

Life in death: What did Christ's death achieve? (April, 2021)

In 1927, T.S. Eliot came to some kind of Christian belief. His friend, Virginia Woolf wrote to her sister of the news: *"I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He... believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is, I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God."* You would think that believing in God was a fate worse than death! John Lennon imagined that a world without Christ would be a kind of bliss. Charles Simeon was terrified of taking the Lord's Supper when he thought about its meaning and his own life before God. For some the cross is an example of costly love, but nothing more. For others, the Bible's claim that the Father sent His Son, knowing that He would die, is akin to abuse.

Yet, for the Apostle Paul the cross of Christ is vital. There is no hope for the world apart from the gospel, and the cross of Christ is the centre of that message. Paul was determined *"to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2)."* He knew the cross was foolishness and a stumbling block, but his message was *"Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23)."* For Paul, the cross drives Christian behaviour, especially humility (Philippians 2:8). The cross demonstrates the costly love of God for His people: *"you were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20)."* The cross is the only point of boasting in his life (Galatians 6:14). Paul even says that he was *"crucified with Christ"* and Christ now lives in him (Galatians 2:20).

The question to ask from all this is what was achieved at the Calvary? Why did the Son of God leave the thrones of glory for the humiliation of the cross? What did the cross of Jesus Christ accomplish? When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid His lifeless body in the tomb what, if anything, had changed? People often look for meaning in a person's death. What of Christ's death?

Below are seven points that explain only some of what Christ's death achieved;

- I. **Peace with God** – There is hostility between God and us. God is holy and as such, He must judge sin. The holiness of God was such that the closer a person came to the Holy of Holies in the centre of the Tabernacle, the more dangerous it became. Christ's death has opened up for us access into the Holy of Holies. It is the grounds of our peace with God. *"God was pleased... to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20)."* Peace with God means that we are forgiven and redeemed from sin's judgment that we deserve. *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7)."*
- II. **Redemption from futile living** – Our way of living was futile and in the end vain. But through Christ's death, *"the ancient tradition of home and nation is broken"* and we are set free to live for God. *"You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:18-19)."*
- III. **His complete obedience to His Father's will** – Jesus said, *"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 6:38)."* That included Calvary. In the Old Testament God's wrath is pictured as a repulsive cup of foaming wine (see Psalm 75:8). Jesus prayed, *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;*

nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will (Matthew 26:39).” Then He drank the bitter cup to the end.

- IV. **The very definition of love** – Christ’s death on the cross proves the depth of His love for us. There is no greater love than at the cross of Christ. *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us (1 John 3:16). “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).”*
- V. **Reconciliation with one another** – the gentiles were *“without hope and without God in the world.”* But the cross of Christ has meant that the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been abolished. Christ Jesus has created *“in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (Ephesians 2:15-16).”*
- VI. **A new way of living** – When Christ Jesus died, believer, you too died! You died to slavery to sin in order to be a slave to righteousness. *“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6).”*
- VII. **A worshipping people from every corner of the globe** – John’s vision of the throne room of God is glorious beyond words! The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song of worship to the Lamb. He is worthy for *“by His blood He has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9).”*

April prayer points

Q. 35. What is sanctification?

Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace by which we are renewed throughout in the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness.

Sanctification means making a person holy. It is called a work because, although the believer has made a definite break with his old life, his being made actually holy is carried on by degrees. It is a renewal because it restores us so as to be like God made us in the beginning.

- Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 35

Some things to pray for in the coming month;



1. Please pray for Craig and Red Fulton and Yolngu believers. Pray also for Johanna’s health (arthritis) and Red’s work at the women’s shelter. Our prayer is the prayer of Jude 20, *“you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that*

leads to eternal life.”

- 2. Please pray for the gospel of Christ Jesus in the country of Bhutan in the Himalayas. Please pray for *Thimphu Covenant Fellowship*. They are a small group of believers who meet in a home. We ask that the Holy Spirit will strengthen and encourage them in every way.
- 3. Please pray for the Youth Group camp, that the children will *“taste and see that the LORD is good (Psalm 34:8).”*