

# Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

by Coty Pinckney 4/9/2009

Why did Jesus have to die?

Tomorrow we remember the death of Jesus on the cross. There are many possible perspectives on this event: It was a tragedy, as an innocent man suffered horribly at the hand of His enemies; it is an example to us, as Jesus focused not on Himself but on others; it is a major event in world history, as Christianity was born at the cross.

But there have been millions and millions of innocent people put to death. There are other ways for God to give us good examples, and other important events in history. These perspectives don't answer the question: Why did Jesus have to die?

The third chapter of Romans provides us with the threefold answer:

- Jesus had to die because man is thoroughly sinful;
- Jesus had to die because God desires to display His perfect justice;
- Jesus had to die because God desires to display His perfect love and mercy.

Paul underlines man's sinfulness in verses 9-12:

For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

God created man and asked of Him only the joyful obedience that comes from trusting his Creator. Jesus summed up God's requirements this way:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37, 39.

Yet no man from creation to today has fulfilled these commands – except Jesus Himself. The rest of us have turned aside, as Paul says; we do not do good, no matter how much we may try to justify ourselves; in our thoughts, in our attitudes, in our actions we have violated the purpose of our creation.

Just as a potter can take a cracked, deformed bowl and toss it in the trash, God would be perfectly just to relegate all of failed and disobedient mankind to His garbage dump. God could, in that way, display His perfect justice. That would be fair. All men would be treated equally. All would get what they deserve. You. Me. All of us.

Do you see what we are saying? Man is thoroughly sinful. God desires to display His perfect justice. Condemnation of all men seems to be the logical result.

But instead, God condemned one man: His own Son. The only man who had ever fulfilled God's commandments. The only man who did not deserve to be condemned. And He did this in order to display His love and mercy in a way nothing else could.

Romans 3:20-26 explains all this. Let me quote the text, and then provide my paraphrase of this, perhaps the most important paragraph in the Bible:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the

Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

(Paraphrase) No one can stand before God and say, "I am righteous," on the basis of the way they live, on the basis of their living up to any standard. (And God didn't provide us with His law for that purpose – Instead, he provided us with His law so that we might understand who He is and how far short of His perfection we fall.) Every one of us sins, every one of us fails to acknowledge who God is and to respond accordingly, every one of us violates the law of God. Thus we deserve God's condemnation. Indeed, God would not be just, He would not be righteous, He would not be the perfect moral authority if he failed to condemn our sin. But God, instead of condemning us as we deserve, has offered us a way for sinners to receive the verdict "Righteous!" instead of the verdict "Condemned!" This way – foretold and pictured and hinted at in the Old Testament - does not depend on our living up to a set of rules or our doing some great deed. Here is the way: Believe in Jesus Christ. Quit trying to prove to God that you are worthy of His favor. Turn away from yourself and look to Him. The only way – the *only* way – any sinful human can receive the verdict "Righteous!" is as God's gracious gift, through the payment made for our sin by the Messiah Jesus on the cross. God Himself sent His beloved Son for this twofold purpose: To display His perfect justice, in that every sin receives just punishment, and to display His mercy and love in declaring righteous all condemned sinners who believe in Jesus. This is our God: Supremely just and supremely loving.

Do you see? God is not satisfied with displaying His perfect justice through the condemnation of all men, guilty as we were. He also desires to display His mercy, grace, and love. He still must display His justice – and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). So Jesus had to die – it was the only way for God to display both His perfect justice and His perfect love, given man's pervasive sinfulness.

- Jesus had to die – because you are a sinner.
- Jesus had to die – because God desires to display His perfect justice.
- Jesus had to die – because God – Praise Him! – desires to show the riches of His kindness to YOU!

Will you then quit trying to prove that you're not a sinner? Will you quit trying to maintain that you are actually worthy of God's favor? Will you look away from yourself and to Jesus, dying on the cross – to Jesus, risen and exalted? He had to die – so that you might live. Marvel at His grace!