

Reflection - At the Cross

by Larry Totzke

This is holy week, a time to reflect on the events leading up to Jesus' death by crucifixion and to prepare to celebrate his resurrection on Easter Sunday. I want to use this space to reflect on the events that happened on the cross. I want to show you that Jesus' victory over sin was won on the cross, and Easter is the celebration of that victory.

The victory was this, that, by his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty, or the ransom, for the sins of all who believe in him. But before I get into showing you why the victory came on the cross, I want to first challenge you with this question: Why was it even necessary that a sacrifice had to be made, that a ransom had to be paid? God is God; he sets the rules. Why did he set such a barbaric rule that there had to be a sacrifice made? Why couldn't he have just said, "That's OK, I forgive you; I know you did your best. Come, give me a hug; it's all OK. Isn't that very similar to what he tells us to do? He says to us, "Love your enemy; don't seek revenge; the more your brother sins against you, the more you are to forgive him." If that's all true, then why does God need a sacrifice to be made in order to make things right with us?

I searched the Internet for a clear answer to this question. What follows is excerpted from [GotQuestions.Org](http://www.GotQuestions.org), a reliable website I research frequently. I quote:

"God's requirement that a sacrifice is necessary to atone for sin is not a rule that He simply "made up." God's Law is not something that He arbitrarily created; the Law is an extension of His holy nature. God did not invent morality; He revealed Himself to us, and that revelation of His person is what morality is. When God said, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), He was not concocting a rule or imposing a new punishment on us; rather, He was revealing to us an unalterable, eternal reality—if you depart from the Sustainer of life, then you logically cut yourself off from the possibility of a continued existence. Those who reject Life only have one other option, and that is Death.

Saying that God made the "rules" by which sin is atoned for is somewhat like saying that Isaac Newton wrote the law of gravity. Newton described the effects and nature of gravity, but the law of gravity preceded and transcended his description. In similar fashion, the Bible describes the nature of sin and

righteousness, but the universal laws concerning sin and righteousness, death and life, and justice and mercy precede and transcend the writing. God's laws flow eternally from the nature of God Himself.

Since God's Law is an outflowing of His nature, the Law is unchanging. It is "firmly fixed in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89, ESV). God cannot set aside His wrath at sin any more than we can change our DNA. God's justice is not a guideline that He chooses to follow; justice is part of His very character. Righteousness and justice are foundational to His sovereign rule of the universe. Without justice—without wrath at sin—He is not God. Death follows sin not because "God says so" but because sin is rebellion against Life.

We should also define the nature of sin. Sin is much more than thoughts or actions that God "dislikes." There is an objective standard by which sin is measured. Sin is any thought or action that does not measure up to God's holiness and absolute perfection. It is that which opposes His nature. Lying is wrong—not because God chose to dislike it but because God is Truth, and lies oppose His nature. Murder is wrong—not due to an arbitrary rule God made but because God is Life, and murder opposes His eternal character.

As sinners before a holy God, we faced sure judgment: an eternal separation from Him, that is to say, an eternal death. Were God to lay aside His wrath at sin and not give us what sin required, He would cease to be just. But, in His great love and mercy, God provided a way for justice to be satisfied and salvation to be extended: "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)."

With that in mind, the way for justice to be satisfied and salvation to be extended was at the cross. I want to quote from *The Daily Bible*, which records the Bible in chronological order. It gives us a compilation of what the four Gospels say about the crucifixion and puts it in the order in which these events happens. I'll begin with Jesus already on the cross.

"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

*Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, **today** you will be with me in paradise.'*"

That word, **today** is significant. Jesus knew that that very day he and the Father would be together in paradise. It wasn't going to be Saturday or Sunday, but that Friday.

"From the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'"

These words are also very significant. To be forsaken is to be abandoned. Jesus was saying that the Father had abandoned him. Why would God abandon his own son? There can be only one reason, and that is that Jesus, at that point in time, had taken on himself all of the sins, past present, and future, that humankind had ever committed. He was experiencing the punishment that comes with those sins, and that punishment is separation from God or what we call, "hell". We have to suspend our idea of time here, because, in their spirit beings, Jesus and God, the Father, exist apart from time. So what may seem like a matter of minutes to us, that Jesus and the Father were separated, was like an eternity to them. It was an eternity that believers do not have to experience.

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.'

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

These statements by Jesus are also very important. When Jesus said, "It is finished," he could have meant that his earthly life was now finished. But I believe he meant that his his work on the cross was finished. He had accomplished the mission he had come to earth to do, namely to atone for the sins of everyone who would believe on his name. In the words of the hymn,

“Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow.” Then he addressed the Father again. This time his statement showed that their relationship had already been restored. That means that the Father had accepted the sacrifice. The ransom had been paid; redemption had been one. Hallelujah!

At the cross of Christ, perfect justice and perfect mercy meet. Sin and injustice were punished on the cross, with the Son of God receiving the condemnation for sin. It's because the penalty of sin was satisfied through Christ's sacrifice that the Father can extend his mercy and his grace to undeserving sinners. God was just in punishing sin, and He can also justify sinners who receive Christ by faith. God's justice and His mercy were demonstrated by Christ's crucifixion. At the cross, God's justice was meted out in full (upon Christ), and God's mercy was extended in full (to all who believe). God's perfect mercy was exercised through His perfect justice. And his love for those who love him was extended by making them joint heirs with Jesus in all that heaven has to offer.

Yes, the victory was won at the cross, and the celebration began on Easter Sunday when some of Jesus' saw him alive in his glorified body. That was proof to them and to us that Jesus had conquered sin. It wasn't the victory they were expecting, which would have been for Jesus to become the earthly King of the Jews, fulfilling what Pilate had written, but it was much, much more!

We can't meet in person as a church this Easter Sunday. That makes me sad because I want to celebrate Easter with my church family. The biggest thing I'll miss from that celebration is being able to say to everyone I see, “He is Risen” and to hear back from them “He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!”