

1 The Death Jesus Died

- Module: Jesus
- Lesson 43

2 Some Recommended Sources

- Norman Geisler, "Christ, Death of," Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics
- John Lennox, Gunning for God
- Martin Hengel, Crucifixion
- Nabeel Qureshi, "Jesus in Islam vs. Jesus in Christianity," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGR08BizLq8>, video lecture.
- William Lane Craig, Atonement and the Death of Christ

3 Why Talk About Jesus' Death in Apologetics?

- The crucifixion and death of Jesus is central to Christian doctrine.
 - It is why Jesus came. (John 12:27)
 - It is the sole basis for our reconciliation to God. (One God, one Mediator— 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:14)
- Jesus' death by crucifixion is one aspect that sets Christianity apart from the mythologies:
 - "It is the crucifixion that distinguishes the new message from the mythologies of all other peoples."
-Justin Martyr (100-165 A. D.)-
 - Crucifixion distinguishes the new message from the old myths.
-Martin Hengel (1926-2009)-

4 Why Talk About Jesus' Death in Apologetics?

- Some (e. g. Richard Dawkins) consider the Christian teaching of vicarious atonement via Jesus' crucifixion a morally repellent teaching.
 - God's demand for such a brutally violent death on the part of his Son is abhorrent.
 - The suggestion that one could pay for the offenses of another is patently morally unjust.
- Some deny the biblical account of Jesus' death.
 - The "swoon" theory suggests Jesus did not die on the cross. (Attempts to account for the empty tomb.)
 - Most Muslims deny that Jesus died on the cross.

5 The Preaching of the Cross

- The folly of the cross.

- “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block [scandalon; skandalon: snare, offense] and to Gentiles foolishness [moria; moria: foolishness, from which we get moron], but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”.

(1 Cor. 1:18, 23-4)

- To the Jews—a scandal
- To the Gentiles—foolishness

6 **The Preaching of the Cross**

- To the natural mind in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds, it would have been ludicrous for anyone wishing to start a new religion to do so by saying that one's god had been crucified.
- That the earliest church would preach Christ crucified is one of the evidences that it did, in fact, occur. (The criteria of embarrassment.)
- The world's incredulity—
 - In the first century—it was unthinkable.
 - Today—we should not be surprised at a similar incredulity. (e. g. Muslim rejection of Jesus' crucifixion.)

7 **The Scandal of the Cross**

- Crucifixion was the most violent and tortuous means of death which the Roman mind could conceive. (Consider the movie *The Passion of the Christ*.)
- Seneca, a Roman author and advisor to Nero referred to crucifixion as...
 - “The most cruel and disgusting punishment.”
 - “The worst extremes of torture.”
 - “The terror of the cross.”
- The Latin word for cross is *crux*, which is the root of our English word *excruciating*.

8 **The Scandal of the Cross**

- The contemptuous aspect of crucifixion.
 - Called the *servile supplicium* (slave's punishment)
 - After Spartacus' slave rebellion (73-71 B. C.) 6000 rebellious slaves were crucified along the Appian Way between Capua and Rome (app. 110 miles).
 - The Christological hymn in *Philippians 2:6-11* exalts Jesus who “took on the form of a slave” and who “humbled himself” by becoming obedient to death, “even death on a cross.”
- The contempt of Dawkins and others for the Christian view of Jesus' crucifixion simply reminds us of the utter contempt of the first-century world for the Christian message that their God had willingly surrendered to crucifixion.

9 Did Jesus Die by Crucifixion?

- The “Swoon Theory.”
 - Jesus merely swooned on the cross, but revived in the coolness of the tomb. He then escaped past the heavy stone and the Roman guards to present himself to his credulous disciples in his emaciated and brutalized state as the risen Christ, victorious over death. (Alternately: He was removed alive from the cross, and was nurtured back to health by his followers, who then conspired to declare him risen from the dead.)
- The insurmountable difficulties facing the swoon theory.
 - The medical analysis of crucifixion reveals that it was virtually impossible to survive a full crucifixion.
 - There is only one recorded event in which someone, once on a cross, survived. (One of two friends of Josephus, who were both removed from the cross before their death due to Josephus’ intervention with the Romans. One subsequently died, one survived.)
 - The swoon theory cannot account for the firm belief of the earliest Christians, especially the disciples, that Jesus was victorious over death, or the other evidences of the resurrection.

10 The Islamic Denial of Jesus’ Death

- Typically, Muslims deny not only Jesus’ crucifixion, but that he died at all. Most believe he ascended into heaven without having died.
- A key Islamic verse: Sura 4:157. “And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them... they did not kill him, for certain.”
- Two primary Islamic interpretations of this verse:
 - Someone else was crucified in Jesus’ place, but God made him look like Jesus.
 - It appeared that Jesus died, but he really didn’t. (A variation of the swoon theory.)
- Why would Muslim’s deny Jesus’ death by crucifixion?
 - Belief that such a shameful death is beneath the dignity of God’s prophet.
 - At its core, it is a denial of the atonement for sin, which in Islamic belief is unnecessary since people are not inherently evil and they must earn their salvation through good works.

11 History and the Death of Jesus

- Jesus’ death by crucifixion is reported by multiple Christian and pagan sources.
- Some sources for Jesus’ death by crucifixion are very early (perhaps within months of the event).
- The Passion narratives exhibit characteristics of historical authenticity (authenticity markers).
 - Plausibility—the details coincide with known facts.

- Embarrassment—multiple accounts of cowardice on the part of his male followers, the scandal of crucifixion, the role of women.
- Early, multiple sources.
- Dissimilarity—early Jewish and Greco-Roman people would not have conceived of such an account of the Messiah or of a god.

12 History and the Death of Jesus

- Crucifixion is known from medical and historical evidence to have a nearly impossible degree of survivability.
 - “How a flagellated, half-dead victim of the hideous torture of crucifixion could impress others as triumphant over death is hard to envisage.” -D. F. Strauss, 19th century liberal theologian-
 - Roman soldiers were extremely proficient at killing their victims. The likelihood they failed in Jesus’ case is remote.
- The scandalous nature of crucifixion makes it extremely unlikely the earliest Christians would have invented the account.
- How can one account for the birth of early Christianity if there was no crucifixion? (What happened to Jesus?)

13 A Historical Consensus On Jesus’ Death

- Michael Licona (The Resurrection of Jesus) classifies Jesus’ death by crucifixion as “historical bedrock.” (Facts that are strongly evidenced and which contemporary scholars nearly unanimously regard them as historical facts.)
- John McIntire, 20th century Scottish theologian: “Even those scholars and critics who have been moved to depart from almost everything else within the historical content of Christ’s presence on earth have found it impossible to think away the factuality of the death of Christ.”
- Gerd Lüdemann, atheist historian: “Jesus’ death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable.”

14 Is The Atonement Morally Repellent?

- Why couldn’t God “just forgive” us without requiring a bloody and brutal sacrifice?
- How can one person atone for the the guilt of another? This seems patently unjust.

15 What the New Atheists Ignore

- The Problem of Sin:
 - Sin is not merely a mistake. It is a profound and pervasive rebellion against the perfectly holy and benevolent God.
 - Trivializing sin—
 - Says we don’t matter. (Our actions are insignificant. They can simply be dismissed.)
 - Says our good and heroic deeds don’t matter.
 - All sin (even that of slave traders, Hitler, or ISIS) is trivialized.
- The Problem of Justice
 - Justice must be required. We all have a sense of the need for justice.

- Justice must be proportional to the offense.

16  **How Can Vicarious Atonement Be Justified?**

- It must serve the purpose of rectifying the conduct of the offender.
- It must satisfy the requirement of justice.
 - It must properly value the degree of the offense given.
 - It must satisfy the offended person's righteous sense of the need for atonement (making one again).

17  **The Problem of Vicarious Atonement: The Issue of Necessity**

- We are incapable of atoning for our offenses against infinite and perfectly holy God.
- Without the availability of vicarious atonement, (if no one is capable of making atonement in our place), then we are without hope of forgiveness and restoration.

18  **The Problem of Vicarious Atonement: The Issue of Justice**

- To be just, vicarious atonement must meet several conditions, without which the act of atonement does not serve a purpose of righteousness and justice.
 - The offender must own his or her wrongdoing.
 - The offender must agree to turn from such deeds in the future.
 - The offender must acknowledge the offer and provision of vicarious atonement.

19  **The Problem of Vicarious Atonement: How Is It Accomplished?**

- The one making atonement must:
 - Be without sin, or else he would need to atone for his own guilt instead.
 - Be incomprehensibly great in order to satisfy the scope of the consequences of our sin.
 - Must provide sufficient atonement commensurate with the offense given.
- The wrongdoer must:
 - Own his or her own sin (confession).
 - Must have a change of mind about his or her actions, agreeing to forgo such actions in the future (repentance).
 - Must receive the offer of atonement gratefully and humbly. (A presumption of atonement betrays an arrogant lack of appreciation of the greatness of the offense.)

20  **Next Week:**

- What is Resurrection?