The Necessity of the Cross

In the series, “Come to the Cross.”

# Scripture: Heb. 10:1-10; John 3:14-16

# Key Thought: Understanding the necessity of the cross helps us to understand the completeness of Jesus’ provision for us.

# Intro:

One of the questions that enters our minds as thinking Christians is this. “Was the cross of Christ really necessary?” “Couldn’t God have thought of another way, besides the cruelty of the cross to accomplish the goal of redeeming his creation?”

Actually, it’s not too different from the question that Jesus himself asked in the Garden of Gethsemane. Scripture records,

He fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Matt 26:39 NIV

Apparently, the answer was, “No, there is no other way.” For Jesus went to the cross for us.

So, we are then left to ponder the question in a slightly different form, “Why was the cross necessary?” Certainly, we cannot fathom the mystery of the cross nor understand the mind of God in his purposes of redemption in any complete way. But the Bible does give us some information that can help us answer our question. As we dig into the Scriptures we can come to understand a little of why God sent his Son to the cross.

# The cross was necessary because the penalty for sin was death

The lesson of Eden.

The curse pronounced after the fall was death. After their sin Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, from access to the tree of life, and from the presence of God who had formerly walked with them in the garden. The penalty of sin was established. It involved both physical death and separation from God.

The cross of Jesus intervened to pay our penalty.

We confess that on the cross Jesus suffered both physical death and, in some sense, separation from his Father as he was made sin for us.

The prophet Isaiah described what God was going to do this way.

Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer,   
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.  
After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities. Isa 53:10-11 NIV

Paul summarized the situation in one verse.

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom 6:23NIV

John 3:14 refers to Moses lifting up the snake in the desert and mounting it on a pole. In that incident, the people were dying for their sin against God. But those who looked to the emblem that Moses lifted up lived. Jesus compared that story to what would happen to him. We can conclude that those who look to him live instead of die.

That is the context in the Gospel of John for many people’s favorite verse -- John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 NIV

The purpose of the cross is then crystal clear – in order that we might not perish—in order that we might live.

# The cross was necessary to complete the picture of forgiveness God had drawn in the Mosaic system

## Jesus had a sense that he was fulfilling the OT

Jesus had a definite sense that what was happening in his life and what would happen in his death must happen in order to fulfill what had been put in place in the OT. God had set in place through the Mosaic system so much rich symbolism that we would need to understand and it would only be complete when it was fulfulled in Christ. What had happened in the OT was filled full of new meaning, it was completed, brought to its intended purpose through what happened to Jesus.

Jesus himself knew and accepted this divine necessity of the cross. This is clear in his first mention of the cross in the Gospels.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.   
Matt. 16:21 NIV

The Savior didn't hint that these things might happen, or even predict that they would happen – but rather declared they must happen. There could be, there would be, no other way. Jesus again emphasize this necessity in the very significant teaching moments he had with his disciples after his death and resurrection: (Luke 24:25 – 26)

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Luke 24:25-26 NIV

(Experiencing the Cross by Henry Blackaby pages 17, 18)

## Think of the many types or pictures set up in the OT and given fuller meaning in Jesus’ death

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| ***The Passover Lamb***  ***Exodus 12:13*** | ***Christ, our Passover Lamb***  ***1 Cor. 5:7*** |
| ***The shedding of blood***  ***”The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Heb 9:22 NIV*** | ***Heb. 9:11,12***  ***”For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Matt 26:28 KJV*** |
| ***The perfect sacrifice***  ***Ex. 12:5; Lev. 4:23; 5:15*** | ***1 Peter 1:18,19 “a lamb without blemish or defect”*** |
| ***Identification with the sacrifice by laying a hand on the head of both the burnt offering and the sin offering Lev. 1:4; 4:29*** | ***Isa. 53:4-6 “the Lord has laid on him…”***  ***John 3:18 “Whoever believes is not condemned.”*** |
| ***Confession of sins over the sacrifice Lev. 16:21*** | ***1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins ….”***  ***He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24 NIV*** |
| ***Cleansing from uncleanness***  ***Lev. 14:19*** | ***Heb. 9:14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! NIV*** |

The cross was the end and the completion of the sacrificial system. The death of Jesus ended the old system by fulfilling it completely and thus rendering it no longer necessary. Perhaps the old system existed to help us understand all that God would accomplish through the cross. The old Levitical system was like a foreshadowing of what was to come in the sacrifice of Jesus.

# The cross was the ultimate proof of God’s love

## The cross is the perfection of the incarnation

Jesus was one with our race all the way to death. It was the love of Jesus that pushed him to identify fully with us. What would it take for Jesus to demonstrate that he had fully identified with us? Jesus was one with our race all the way to an unjust death. Jesus was one with us in a death filled with suffering. He could not possibly have identified with us more deeply or more fully.

For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Heb 2:17 NIV

## God demonstrated his love by sending Jesus to die

The cross is the ultimate symbol of the sacrificial and self-giving love of God that is behind the plan to send Jesus to die for our salvation. Knowing the separation that would be involved, knowing that Jesus would suffer at our hands, God loved us so much that he sent his only Son anyway.

“For God so loved the world…” says our favorite verse. Or as Paul put it in Romans….

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Rom 5:7,8 NIV

 We cannot fathom the love of God for us but when we try to conceive of a Father sending his son to die for sinners who were still his enemies, we are overwhelmed. The very idea gives us a small glimpse of how much God must love us.

# Conclusion

## How do we respond?

* If we have not opened our hearts to Jesus, just thinking about how he went to the cross for us, should certainly motivate us to do so. The first response that God wants from us is to believe in the one He has sent!
* For all of us, we can respond in humble worship of God and His Son Jesus, our Lord. The more we meditate upon the cross, the more filled with worship and awe we become.
* The third response I think all of us will have is to wholeheartedly follow Jesus. There are many distractions today. We live in a world where we have so much in the way of creature comforts. It is so easy to put our discipleship on the back burner, just by carelessness or lack of diligence. As Henry Blackaby put it:

Our constant natural tendency is to wander, to grow slack and lose our diligence and discipline and seriousness, and I believe this kind of carelessness and casualness are among the greatest failures of God’s people today. (Experiencing the Cross by Henry Blackaby p. 155)

But when the cross of Jesus is on our heart, there is a new sense of urgency in our desire to follow him. When we meditate upon all that God accomplished for us through the sufferings of his Son, we find new energy and new vitality as Christ followers.