

## **The Passion of Christ**

When God put the two trees in the midst of the Garden of Eden, He was making Adam and Eve aware of their freedom – that they were being given a choice. The choice was to listen to God and follow Him or reject His counsel and go their own way.

**Genesis 3:1 – 4** *“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, **Ye shall not surely die.**”*

Up to now there had been no death in the entire universe. Could Satan have thought he was telling the truth? Satan had rebelled against God in the very throne room of heaven and though cast out, he is still alive.

**This brings up an important question** - Has God told the truth? Can God be trusted when He says if you choose to go against His instruction you will die?

**Verse 5** *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”*

Satan implies to Eve that God knows this experience will make her and Adam equal with Him and that God is selfish and wants to rule over them.

**That leads to another question** – Is God arbitrary? – does He demand obedience or else?

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree, something happened to them, they were changed and they began to look at God differently.

**Verse 6 –11** *“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. {pleasant: Heb. a desire} And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. {aprons: or, things to gird about} And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”*

Where there was once trust and freedom, there is now doubt and fear!

**Now the question** – Should we be afraid of God? What will He do to those who disobey Him? Is He willing to freely forgive?

For centuries many thinking men and women who study the scriptures have asked these questions. From the beginning Satan has lied about God. David speaks of the results of Satan’s lies when he writes *“clouds and darkness surround Him”* and Isaiah says that – *“darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people.”* Satan has done a masterful job at deceiving the world about the character of God.

Then Jesus came to this earth to bring light, that is, to show us what God is really like. You will remember from a previous lesson Jesus said, *“If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.”*

Jesus came to answer all the questions raised in the Garden of Eden. Is God arbitrary? Does He demand obedience or else? What will He do to those who disobey Him? Will He freely forgive? Should we be afraid of God? And maybe the most important question - Did God tell the truth when He said sin leads to death?

Can we trust God’s word? Satan says no. We must honestly deal with this important issue. Jesus came, not with great claims, but to

demonstrate what God is really like that we may have the answers to these questions. We begin in the book of Hebrews.

**Hebrews 2:9** *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”*

We have studied the issue of death in previous lessons. Is the death spoken of here the first death (sleep) or the second death? II Corinthians helps with the answer.

**II Corinthians 5:21** *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

If Jesus “*was made to be sin*” in order for Him to “*pay the penalty of sin*” then He would have in some way experienced the “*second death*” of the sinner.

Some say Jesus died to “*pay for our sins*” in a legal sense – in that it was Him or us. If that is true and if the penalty for sin is to be burned in hell for eternity - then the penalty is not paid, because He did not burn in hell for eternity! If the penalty is death with no resurrection, then the penalty is not paid, because He was resurrected. If the penalty is eternal separation from God – then the penalty was not paid, because He is now with the Father. There are problems if we try to understand the plan of salvation in this legal sense.

The teaching that God demands the life of the sinner as the punishment for disobedience, but He is willing to accept the death of His own son in the place of the sinner is making God look like the ancient gods of the pagans who demanded child sacrifice in order that their wrath may be appeased. Today any person would recoil at the idea that God would require one’s child as a sacrifice. Yet it is widely taught that God sacrificed His own Son in our place in that Jesus had to die in order for God to forgive the sinner. That teaching makes God look no better than the ancient pagan god Moloch who would accept no less than human sacrifice to assuage his wrath!

**So how are we to understand the death of Christ? We have three questions on this subject –**

- (1) How did He die?**
- (2) Why did He have to die?**
- (3) What made His death different from that of any other person who has died for the sake of others?**

We will start with the last question. Jesus death was different because He is the only one who has suffered the full “*wrath of God.*” Remember God is not like us – His ways are not like ours. We learned in a previous lesson that the “*wrath of God*” was not being beat up or burned up but being given up. So if the wrath of God is being “*given up*” – we should have a text that says Christ was “*given up.*”

**Romans 4:24,25** *“But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was **delivered for** our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”*

**Romans 8:32** *“He that spared not his own Son, but **delivered him up** for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”*

These two phrases “*delivered for*” and “*delivered him up,*” are one Greek word “*paradidomi*” which means “*to give over*” or “*to give up*” as is translated in the **English Standard Version** which translates Romans 8:32 this way- “***He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.***”

Now if we go to the record of the crucifixion we will find that is exactly what happened. The prophet David speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit foretold this experience of Christ in the Psalms.

**Psalms 22:1** *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”*

**compare Matthew 27:46** *“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

**Psalm 22:6 – 8** *“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. <sup>7</sup> All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, <sup>8</sup> He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”*

**Compare Matthew 27:39 – 40** *“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, <sup>40</sup> And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.”*

**Psalm 22:16 – 18** *“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. <sup>17</sup> I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. <sup>18</sup> They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”*

**Compare Matthew 27:35** *“And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.”*

As we compare Psalms 22 with Matthew 27 it becomes clear that the prophet who wrote the Psalms is describing the experience of Christ as He is crucified many years before it happened.

In **Psalms Chapter 88** we read more of the thoughts in the mind of Christ as He experiences the suffering of the awful second death. In Psalm 88 verses 14 – 18, we are given evidence of who is having the experience described in this chapter.

**Psalm 88:14** *“LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?”*

Remember Jesus cry from the cross – *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*

**Verse 15** *“I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up:”* Jesus knew He was born to die for the sins of mankind. *“While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.”* The word distracted is from the Hebrew word “poon” which means, “to be confused, perplexed, unable to think logically.” Jesus as He suffered the terrors of the cross became perplexed, unable to think clearly.

**Verse 16** *“Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.”* Christ suffers the wrath of God that we discussed earlier, He senses that He is cut off – separated from the source of all life, and dying the second death from which there is no resurrection, which becomes clear as we read verses 3 – 8.

**Now verses 3- 8** *“For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. <sup>4</sup> I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: <sup>5</sup> Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. <sup>6</sup> Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. <sup>7</sup> Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. <sup>8</sup> Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.”*

*“I am shut up and I cannot come forth.”* Christ feels there is no hope of escaping a death from which there is no resurrection, that He will never come forth from the tomb He is about to enter. Christ is experiencing what the wicked experience at the Great White Throne Judgment and the second death. Realizing they will die eternally with no hope, feeling only guilt, despair, fear, and condemnation, cut off from the only source of all life.

We find more evidence of this concept in comparing a passage in Matthew that refers to the experience of Jonah.

**Matthew 12:40** – *“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*

Jesus is comparing the experience of Jonah with His own experience with death soon to come.

**Jonah 1:17 – 2:1-6** *“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of **hell** cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; **the earth with her bars was about me for ever.**”*

How long did Jonah say he was in the belly of the whale? Not three days and three nights, but “forever.” He implies that his experience was like being buried in the earth forever! The book Matthew records Jesus is saying the same thing as Jonah. His experience with death will seem like it is forever.

The thing we need most to realize is that as Jesus suffered the horrors of the crucifixion and a separation from His Father He had never before experienced, He lost sight of His own resurrection. He had lost all hope of coming forth from the tomb. Yet, even though He felt this death was eternal, He refused to come down from the cross! He would die the eternal death if it meant that by His death men and women would be drawn to God so that they may have eternal life! *“Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might **bring us to God**”* (I Peter 3:18)

That is what the author of Hebrews is speaking of when he writes, *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2)

**All the questions about God are answered at Calvary –**

**1. Did God lie to us when He said that sin leads to death?** The Cross says no. Christ willingly *“being made sin for us”* died that death so that we could see that sin, separating us from God, the source of life, kills all those who cling to it.

Did the Father punish His Son? Did God kill his Son? The cross says no. Who did torture Christ? Who killed the Lamb of God? What caused His death? The sinful heart of man! The answer to this question declares that we can trust God's word that says the wages of sin is death – Christ died that death!

**2. Is God arbitrary and selfish?** The Cross says no. If God demanded a life be sacrificed for sin He could have sent an angel. But God did not ask any man or angel to do this. No one has actually experienced the agony of the “*second death*” except the Son of God. He had to publicly die – but not because God required a sacrifice – Psalm 40:6 declares, “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire...burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.*” It was not because God required it, but because there was no other way that God could reach the hardened heart of man. It was because we required it! It was to change our attitude towards God – not to change His attitude towards us! God says, “*I change not!*” The death of Christ at the hands of sinners was the only thing that would demonstrate to men and angels the self-sacrificing love, forgiveness, and trust-worthiness of God.

**I Peter 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 in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*”

**Romans 5:8** “*But God commendeth (demonstrates or shows) his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

**John 12:32** “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all (men and angels) unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.*”

**Colossians 1:20** “*And, 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.*”

Christ died for the sinless angels too! Only as the angels look to the cross of Calvary are they safe from rebelling against God in the future as Lucifer did in the past.

**3. Is God unforgiving?** The Cross says no. Remember the prayer of Jesus for those who were crucifying Him – *“Father forgive them”* when no one asked or repented! This clearly demonstrates God’s willingness to freely forgive, even those who put His Son to death!

**4. Should we be afraid of God?** What will God do to those who have disobeyed Him? The Cross tells us there is no reason for the sinner to be afraid of God. God will not beat them up or burn them up, but if they do not want Him, He will eventually give them up as He did Christ on the cross. And having rejected God, having cut themselves off from the source of life, they will ultimately die the horrible second death. This is evidence that we need not fear God but our own selfish rebellious nature that turns us away from God.

When Christ had answered all the questions on the Cross, He said *“Father into your hands I commend my spirit.”* As Jesus experienced this awful death - no matter how hopeless it looked to Him – He trusted God’s word. This is the *“Faith of Jesus.”* We all need that kind of faith, a faith that trusts in God no matter how hopeless and dark the situation looks to us.

**The good news is this** - Even though Christ would not come down from the cross that day – He did come up from the grave and He reigns on God’s Throne forever! Moreover, because He lives, you and I can be among those who will live eternally with Him in the earth made new.

### **Response Questions:**

1. Do you understand that if one continues to cling to sin eventually they cut themselves off from the source of life and will die the awful second death? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Questions continued on next page -

2. Do you understand Jesus died to demonstrate the love of God and that the wages of sin is death? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

3. Do you now realize that there is no reason to be afraid of God but rather it is the rebellious nature of man that we should fear?  
Yes \_\_ No \_\_