Annals, XV, 44).

- b. Lucian (a satirist of the 2nd century): “. . . the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world . . . Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.” (*The Passing Peregrinus*)

An unbelieving Jewish historian says it happened.

- a. Flavius Josephus (a Jewish historian of the 1st century): “*At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have re-counted wonders.*”

2. But I want you to think about how unusual His death was: His death by crucifixion was the most unusual in the history of the world.

Many thousands have suffered death by crucifixion since it was introduced into the world by the Phoenicians.

- a. There is evidence of its use by the Persians in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, and by the Egyptians in the 5th century BC.
- b. The Greeks and Romans adopted it from the Phoenicians (Eerdmans' *The New Bible Dictionary*, pg 281).
- The Maccabean king Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 leading Pharisees after an insurrection in 88 BC.
 - In 4 BC the Roman general Varus is reported to have crucified 2,000 insurgents.
 - And it was the crucifixion of 3,600 Jews by Florus in AD 66 that precipitated the Jewish rebellion against Rome.
 - During the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus (AD 70) so many were crucified that there was a shortage both of wood and of room for the crosses. (Eerdmans' *The New Bible Dictionary*, pg 281).
- c. But, of all the many thousands who have suffered that terrible punishment, Jesus' death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world.

Jesus' death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world because **it was foretold hundreds of years before it happened -- by the prophets of God in Israel.**

- a. The entirety of the **53rd chapter of Isaiah** is devoted to a prophecy of the suffering and death that would be experienced by the Messiah who was to come into the world and die for the sins of the people
- b. **Psa 22** also prophesies the suffering and death of the Messiah and prophesied that in His death His hands and feet would be pierced (**Psa 22:12-18**)

Jesus' death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world because **He suffered that terrible fate as a completely innocent man.**

- a. Oh, I'm sure there were times when a man was crucified who was innocent of the crime he was condemned for.
- b. But in the case of Jesus: Not only was He innocent of the blasphemy He was charged with before the Jewish Sanhedrin, and not only was He innocent of the charge of treason that was brought against Him when He was on trial before Pontius Pilate, but He was innocent of all crimes and all sins!
 - Jesus never once committed a crime! Never! Not once!!
 - Jesus never once committed a sin! Never! Not once!!
 - He was innocent from the day of His birth until the day of His death
- c. **Heb 4:15** -- Jesus was "**tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin**"
- d. Paul says, "**He knew no sin**" (**2Cor 5:21**)
- e. Peter says, "**He committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth**" (**1Pet 2:22**)

Jesus' death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world because **Jesus willingly died that death on the cross.**

- a. I doubt that anyone else has ever willingly died by crucifixion -- but Jesus did.
 - When Peter tried to prevent the soldiers from arresting Jesus, He told Peter that He could call 12 legions of angels to His rescue if He wanted to (**Matt 26:52-54**).
 - In **Jn 12:27** He said, ". . . What shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."
 - And, in **Jn 10:17-18** He said, ". . . I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself."

Jesus' death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world because **His death was overruled and He was raised from the dead.**

- a. **Ac 2:22-24** -- "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- ²³ Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴ whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it."
- b. **Ac 2:29-32** -- "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the

patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹ he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. ³² **This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses."**

- c. So, Jesus was nailed to a cross and then buried in a borrowed tomb -- but God overruled it.
 - God raised Him from the dead!

3. But Jesus' death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world for another reason -- for what it accomplished for us.

I'm not saying nothing was accomplished and no good purpose was served in the case of any others who were ever crucified.

- a. Any time a man was crucified who was guilty of terrible crimes, something was accomplished and a good purpose was served -- justice.
 - In fact, two other men were crucified alongside of Jesus, and when they died justice was served -- because they were guilty of terrible crimes.
- b. And surely all who died by crucifixion served as an example and warning to others and may very well have deterred some from committing crimes.

But Jesus' death is the most unusual in the history of the world because of what it accomplished for us.

- a. And there isn't any way to overstate or exaggerate what He accomplished for us when He willingly gave His life on the cross.

When Jesus died on the cross He saved us from the wrath of God.

- a. Our sins separated us from God (**Isa 59:2**), alienated us from God (**Eph 2:12**), and made us "children of wrath" (**Eph 2:3**) -- altogether deserving of God's wrath, and destined to be the objects of His wrath.
 - In the day of judgment, the "children of wrath" will be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels (**Matt 25:41; Rev 20:15**).
 - And, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (**Heb 10:31, NASB**).
- b. But, when Jesus died on the cross He saved us from the wrath of God.
 - Because of the sacrifice He willingly made for us, we are delivered from the wrath to come (**1Th 1:10**).
 - **Rom 5:9** -- "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."
 - + **Rev 1:5** -- ". . . and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood"

His death on the cross reconciled us to God.

- a. We were the “children of wrath” -- but now we are the “children of God.”
 - Rom 5:10 -- “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

He redeemed us.

- a. In Rom 7:14 Paul said, “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (NASB).
 - That describes us all, in our pre-christian lives -- the slaves of sin, sold into bondage to sin.
- b. But Jesus “gave His life as a ransom for all” (1Tim 2:6).
 - He paid the price to free us from the bondage of sin.
 - Tit 2:14 -- “. . . who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”
 - Rev 5:9 -- “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood . . .’”

4. But Jesus’ death by crucifixion is the most unusual in the history of the world for another reason -- for what it requires of us.

The crucifixion of those 800 Pharisees in 88 BC requires nothing of us.

- a. Their crucifixion accomplished nothing for us -- and requires nothing of us.

The crucifixion of 3,600 Jews in AD 66 accomplished nothing for us, and requires nothing of us.

The crucifixion of all those Jews during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 accomplished nothing for us, and requires nothing of us.

But when Jesus gave Himself to die on the cross, He saved us from the wrath to come, He reconciled us to God, and He redeemed us from the bondage of sin.

- a. That requires something of us.
 - It demands something of us.

Because Jesus died for us, and saved us from the wrath to come, we must hold fast to His word.

- a. His death demands that of us.
 - 1Cor 15:1-2 -- “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, **IF** you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.”

Because Jesus died for us, and reconciled us to God, we must continue steadfastly in the faith.

- a. His death demands that of us.

- Col 1:21-23 -- “And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, **IN ORDER TO** present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- ²³ **IF** indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . .” (NASB).

Because Jesus died for us, and redeemed us from the bondage of sin, we must glorify Him by the way we live our lives.

a. His death demands that of us.

- 1Cor 6:20 -- “For you were bought at a price; **THEREFORE** glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

And, in 2 Cor 5:15, Paul summarizes the demands that Jesus’ death makes of us: “. . . He died for all, **THAT** those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

a. Jesus gave up heaven for 33 years . . . He humbled Himself and made Himself the servant of all men for 33 years . . . and then He gave Himself to die a terrible, agonizing death on the cross -- and He did it all for you and me.

- That requires something of us.
 - + It demands something of us.
- It demands that we give ourselves completely to Him.
 - + It demands that we live our lives for Him.

b. One of our song writers has expressed it beautifully in these haunting words -- words that are altogether consistent with what the Bible teaches:

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

*When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ, my Lord;
All the vain things that charm me most I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled
down;
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Conclusion.

The death Jesus died was the most unusual death anyone ever died.

- It was foretold hundreds of years before it happened.
- It was gross injustice, but He suffered it willingly.
- It was overruled by God when God raised Him from the dead.

- d. It accomplished for us every thing we need.
- e. It requires of us every thing we have.

If you have obeyed the gospel at some time in the past, are you living up to the demands that His death makes of you?

- a. Are you living your life for Him?
- b. Are you submitting to His will in every area of your life?

If you haven't yet obeyed the gospel, please think about the death that Jesus died on the cross for you -- and for us all.

- a. Think about what He did for you.
- b. Think about what He accomplished for you.
 - You can be saved from the wrath to come.
 - You can be reconciled to God.
 - You can be redeemed from the bondage of sin.
- c. But you must believe on Him (**Jn 8:24**), and repent of your sins (**Ac 3:19**), and you must be baptized into His death (**Ac 2:38; Rom 6:3-4**).
 - And when you come up out of that watery grave you must begin living your life for Him (**2 Cor 5:15; Gal 2:20**).

Surely you can see what His sacrifice demands of you.

- a. Will you give yourself to Him . . . right now?

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