

Why the Cross?

My former pastor, the late Bill McGilton, often used to say that as evangelicals we preach the Cross all year round. Yet as Easter approaches we are compelled to focus afresh upon the Cross of Christ.

Jesus Christ the Son of God, having been found innocent of all the fabricated charges, was sentenced to death by crucifixion.

After being mocked and cruelly flogged Jesus was made to carry his heavy cross until he fell under its weight. By 9 am. on that historic Friday morning our Lord had been nailed to that cross and left to die in excruciating pain.

Crucifixion was the cruellest of deaths and normally reserved for the worst of criminals. It was also the ultimate disgrace.

Yet the death of Christ upon the cross became the central thrust of the message of the early church. 'But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' (Gal.6:14) So what was it about the death of Christ upon the cross that makes it central to the Gospel message, and the constant theme of the songs of heaven? 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;' (Rev.5:9)

In other word, why did Jesus die?

Sin had entered, corrupted and devastated God's perfect world leaving all mankind guilty and condemned before God: 'through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin' (Rom.5:12).

God's holiness and justice demanded that the penalty of sin – death - be paid. God's love desires the salvation of sinners. How can these two aspects of the character of God be reconciled? The answer is the Cross.

So God in love, according to His eternal plan of salvation, sent forth His Son into the world; and God in justice and righteousness delivered Him up to the awful death of the Cross: 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10).

But how does this activity of God accomplish the salvation of sinners?

The cross was a place of punishment. Jesus was punished on the cross for our sins. God in his love for sinners, made His Son, 'who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Cor. 5:). Jesus became our sin bearer and as our sin bearer Jesus stood in our place before the bar of God at Calvary. At Calvary, Jesus came under the divine judgement of God against sin. There God meted out our punishment to Christ.

He was the propitiation for our sins. He died on the cross to appease the righteous anger and wrath of a holy God against our sin. Our just desert fell upon the blessed Son of

God at Calvary: 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal.3:13).

Jesus dying on the cross in our place means that God's holiness and justice has been satisfied. God's holiness demanded that sin be punished and so it was in Christ. God's justice demanded that the wages of sin - 'eternal death' - be exacted and it was at Calvary.

The hymn writer, Anne R. Cousin (1824-1906) expressed it thus,

*O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!
Our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead,
Didst bear all ill for me.
A Victim led, Thy blood was shed;
Now there's no load for me.*

*Death and the curse were in our cup:
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee;
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop,
'Tis empty now for me.
That bitter cup, love drank it up;
Now blessing's draught for me.*

The Cross also displayed the fullness of God's love for His people. God now freely pardons, forgives, and justifies guilty sinners who come to Him in Christ. God has in the death of His Son provided and secured the salvation of all who will believe.

There was no other way the salvation of God's people could be accomplished. What a wonderful perfect redemption! That is why Jesus died!

How should we respond to such love? Isaac Watt in his much loved hymn, '*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*,' reminds us,

*'Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.'*

How will you respond to the death of Christ this Easter time?