

## What Kind of “God” Dies?

Air Dates: April 11 – 15, 2022

### Day One

I hope you have been preparing your heart to celebrate Resurrection Sunday, for it is truly the most important celebration for us as Christ-followers. And in preparation, I'd like us to focus on a very unusual question, which is: What kind of god dies?

If you or I were given the assignment to determine how the sins of mankind could be forgiven, would we ever have come up with a plan that God becomes man and dies? The disciples certainly had difficulty hearing Jesus when he repeatedly told them that he had come to die, not to get rid of the Roman rule in Israel and establish himself as the ruler. Even though there were many clues and prophecies from the Old Testament showing that the coming Messiah would die, their belief at the time was that Jesus was Messiah and he had come to save them from Rome, not from their sins.

I've been trying to put myself in the shoes of those disciples as they grappled with Jesus' mission. Clearly Jesus told them, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). He told them that he was the Good Shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He even gave them an indication of the kind of death he would die when he said, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up” (John 3:14). But they just couldn't hear it because what kind of god dies?

Only the true eternal God would have put this plan in place. To send his only Son who was equal with God the Father for the purpose of dying could only come from the mind and heart of God himself.

Then think of this—the way Jesus died was not only the most painful and horrendous way to die; the Jews considered that any crucified person was condemned by God. Don't you imagine that in those early days following the crucifixion, the disciples were struggling to understand why Jesus had to die, and why he died on a cross? He died this ignominious death and all along they thought he was from God—which of course he was—but how could he be from God and die on a cross?

### Day Two

Have you ever asked yourself this question: What kind of god dies? Jesus kept telling his disciples that he came to die, he came to deliver them from their sins not from Rome. But they just couldn't hear it. After all, what kind of god dies?

If I had been in the shoes of those disciples at that time, I'm sure I would have struggled with understanding that the Messiah—the one I had faithfully followed for over three years, the one I hoped was going to redeem Israel from Rome—this Jesus was going to die on a cross under God's curse. No doubt they knew the passage from Deuteronomy 21:23 which says that “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.”

When Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified, the Jewish leaders were very pleased for no doubt they thought this would be the end of this troublemaker and his followers. Surely those pesky disciples would give up after Jesus was hung on a cross. This helps us understand why the disciples went into

hiding after the crucifixion and were frightened that they would be found out. They were bearing not only the grief of losing Jesus, but the shame and disgrace of the way he was killed—on a cross.

A crucified Messiah was not their idea of a hero, a Savior, their hope. And up to the end they just couldn't believe it—Jesus was going to be crucified on a cross? They must have wondered why God sent Jesus to die and why did he have to die on a cross? What kind of god dies?

Well, with clear hindsight now and with the New Testament to explain it to us, we can look back and see why God the Son had to die—and yes, even his method of death, a cross, was part of God's plan. Remember, no one took Jesus' life from him; he gave it. This was all part of God's eternal plan, every detail of his death was predetermined by God.

The reason Jesus had to die was because sin has consequences and a holy God cannot just overlook sin. The price had to be paid for sin; this is what God declared. He does not ignore our sins, but he makes it possible for our sins to be forgiven in Jesus Christ. Of course, God also never intended for death to have dominion over Jesus. What a glorious truth!

### Day Three

Resurrection Sunday is definitely the best day of the year, as we sing the glorious truth that Christ the Lord is risen! But back in the day, when the disciples were expecting Jesus to save them from Rome, they never expected him to die—and certainly not to die on a cross because that was cursed by God. But it was totally necessary for Jesus to die if any of us could be forgiven. You see, even if each of us were to pay for our sins, we would simply die *in* our sins. We would pay the price—death—but there would be no redemption. Jesus paid the price *for* our sins. Because he was the perfect Son of God, he was qualified to die for our sins because he did not have to die for his own sins. He took our sins on himself and paid the price we could never pay so that those sins could be forgiven and we could have access to God through Jesus and his sacrifice.

Furthermore, the payment for sin had to come through the shedding of blood. Hebrews 9:22 tells us: "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." So, the death that Jesus died had to be one where his blood was shed; it could not be a bloodless death. The cross was God's choice for the death of his Son—the shameful cross—because in that way his blood was shed, and Jesus took that curse that we deserved and paid the penalty that we owed. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.'"

The good news is that even though the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). It's good for us to get a renewed and deeper understanding of why Jesus died and why he died on a cross.

As clueless as the disciples were while Jesus was with them, once they "got it," once they began to see why Jesus came to die and why he died on a cross, and they saw that he triumphed over death and rose from the grave, then when they were indwelt with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, their whole attitude toward the cross changed. Their hopes were dramatically restored and they had unshakable faith in their crucified risen Messiah.

### Day Four

It's really important to rehearse again this incredible truth that God, the Son, came to earth to die to pay the debt you and I owed—one we could never pay—for the forgiveness of our sins. And because Jesus died and then rose again after three days, he has conquered eternal death for us. If you have been born from above through faith in Jesus Christ, then your debt has been paid and that is the most amazing truth ever.

Think about the disciples as they were witnessing Jesus' trial and crucifixion. No doubt they just could not comprehend how Jesus could come to this end. They believed he was their Messiah and he would save them from Rome, but instead he came to save them from their sins. But after the resurrection when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they finally understood and they were changed people.

In a statement to the Sadducees, who had just put him in jail for preaching the Gospel, Peter said, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Peter points to the tree—the curse of the cross—and says that in spite of their intention to bring Jesus to disgrace, God raised him from the dead and reversed the stigma.

Paul went even further to show how the cross became their message. He said, "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 Corinthians 1:23-24). The fact that Jesus was crucified was a great stumbling block to Jews in that day. How could their Messiah die and on a cross of all things? And for the Gentiles—those who are not Jews—this idea of a god dying seemed foolish. There were lots of gods that were worshipped in those days. The Romans had false gods for every occasion. But none of their gods died by crucifixion! That was foolishness to them.

The amazing truth is that once the disciples understood the purpose of Jesus' death on the cross, that very shameful act of being crucified transformed the disciples and their message, and the thing that once had been so repugnant to them became the thing in which they boasted.

And that is what we boast in this Easter season. Don't let this celebration pass you by without taking time to remember again that Jesus set you free by dying for you and then rising from the tomb. And because of that, you are free indeed!

## Day Five

Of what or who do you boast? Or in our vernacular, what do you brag about?

Paul said to the Galatians: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). Can you imagine what this sounded like to Jewish people of that day? Boasting in the cross? That was unthinkable—and yet it is because of the cross that Jesus was able to purchase our salvation.

I have led many tours to Israel and each time I went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus spent those agonizing hours before he was arrested, I was reminded that it's not a fairy tale, it's not just a story that has been passed down through the ages. No, the cross of Jesus Christ was real. He suffered that shameful death for me—and for you—so that God could forgive our sins and we could have the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to us and therefore making us eligible to spend eternity with God.

There's something about sitting in that garden, still filled with olive trees, and knowing we are on sacred ground, walking and meditating there where Jesus agonized until his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground, praying "Not my will but thine be done," as he faced the reality of being separated from his Father and bearing in his own body the sins of the world. Each time I came away from that Garden more humbled and more aware of just what it meant for Jesus to give himself a ransom for many—for me—and to be willing to die on a cross.

As you and I celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, let us glory in the cross, because without it, we have no hope. Boast about the cross and what Jesus has done for you. Tell everybody you can why this celebration is so vital and precious to you. And we will celebrate with great joy the fact that the grave could not hold Jesus; death had no victory over him. He arose from the grave.

What kind of god dies? Only the true God, the only God, who died so that we could live. Let it sink into your mind and heart as you stand in awe that Jesus died for you. Don't ever take this story, this truth, for granted or allow it to become just another story. Understanding the enormity of his death on a cross is sobering and amazing, and it is reason for great joy.