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The Cause of His Death - Part 2

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott takes us to the Last Supper as Jesus explains to His disciples the significance of the bread and wine. John explains what Jesus meant when He asked for the cup [of suffering] to be taken from Him and why Jesus was forsaken by His Father.

Transcript

♪♪♪ Apathy and complacency can blossom everywhere in the world, except at the foot of the cross. Apathy and complacency are noxious poisonous weeds that can grow anywhere else, except there. The foot of the cross, they weather up and die.

♪♪♪ Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. During his lifetime, he impacted the Evangelical Church on every continent and was author of the landmark Lausanne Covenant on Evangelism. ♪♪♪ But for all his global influence, he had an unassuming demeanor preferring to be known as Uncle John and living in a small apartment above a garage of a rectory in London.

Indeed, the rectory of all souls laying in place, which was his home church for almost 60 years. We are privileged to be marking John Stott's centenary by bringing you just some of his timeless teaching. ♪♪♪ In last week's message, John Stott explained why God could not forgive our sins in the same way that we might forgive one another.

He showed us why Jesus needed to die on the cross for us. This week, Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples for the last supper. There were some important things he wanted them to understand.

To begin with, he emphasized the centrality of his death. It was his last evening. He wanted them to remember him.

He said, "Do this and remember it to me." He gave instructions for his own memorial service. And for what did he want them to remember him? What was it that spoke from the bread and wine? He said, "This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you."

Do this and remember it to me." In other words, he wanted to be remembered for his death. He did not ask them to remember his birth or life or ministry or miracles. Even his resurrection.

It was death that spoke through both the elements, the bread and the wine, and that is what he wanted them to remember. Surely that is conclusive, is it not, that the death of Jesus was central in his own mind as the most important thing that he had come to do. Then here is another thing.

He tells us, again in the upper room, through the bread and the wine, the purpose of his death. He spoke of his blood of the new covenant shed for many for the remission of sins. Well, our minds have to go back to a day, 600 years before Christ.

When God said to Jeremiah, "The day is coming when I will make a new covenant with my people." And as part of the promise of the covenant, I will forgive their iniquities and their sins. I will remember no more. You see, a new covenant in which the forgiveness of sins is promised.

600 more years passed, and a young Jew named Jesus, carpenter by trade, preacher by vocation, had the effrontery to say that this new covenant that God promised 600 years ago is about to be established, that the forgiveness of sins that is the promise of the covenant is about to be available, and the sacrifice to ratify the covenant is the shedding of my blood in death. It could be hard to imagine a more audacious claim than that, that the reason he was going to die on the cross was to establish a new agreement between God and man and make the forgiveness of sins possible. That's his understanding of his death.

One other thing before we leave the upper room, and that is, notice the form that the drama took. He didn't just break bread. He didn't just pour out wine.

It wasn't just the drama in which he was the actor, and they were the spectators watching the breaking of the bread and watching the outpouring of the wine. No having broken the bread, he gave it to them. He said, "Take it, eat it." Having poured out the wine, he gave them the cup.

He said, "Drink it." In other words, they were not to be spectators only. They were participants in the drama. Just as it was not enough for the bread to be broken, it had to be eaten.

And for the wine to be poured out, it had to be drunk. So it is not enough that Christ died on the cross. We have to receive him.

In that dramatic imagery of Jesus, we have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. That is to say, we have to appropriate personally for ourselves the benefits for which he died. We have to receive him as we eat the bread and drink the wine.

We can receive Christ into our hearts and make him our own as our personal Savior. Amazing that Jesus should have taught all that in the upper room through bread and wine. Now let's leave the upper room.

Come with me to the second scene. It's moonlight now. It's nighttime.

They leave the upper room in Jerusalem. They walk through the deserted streets of the city. They cross the brook, Kidron.

They begin to climb the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem. And then they turn off into Gethsemane, which seems to have been an olive orchard. And there something happened which simply cries out for an explanation.

Jesus leaves the apostles and goes on by himself into the depths of the garden where he prostrates himself in prayer and cries, "Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will. And again, oh, my Father, if this cup may not pass from me unless I drink it, your will be done." And then Luke tells us after he'd said it a third time, he was in great agony of mind and spirit, and his sweat poured from him like drops of blood. What is the meaning of that sorrow, that agony, that blood is sweat? There's anxious cries that if possible, a certain cup that was being offered to him to drink might be taken away from him.

What is that cup? Is it the mocking, the spitting, the flogging that he was going to have to endure? Is it the desertion of his friends, the abuse of his enemies, the physical torture of death by crucifixion? Is that what he's shrinking from? You never make me believe that it was any of those things, or all of them put together. To me, it's ludicrous to suppose that Jesus, whose moral and physical courage has never for one moment wavered, is now afraid of pain and insult and death. I tell you, it is absurd.

Plato tells us that Socrates, in the prison cell in Athens, took the cup of hemlock readily and cheerfully. He wasn't afraid to die. Was Jesus afraid to die? Was Socrates braver than Jesus? Was Jesus, after all, in the moment of his testing, a coward? I tell you no.

All the evidence of his former life and character is against it. So in that case, the cup that he was being offered to drink, from which he was shrinking, was something different. It is neither the physical pain or torture of crucifixion, nor the mental anguish of being abandoned by friend and foe, but the spiritual pain, a bearing in his own innocent person, the sins of the world, and the divine judgment upon their sins.

From that contact with human sin, his sinless soul recoiled, and from that experience of alienation from his father, which the judgment upon sin involved, he hung back in dread and horror. Not that for one moment he rebelled. He began each prayer, "If it be possible." He ended each prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done." There was no rebellion there.

There was just a desire that if it were possible, some other way could be found. But when he emerged from the agony in the garden and was about to be arrested, and Peter tried to avert his arrest, do you remember what Jesus said, "Shall I not drink the cup which my father has given me?" Now we know from the Old Testament what that cup was. The cup of wine is often in the Old Testament, a symbol of the judgment of God and the anger of God against evil.

For example in Isaiah, "Rise yourself, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath." Or again, Jeremiah, "Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, 'Take from my hand this cup of the wine of roof.'" There's only two of a number of examples. That was what the cup was, an experience of the judgment of God upon sin with which he identified in our place. I come in my last few moments or minutes to the third scene, which is the hill called "Golgatha." I went to imagine the details that you know very well how the cross was hoisted into an upright position and dropped into a socket that had been dug for it in the ground and how Jesus was suspended between heaven and earth.

The priest mocked him and the soldiers gambled for his clothing and he spoke a word of reassurance to his mother. He asked John to look after her. He spoke words of forgiveness to the penitent thief and so on.

And then darkness came upon that hill. Maybe an eclipse of the sun, but maybe symbolic of the darkness of soul into which he now entered as he bore the Son of the world. For what is darkness in biblical symbolism but separation from God? Jesus' own phrase for hell is "outer darkness" because God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

And separation from the God who is light is to enter into darkness. So our sins came between the Father and the Son and blotted out the light of the Father's face and into that outer darkness, the Son of God plunged for us. I do not hesitate to use the terrible words that our sins sent Jesus Christ to hell.

And from that agony of dereliction he emerged crying, "My God, my God, why have you or did you forsake me?" Now the reason it was a question is not because he didn't know the answer. He knew very well the answer. But because he was quoting from Psalm 22 verse 1 where it is in the form of a question and he quoted that verse Psalm 22 verse 1 for the same reason that he quoted every other verse of the Old Testament, many of which he did quote, name, leatherty, believed that he had fulfilled it.

He experienced the terrible God forsakenness on the cross which was due to our sin and its just reward. All most at once after that he cried, if any one word in the Greek accomplished. Notice the death he dies.

He is not referring to the dastardly deed which the soldiers and others had accomplished, but to what he had accomplished by dying for our sins on the cross. And

36 hours later God raised him from the dead as a final decisive proof that he had not died in vain. That he who had been condemned for us in his death was publicly vindicated in his resurrection.

Now my friends, all this I want to suggest if I may is a coherent and a logical picture. It gives an explanation of the death of Jesus that takes into proper scientific account all the available data without dodging any. It explains the centrality, the central importance that he attached to his death, why he instituted the Holy Communion or Lord Supper to commemorate it, how by his death a new covenant has been established between God and man in which the forgiveness of sins is available.

It explains the agony of anticipation in the garden and the anguish of dereliction on the cross and is claimed to have decisively finished what he had come to do and accomplished our salvation. All this and more is explained if we accept what Jesus himself said and his apostles that he bore our sin in his own body on the tree, that he was actually made sin with our sins. The sinless one made sin with our sins that he was made a curse for us because he identified himself in holy love with our sin and it's just reward.

Towards the conclusion, why not you very quick and very simple things. If what I said is true tonight and it's plain as a pike staff in the New Testament, then firstly our sin must be a horrible thing. Nothing reveals the seriousness of sin or self-centeredness like the cross because what sent Christ to the cross ultimately was not the greed of Judas or the vacillating cowardice, a Pontius pilot or the envy of the priest but our sin and his determination to die for it in order that it might be put away and forgiven.

I think it is impossible for any of us to face the cross of Christ with honesty and not feel ashamed of ourselves. As I stand before the cross, I do not feel able to lift up my head. I feel deeply ashamed.

Apathy and complacency can blossom everywhere in the world except at the foot of the cross. Apathy and complacency are noxious poisonous weeds that can grow anywhere else except there. At the foot of the cross they wither up and die.

If there was no way by which a righteous God could deal with our unrighteousness, except that he should bear it and its judgment in his own person, then our unrighteousness must be horrible indeed. Just a first lesson I learned and the second is that God's love is wonderful beyond human comprehension. God could quite justly have abandoned us to our fate.

He could have left us to reap the fruit of our own wrongdoing, karma and perish in our sins. To what we deserved, God he didn't. He loved us.

He came after us in Jesus Christ. He pursued us even to the desolate agony of the cross.

And I tell you it takes a hard and stony heart that remains unmoved by love like that.

The sinfulness of sin, the love of God, and thirdly the freeness of salvation. As I look at the cross I realize that his forgiveness must be a free gift as utterly free as it is utterly undeserved. Jesus purchased it for us when he died on the cross.

He made it possible by his sin bearing death. So what is there left for us to do? Nothing. What is there left for us to contribute to our salvation? Nothing.

He has done it all. He said it is finished. And all we have to do is to kneel in penitence at the foot of the cross and receive from Jesus Christ the free gift of his forgiveness and new life.

Of course we hate that. We love to contribute. We love to be able to earn it.

We love to be able to strut round heaven like peacocks because we got there by ourselves. But you can't do it. There's nothing to do.

Nothing to give. Nothing to contribute. Only to receive.

To come to Christ and say, "Nothing in my hand I bring simply to your cross I cling. Naked come to you for dress. Helpless look to you for dress.

Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me a saviour, or I die." I want to suggest that we spend as much as a minute now in prayer. Jesus Christ is here.

He stands before us. He speaks to us from his cross. He says to us, "I bore your sin and it's just reward.

I died for you. I was made sin and a curse for you that you might be forgiven." And all we have to do is to thank him for his great love and receive his forgiveness as a free gift. Will you do that? Speak to Christ in the silence of your heart now.

If you are ready, you want to come to Christ. You want to receive his salvation, the free gift of his forgiveness. Maybe you would be able to echo these words.

Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for dying for me. Do not fully understand yet what you have done.

But I believe that you bore my sin on the cross. And that you offer forgiveness because you died for us. I come to you now.

I have nothing to offer or to contribute. But I seek to receive your free gift. Forgiveness and a new life as you offer it to us from the cross.

Thank you for your free salvation. May I follow you all my life. For your name's sake.

You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on the cause of his death. If you prayed that prayer or you want to know more about the Christian faith, then you'll find it helpful to go to our website and click the link that says "What is Christianity?" It's at the bottom of our homepage. John Stott was a writer as well as a preacher.

And each week we recommend one of his books. Today it's simply entitled "The Gospel." And you can find out more at our website, premierchristinradio.com/JohnStott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world. Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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