

It was for good reason, then, that Paul said that he preached “Christ crucified”, for Christ died **for our sins**, and the forgiveness of sins is declared on the basis of the death of Christ on the cross.

But it was also for good reason that Paul’s preaching of the cross placed such emphasis on the resurrection. Unless Christ died having “authority to lay down his life and authority to take it up again, he died as the victim of sin but not as the Saviour from sin.

- Meditate on v. 20 and on what this means for our gospel, salvation and hope.
- Christ is “alive for me!” – what does this mean to me?

In Other Words...

In short, there would be no resurrection to proclaim if it were not for the crucifixion, and there would be no atonement to proclaim if it were not for the resurrection.



Three studies on Jesus, his Cross and Resurrection
by Peter J Blackburn

2. Why the Cross?

In the light of the resurrection we make bold to claim that Jesus had “authority to lay down his life,” that he died, not just because of human hatred, but because of divine love, that he died, not only because of sin, but for sin.

The Divine Necessity

Why did the God-Man die? Many have stumbled at this point. Some of the early Christian thinkers, devoutly seeking to maintain the deity of Christ, made of his body a phantom shape which stripped his suffering and death of true reality, or else denied that he could have suffered in his full personality – divine and human.

The point of our question is that Christ died as the God-Man. As such he could only die as part of the divine plan and will. Here was an actual death – neither phantom nor fake. Human hatred said, “Let him be crucified.” The Father’s love for human beings also said, “Let him be crucified.” And in the awful death of the Son of God – involving the agonising separation of the Son from his Father, as he became identified with the sins of the whole world (Mt. 27.46; 2 Cor. 5.21) – God accomplished forgiveness and new life for all who put their faith in Christ. Christ, then, died **for** our sin, and not just because people in their sinfulness could not abide the presence of the holy and just one.

- Do we view the cross of Christ as human intrigue or divine plan? Why?
- James Denney in *The Death of Christ* wrote, “If I were sitting on the end of a pier on a summer day enjoying the sunshine and the air, and someone came along and jumped into the water and got drowned ‘to prove his love for me,’ I should find it quite unintelligible. I might be much in need of love, but an act in no rational relation to any of my necessities could not prove it. But if I had fallen over the pier and were drowning, and someone sprang into the water, and at the cost of making my fate his own, saved me from death, then I should say, ‘Greater love hath no man than this.’ I should say it intelligibly, because there would be an intelligible relation between the sacrifice which love made and the necessity from which it redeemed.” So... where are we and the rest of humanity? on the pier or in the water? In what ways do our perceptions of “where we are” affect our view of the cross?

Cross and Empty Tomb

The fact of the empty tomb – or, more especially, of the resurrection to which it bears witness – is crucial to our understanding of the cross.

The resurrection confirms the claim of Christ to be the Son of God (Rom. 1.4). Though the man who died on the cross had been ever so innocent and good, if he were not the Son of God, there would be no atonement for sin. This is not the only case in history of a good man being made the unjust victim of legal processes and put to death. Such cases have, indeed, made an emotional impact on those involved, and may have led to moral reform. But only in the death of the Son of God has an atonement been made for sin and fellowship restored between humanity and God. Because the resurrection declares Christ to be the Son of God, it also declares the atonement.

The resurrection is also the declaration of Christ's victory over sin and the grave. This victory would remain only a theoretical possibility if Christ had remained dead, but his resurrection confirms and declares it.

The resurrection vindicates the moral rule of God. In the cross we see that God does not take sin lightly and that his forgiveness of sin is consistent with his moral rule (note Rom. 3.25b,26). But if Christ had remained dead, this would be the striking instance of the triumph of wrong over right, of evil over good, of hatred over love – the universe would be a moral chaos!

- “The fact of the empty tomb – or, more especially, of the resurrection to which it bears witness – is crucial to our understanding of the cross.” Why is this so?

Preaching Christ Crucified

The apostle Paul wrote, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1.22-24).

This is often loosely quoted – “We preach Christ crucified and risen again...” But this is not what Paul wrote – “Christ crucified” was the theme of his preaching.

How do we reconcile this with the evident experience and preaching of Paul as recorded in Acts? His conversion stemmed from an encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9.4ff). In his sermon at Pisidian Antioch, the resurrection is

strongly emphasised – note 13.32-33a, “We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.”

The theme of his discourses to the Thessalonian Jews was “that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead” and that “Jesus is the Christ” (17.3).

His opportunity to preach on Mars Hill in Athens came because he was “preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection” (17.18b) – it was the reference to the resurrection that caused dissension among his listeners (v. 32).

He split the Jewish Sanhedrin by affirming, “I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead” (23.6b) Indeed, in 1 Cor. 15, where he sets out the terms in which he preached the gospel to them, he devotes one verse (v. 3) to Christ crucified and five verses to Christ risen from the dead.

It is clear from these references that, when Paul writes that he preaches “Christ crucified,” he is not minimising the importance of the resurrection for the Christian faith or for his preaching. As we look at these references, however, we need to be careful not to miss some important points.

In the sermon at Pisidian Antioch, note Acts 13.38,39 – “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.” Luke's account gives no elaboration of the means by which God has brought about this forgiveness. In speaking with his hearers the relationship between the forgiveness of sins and the death of Christ could well have been made explicit.

In Paul's defence before Agrippa, we note that the risen Christ has commissioned him to go to the Gentiles “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (26.18). Indeed, the Old Testament Scripture has pointed forward to Christ – “that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles” (v. 23). This proclamation of the risen Christ could only be made in view of what was accomplished on the cross.

In 1 Cor. 15, Paul states that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (v. 3). As we shall see in the third study, the resurrection of Christ is of great importance to us as Christians in the assurance that Christ did die “for our sins.”