

Christ Our Sin Bearer

The Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World

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A compilation of articles from

The Gospel Network

tgnghana.org

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A Note to the Reader

The articles collected in this ebook were first published on *The Gospel Network* (tgnghana.org), a blog dedicated to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Written by several authors across different years, they share one theme: Christ is our sin-bearer—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

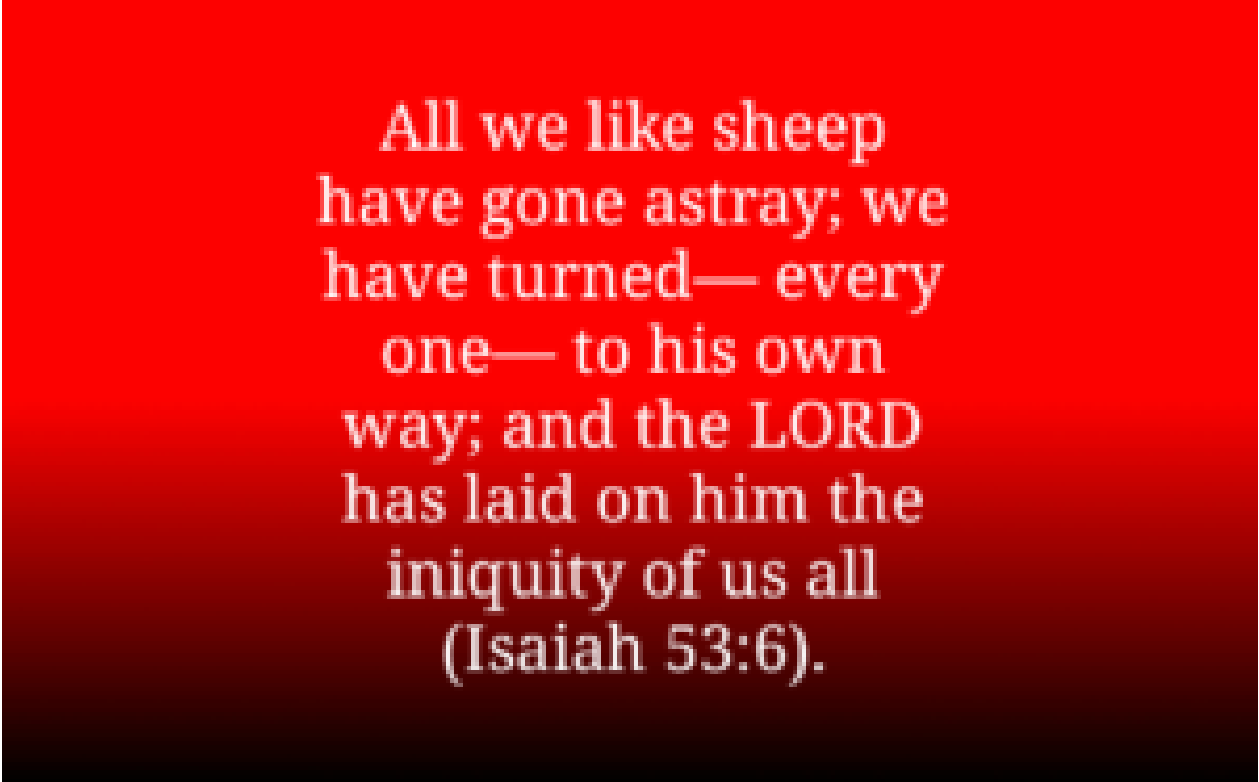
We pray that as you read, the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of your heart to behold the Lamb, and to rest in the finished work He accomplished on the cross and confirmed by His resurrection.

The Gospel Network Editorial Team

Sin and the Need for a Saviour

Christ Our Sin Bearer

By Enoch Anti · March 25, 2016



All we like sheep
have gone astray; we
have turned— every
one— to his own
way; and the LORD
has laid on him the
iniquity of us all
(Isaiah 53:6).

Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It is also the book of beginnings because it tells us the origins of life and accurately explains the main problem of the world—Sin. From the first two chapters of Genesis, we are made to know there is a Creator who created the world and all that dwells in it (Genesis 1:1, 31, 2:26-27). After creation, God saw that everything He had created was good (Genesis 1:31). But today, in contrast to Genesis 1:31, the world in its current state is not good. It is a world filled with pain, tragedy, wickedness, cruelty and every horror imaginable. How do we reconcile the current state of the world with God’s proclamation that “everything that he had made...was very good”. The answer is that sin entered the world. So;

What Is Sin?

*Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God [a]. Lev 5:17;
Jas 4:17; 1 John 3:4*

~Westminster Shorter Catechism Q14

In these words we see what sin is. Sin is breaking God’s law by omission or commission. In modern English, the words, “want of conformity” will read something like inability to conform to the law of God or failure to measure up to or obey God’s command. In Greek, the word hamartia is used in explaining what sin is. Sin is “missing the mark” and rightly so, we are all sinners because we have missed the mark of God’s righteous standard (Romans 3:23).

Now, how did sin enter the perfect world God created? We again go back to Genesis, the book of origins. In Genesis 2:16-17, we read of a commandment God gave Adam, the first created man, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”. Fast forward to Genesis 3, Adam disobeyed God; he ate of the forbidden tree and by that act of disobedience, sin entered the world.

Adam in the garden of Eden was acting as a federal head for all of humankind therefore his fall became the fall of all who will ever walk this earth: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”(Romans 5:12).

Except Jesus who lived a perfect life without sin, all humankind inherited the consequences and effects of Adam’s fall; physical and spiritual death. Our nature was badly corrupted and we were alienated from God. The Psalmist said “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

What he means here is that he was born with a sin problem. He inherited sin. We are by ourselves unable to please God: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:11-12). These words describes the helpless state of humankind without Christ. They are enemies of God, separated from Him and guilty of eternal damnation.

However God didn’t leave sinners to our fate to try to work our way to Him. God made the first move towards reconciling sinful humankind to Himself. If you read Genesis 3 again, we see that even in their sins, God’s mercy was manifested. Firstly, God proclaimed what theologians refer to as protoevangelium—the first gospel. God announced His plans towards reconciliation. A curse was pronounced and a remedy for that curse was also revealed:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

The seed of the woman being referred to here is Christ who the Bible speaks of by saying “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”(1John 3:8). The works of the devil is sin that separated us from God. And it is this, Jesus died to destroy. He took the punishment that belonged to sinners. He died in our place to appease for our sins and reconcile us to the Father. Our sins was imputed to Him. He became our substitutionary atonement (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Secondly, God covered the nakedness (guilt and shame) of Adam and Eve revealing a type of Christ’s imputed righteousness to those who will come to Faith through Jesus Christ. Paul aptly captures this saying, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2Corinthians 5:21).

Christ was murdered on the cross because of the sins of you and I. And He resurrected to give eternal life to all who will come to Him in Faith If you have not come to saving faith through Christ, you are condemned to eternal damnation and an enemy of God. One day, you will have to answer for your sins before a Holy God and nothing you will present will measure up to God’s Holy standard. Your good works outside of Christ are like filthy rags. Repent from your sins and turn to Christ for forgiveness.

Jesus Paid It All

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · March 28, 2016



Romans 10:3-9

Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.~ Elvina M. Hall; 1865

Imagine this scenario with me. A man who owes the creditors a huge sum of money is dragged before the court. He admits that even if all his property were sold, it wouldn't be enough to clear all his debt. Suddenly, a 'good Samaritan' offers to settle all the debt to the last penny. If it were you, what would be your reaction? Now imagine further, if instead of accepting the good Samaritan's benevolent offer, this debtor rejects it; choosing rather to make up for his debt by suffering a lifetime of hard labour in prison.

Who would do such a thing? Sounds outrageous doesn't it? Yet in the passage from Romans 10 above, Paul suggests the actions of the Jews amounted to just that. They, to whom God gave the Law had spurned God's Son, Jesus Christ, and rejected His offer of salvation through faith. In his description, Paul writes, "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Romans 10:3). The phrase "seeking to establish their own righteousness" (in the authorised translation, "going about to establish their own

righteousness”) connotes a strenuous effort to establish one’s own righteousness instead of relying on God’s.

The Law and Man’s Inability

God gave the Law to man with this caveat “...the person who does the commandments shall live by them.” (Romans 10:5b). Which means one could attain righteousness and eternal life by fully obeying the law without faulting at any point (Deuteronomy 30:15-20, James 2:10). In our fallen state, God’s verdict is that no one could keep the law no matter how hard we try. The Jews were therefore wrong in thinking that they could work out their own righteousness before a holy and perfect God. God requires sinless perfection. Jesus in Matthew 5:20-48 clearly teaches that the benchmark is not 99% but a 100%.

It is therefore tragic that anyone would try to attain righteousness by their own effort and good works. Many today go to great lengths to be good, fast, pray and obey the 10 commandments — all in an attempt to save themselves. God demands perfect obedience with all of one’s heart, mind, soul and strength, and one ought to continue doing so unflinching in order to maintain righteousness (Matt 22:36-38; Rom 10:5). The plain truth is that none of us is equal to such a task.

The law points to the fact that we need God’s help in order to be saved. It shows us how inadequate we are in terms of fulfilling God’s Law; yet offers us no remedy. On this, John Bunyan writes, “To be under the law as it is a Covenant of Works, is to be bound, upon pain of eternal damnation, to fulfil, and that completely and continually, every particular point of the Ten Commandments, by doing them.”¹

Paul, recounting his own experience wrote:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:15-16, 18, 24-25a ESV).

John Bunyan further comments,

So long as people are ignorant of the nature of the law, and of their being under it – that is, under the curse and condemning power of it, by reason of their sin against it – so long they will be careless, and negligent as to the inquiring after the true knowledge of the Gospel.”²

If we truly understood what the law required of us in order to be saved, we’ll come flying to the foot of the Cross.

The Good News: Christ, The End of the Law

Jesus, as the last Adam, was the only one who was able to wholly and completely obey God’s Law. This is what Paul meant by saying Christ is the end of the Law. Not that He abolished it; but rather because He fulfilled all its righteous requirements. But He is the end of the Law only to those who believe in Him. To these, the law is no longer binding in justifying sinners before Christ. Through faith in the finished work of Christ, sinners are freed from the guilt of the Law and from God’s wrath. Christ’s life of sinless obedience and His death on the cross fully satisfied God’s wrath

against sin for all who believe in Him.

God therefore offers righteousness to all who believe in Christ alone, free of charge. This does not require any strenuous effort from us — only faith in Christ and what He has done on our behalf.

There's no need to strenuously seek to establish your own righteousness. Jesus paid it all — all the debt we owed God for disobeying His Holy Law and its repercussions; eternal death. This is the reason for the Cross. Celebrate this season with understanding. If you haven't already, come to saving faith in Christ now; He is willing and ready to save you.

Notes:

1: John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*

2: *ibid*

Behold the Lamb

Behold The Lamb of God! (Part 1)

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · February 24, 2023



The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29.

The year was 2019. The month was November, the day, the 6th. The venue: Our first-born son, Ekow’s primary school, and the occasion, parents’ evening. Nothing could have prepared me for what awaited me that evening. I will never forget the expression on the teacher’s face as I entered the room. I hardly sat myself down when she said: “How do you do it? What is your secret?” The question completely threw me off. Before I could respond, she continued, “I wish I had 23 Ekows in my class!”. “He is so polite, so well-behaved, he is such a delight to have in my class!” She added, “So, how did you raise him? How did you do it?”

I stuttered. “Err...erm...” “At home, we try to erm...”, “It’s their mum... erm...”. Finally, I managed to say, “It’s so kind of you to say... I’m so pleased to hear you say that!” I missed a golden gospel opportunity. Ekow’s light shone brightly in his new school (he had started there only the previous year), and his teacher noticed it and wanted to know our secret.

Did we have a special formula for raising our kids? No, we didn’t. Did Ekow eat different meals from his classmates? Perhaps. But was it down to anything in us that he was shining in school? Of course not! However, we did have something up our sleeves! We had Jesus; our kids have been

learning about Him at home from infancy and have grown to love Him for themselves. So, if there was any praise, if there was any virtue, or if we had anything to boast of, it was to boast that Ekow knew the Lord, which was why he was who he was. This was the perfect opportunity to point Ekow's teacher to Jesus, but I blew it! Perhaps you, too, can identify with a time when you were presented with the ideal gospel moment where you could testify about your faith, but you failed to "carpe momentum!" (Seize the moment!).

Not John the Baptist. When faced with an enquiry about who he was and the secret to his ministry, he was able to milkshake the situation into one of the most powerful witnesses about Jesus in holy writ. That inquiry sets the scene for our opening passage. You will find that in John 1:19-28.

A little introduction to John's gospel is fitting. John, the beloved's goal in his gospel is to prove "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31). And in so doing, he marshals at least seven powerful witnesses. John's (the baptist's) witness in our opening text is the first witness John presents. The Wycliffe Bible commentary notes,

"In his burning desire to magnify Christ, John turned an inquiry about himself into a strong witness to the greater One about to manifest himself."

In this series of articles, we will explore John's (the baptiser's) testimony about Jesus in detail. First, we will set the scene and situate our passage within its proper context. Then, we will focus our attention on, "Who is this Lamb who takes away the sin of the world"? We will then seek to understand what it means to take away the sin of the world. We will probe the question, "Why did John use this description of Christ as a Lamb and not any other, for example, a Lion?" And finally, we'll look at the response of John's hearers and what our own response should be.

Setting the scene

Let's recount the events of that fateful day. The Jews (by which John the beloved means the Jewish authorities, who were often opposed to Christ) had sent priests and Levites to ask John whether he was the Christ, Elijah or the prophet. John did not mince words. He declared unwaveringly: "I am not the Christ, nor the prophet – I am only the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

But his inquisitors were not satisfied. They pressed further, "If you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet, then why are you baptizing?" To which John (the baptiser) waxed even more eloquent. "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." John (the beloved) does not record it in his gospel, but this was the same day that John (the baptiser) baptised Jesus. John's (the baptiser's) words in vv. 30-34 give this away. Matthew 3:11-17 places John's words in that passage squarely at the baptism of Jesus.

Now we've got to ask why the Jewish authorities interrogated John this way. We can point to at least two reasons.

First off, the strong preaching of John, which had captivated the multitudes, had piqued the interest of the Jewish leaders. Who was this new preacher who was drawing masses to the wilderness? Matthew 3:5-6 records that "Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." So, given the size of John's congregation, the authorities were beginning to wonder, "Could this be the Messiah?"

But even more important was that he was baptising those who came to him. You see, one of the things baptisms symbolised to the Jewish people was leadership. This is implied in Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2:

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

What does Paul mean by the Israelites being baptised into Moses? Let's unpack this. The children of Israel had just been freed from slavery in Egypt and were on their way to the promised land. They were camped at Pi hahiroth, by the sea, when they saw Pharaoh and his army hard in pursuit, hoping to capture and send them back to bondage. God commanded Moses to stretch out his rod over the red sea, at which it parted in two for them to walk through. So, as they marched through the red sea, following Moses, we see a clear sign of their freedom from slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh and their submission to the leadership of Moses, who would lead them into the promised land. Thus, the Holy Spirit writing through Paul indicates that at that point, they were being baptised into Moses—i.e., they had severed their ties with Pharaoh and Egypt once and forever and were now following Moses' leadership. (Just as the believers' baptism signifies our being buried to the old nature (freedom from sin and the devil's tyranny) and our new life and decision to follow Jesus). That is why God consistently warned them not to return to Egypt because it represented a return to the leadership of Pharaoh, if you like.

So here was John the baptiser, baptising the multitudes who came to him. And the Jewish leaders wondered with what authority was he baptising the people. Could it be he was the Christ? So, you see why they asked those piercing questions. And thus, John had to clarify. He said, “I merely baptise with water – indicating that you have a sin problem and need purification. But I cannot take away your sin, no. There is One among you, whom you do not know; He will perform the ultimate work of purification.”

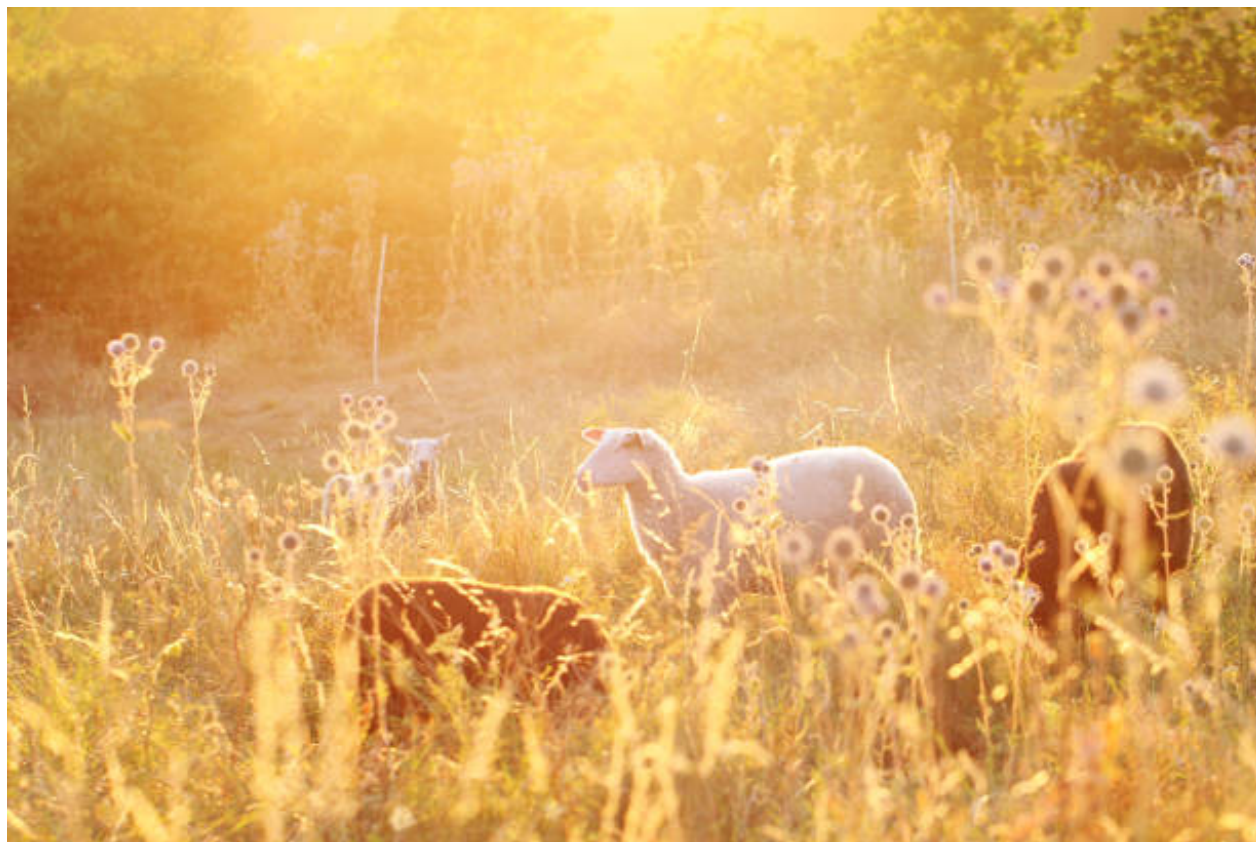
So, we arrive at the next day after all these have occurred. John is once more thundering from the wilderness, calling the people to repentance in preparation for the Messiah, in true fashion to his calling. Then he sees Jesus coming toward him and declares to his multitudinous congregation: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John says, “Look, guys, you've got it all wrong! You're making a big fuss about me, but your attention is in the wrong place. You are focusing your energies on me, a mere messenger. I am only a shadow; this is the real thing! Focus your attention on Him! He's the one I want you to fall in love with, not me.” And so, that's what we'll do in the subsequent posts.

And like John, that's what we ought to call those around us to do, in our words and deeds.

Behold The Lamb of God! (Part 2)

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · February 27, 2023



In the previous article, we noted from John 1:29-34 how John the Baptist turned an inquiry about himself into one of the most potent witnesses about Jesus in holy writ. In this sequel, we will attempt to unpack what John means by referring to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Wycliffe commentary notes,

“John gave three sterling testimonies to Christ’s person and work. As the Lamb, His mission was to be one of redemption. As baptiser with the Spirit, He would found the Church. As Son of God, He would be worthy of adoration and obedience.”

For this article, we will focus on the person and work of Christ as the Lamb of God, who takes away the world’s sin.

Who is this Lamb?

The idea is suggested in history (Exodus 12) and prophecy (Isaiah 53). Historically, we refer to passages such as Exodus 12, where the portrait of Christ as the Lamb of God is painted ever so clearly. On the eve of the Exodus, God commanded the Jews to mark their doorposts with the

blood of a year-old lamb without blemish and how the angel of death would pass through the land of Egypt to kill the firstborn in every house where the command has not been obeyed.

That lamb without blemish, was a type of Christ. Paul makes this connection in 2 Cor. 15:10 when he says,

“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

Also, several verses in the book of Revelations refer to Christ as the Lamb who was slain. Let’s look at it with a chart (below) and work it out for ourselves.

The Passover lamb	Jesus	Scriptural references
A year-old lamb	Died in his prime, at 33 years	Isaiah 53:8
Spotless	Jesus never sinned	1Pet. 2:22; Hebrews 4:15; 2Cor. 5:21; John 18:38; 19:4, 6
Slain and roasted with fire	Jesus’ crucifixion and suffering	Isaiah 53
Not a bone was to be broken	Jesus’ legs weren’t broken	John 19:33
The sprinkling of the blood	We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ	1Peter 1:19

First, God required a lamb a year old, in other words, a lamb in its prime. Similarly, Jesus was crucified in the prime of his life, at 33 years. It was to be a spotless lamb. Jesus was tried six times, and each time his innocence shone through. Thrice, during his trial, Pilate declared, “I find no fault in Him!” The lamb was to be slain and roasted with fire. This signified the type of death Jesus was to die and the painful suffering he would endure on our behalf. The fire denotes the wrath of God, which Christ fully bore so that we who were once God’s enemies can be forgiven and adopted into God’s family.

Not a bone of the lamb was to be broken. On the cross, the Jewish authorities asked the soldiers to break the bones of the prisoners to hasten their death, as it was nearing the Passover. But when they got to Jesus, they found he was already dead, so none of His bones was broken (John 19:33).

The sprinkling of the blood was crucial to the angel of death passing over. If the lamb was killed, but its blood was not applied to the doorposts, the angel of death would not pass over. Similarly, Christ has been crucified; His blood has been shed for our sins; however, we must receive the atonement for ourselves, or else we won’t be saved. We must not wait till tomorrow. Today is a gift, that’s why we call it ‘present’ but tomorrow is never ours. As the Scripture says, if we hear his voice today, we must let Him in and not harden our hearts (Heb. 3:15).

It was to be eaten with bitter herbs, a reminder of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. As we feed upon Christ, we must remember the sin from which we are saved and hate it, never to go back to it again. On this, Matthew Henry pithily notes,

“Christ will be sweet to us, if sin be bitter.”

Prophetically, we’ve got passages like Isaiah 53, where God’s chosen Messenger, the promised Messiah, is described as a suffering servant who would be led as a lamb to the slaughter on behalf of those he came to redeem. Isaiah 53:4-8 says this:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed

for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;

and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

One commentator points out that the words “stricken, smitten of God” are used elsewhere in Scripture, specifically in relation to leprosy and other terrible sicknesses (Genesis 12:17; Leviticus 13:3; Leviticus 13:9; Numbers 14:12; 1Samuel 6:9; 2Kings 15:5). This is most instructive! In other words, this Lamb, this suffering servant, took upon himself the worst sickness there is, even our sin. Sin is the killer of killers, more deadly than leprosy, HIV and Covid-19. Ever since the fall of our first parents, our world has been plagued with the dreadful disease called sin. That is the root cause of all the wars, crimes, and every evil you can think of. Sin is the true cause of all the grief and sorrows in our world. And Christ has borne all of the world’s sin in His own body.

The word for “borne” in the original implies both the “taking upon oneself,” and the “taking away from others,” thus, we are hereby introduced to the idea of Christ’s vicarious (he died for us or in our place) and mediatorial (he takes away our sin and thus brings us back to God again) atonement. This leads us to consider our next question, “What does it mean to take away the sin of the world?”

That will be the subject of our contemplation in the next article in the series.

Behold the Lamb of God! (Part 3)

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · March 1, 2023



The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29.

We pick up our study of John’s testimony about Jesus in John 1:29-34 from where we left off in the previous article, having considered how the historical and prophetic teaching on the Lamb of God converges in Jesus Christ. In this final article in the series, we will consider what it means to take away the world’s sin and explore the response of John’s first hearers and what our own response must be.

What does it mean to take away the sin of the world?

Observe that our text says, “the Lamb of God (not just any lamb) who takes away the sin (not the sins) of the world“. This is most striking! It begs the following questions: “Why did God have to provide Himself a Lamb?“ (Genesis 22:8), “Could we be absolved of our sins by any other means, without the intervention of this Lamb?“ and “What is the sin that this Lamb takes away?“

In his book, “Everyone’s a Theologian“, R. C. Sproul provides an illustration that I think is very useful in answering these questions. I will attempt to recapitulate it as faithfully as I can. Imagine a small boy entering an ice cream store and ordering an ice cream cone. The waitress serves him the ice cream and tells him he owes GHS2. The boy’s face sinks as he reaches into his pocket and pulls out only a GHS1 note. With deep sadness, he tells the waitress, “My mommy gave me only one Ghana cedi“. Imagine you were standing in the queue, watching this drama unfold. Moved, with

compassion, you pull out a cedi from your pocket, hand it to the waitress and say, “Here, I’ll make up the difference.” The boy looks up with a beaming smile and says, “Gee, thank you Sir” and goes away ravishing the ice cream.

Do you suppose the waitress will accept the payment? Yes, she would because the boy incurred a financial debt of GHS1, and as long as the money you offered is genuine, it is legal tender, and the waitress will have to accept the payment. However, the result will be different if we tweak the story a bit.

Imagine our boy entering the shop again, but this time, instead of ordering a cone, he waits until the waitress goes to the back of the shop, at which time he quickly scoops some of the ice cream into a cone and makes a run for it. Unfortunately, the security at the entrance catches him, and the shop owner calls the police. As you watch this drama unfold, you feel sorry for the boy and decide to intervene. You hand the owner GHS2 and say to the policeman, “Hang on a second, officer. Look, here’s GHS2 for what the boy owes, now shall we forget about this?”. The policeman looks at the owner and asks, “Do you want to press charges?” The policeman cannot let the boy go just yet because this time, he has not just incurred a pecuniary debt; he has broken the law and incurred a moral debt as well. So, the store owner reserves the right to accept or refuse the payment.

That is precisely how we should view the atonement. When Paul contemplated the atonement in Romans 3:26, he called God both the judge and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Sproul points out that God the Father is the owner of the ice cream store, and we are the little boy who tried to steal some ice cream. All of us have broken God’s law and incurred a moral debt, the punishment for which is death. That is the sin of the world – a moral debt; one that we cannot pay because we keep on sinning.

God being just, he must punish our sin. And just as the owner of the ice cream shop decides what payment he will accept, so God the Father reserves the right to dictate what payment is required for our treasonous offence and the moral debt we owe him. God has chosen His own substitute to pay the price for our sins; a bystander cannot simply pay the debt. That is the only payment He has chosen to accept, the only one worthy and sufficient to pay for our moral debt. And so, sin cannot be taken away by any other lamb.

Why does John use this description of Jesus and not any other?

To answer this, we turn to Revelations 5. A verdict is about to be given in heaven, and John hears a loud voice ask, “Who is worthy to open the scroll?” At first, no one is found worthy, and so John weeps uncontrollably. Then one of the elders tells him to stop weeping, for behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered and so can open the scroll and its seven seals.

Based on the description of the elder, one would expect to see a powerful lion coming up to snatch the scroll and tear it open, but instead, as John looks on, he sees a Lamb, as though it was slain, standing between the throne and the four living creatures. He [the Lamb] takes the scroll from the hand of Him, who sits on the throne. And then the four living creatures and twenty-four elders prostrate themselves before the Lamb and sing his praises.

The portrait of Jesus as the Lion easily evokes imageries of power and majesty. Rightly so, for all power in heaven and on earth belong to Jesus. But then, I believe that his power, majesty, and exaltation are revealed in his death on the cross. It was as the Lamb that was slain that he conquered, not as a Lion. That is why he retains the portrait of a Lamb even in heaven. And that is why the Lamb is the theme of heaven’s praises, as exemplified by Revelations 5. According to one count,

there are twenty-eight references to Jesus as the Lamb in the book of Revelations and only one in the rest of the New Testament (from John's testimony in our opening passage). He sits on heaven's throne as the Lamb that was slain instead of a Lion.

What was the response of John's hearers, and what should our own reaction be?

John's words would have been momentous to his hearers. And the import of such a description would not have been lost on them. "This is the one Isaiah and the prophets spoke about!" This is the great antitype of all types presented in the numerous offerings and sacrifices you and your fathers have performed in the temple. Behold the Lamb of God!"

And what was their response? Some, like the two disciples of John, Andrew and the other (whose name we don't know), believed and left John to follow the Lamb (John 1:40). He [Andrew] then found his brother, Simon and brought him along to the Lamb. But others, such as the Jewish leaders, rejected him because he did not fit the mould they were expecting. They expected a military leader, a Lion, who would ravage the armies of the Romans and set them free from physical and economic oppression. And so, they rejected him and had Him killed.

What would our own response be? I would like to suggest two ways in which we must respond.

Firstly, if you don't know Jesus as your sin-bearer, this is your moment to behold him as your Lord and Saviour. Consider giving your life to Him and making him your sin-bearer too.

For you, my Christian friend, recognise that the Sin-bearing Lamb is the world's greatest need. I fear that the church today is too quick to present a portrait of Jesus that is popular with the masses. Too often, we try to present a politically correct or people-pleasing Jesus who doesn't want to offend anybody; or a philanthropic Jesus who wants to feed the poor, clothe the naked and solve every other problem but not the problem of sin. However, these are not the greatest needs of our world.

Perhaps, we are afraid people will reject our Jesus as the Lamb who takes away their sin, so we try to present a "softer" version of Him. As theologian D. A. Carson so poignantly points out,

"If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, He would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and he sent us a Savior."

Let us be careful to present the sin-bearing Lamb to a world that needs Him more than anything else!

The Cross

The Sequence of Events That Transpired at Easter

By Michael Franco Smit

Throughout the annals of time, no week holds as profound a significance as the Week of our Lord's Passion and Resurrection. Its gravity is rivalled only by the Week of Creation, marking it as a pivotal moment on God's redemptive calendar. This primer endeavours to illuminate the sequence of events that transpired two millennia ago, urging us to reflect on the transformative journey that Easter encapsulates.

Palm Sunday

As the Week commenced, Jesus made a triumphant entrance into Jerusalem amid the resounding cries of "Hosanna!" His arrival atop a humble donkey symbolized the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy, igniting hope and anticipation among the people. This initial moment marked a promising beginning, with Jesus poised to accomplish the ultimate act of salvation for His people. The atmosphere was electric as the City recognized Him as the long-awaited King, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Yet, as the Week unfolded, the atmosphere within the City would undergo a dramatic shift, foreshadowing the tumultuous events to come.

Scriptural References: Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19.

Monday to Wednesday

As the initial excitement of His triumphal entry subsides, Jesus sets about preparing the stage for His ultimate glorification. On Monday, Jesus initiates His mission by cleansing the Temple, which had deviated from its sacred purpose of being a House of Prayer, as mentioned in Isaiah 56:7, to become a den of robbers. The once vibrant fanfare begins to dim, overshadowed by the sobering reality of Jesus' confrontations with the religious authorities, gradually intensifying the atmosphere. On Tuesday, Jesus cursed a barren fig tree, hinting at the impending narrative of judgment and consequences on God's people, who in the Old Testament are often symbolically depicted as figs or a fig tree (Hosea 9:10; Jeremiah 24). Throughout this period, Jesus imparts profound teachings through parables, underscoring the imperative of repentance, faith, and obedience for attaining salvation. Amidst these developments, a lingering question arises: can the situation deteriorate any further?

Scriptural References: Matthew 21:12-25:46; Mark 11:12-13:37; Luke 19:45-21:38.

Thursday

This day marks the pinnacle of solemnity in the Holy Week. While much of Jesus' ministry has unfolded in public settings, on this day, He turns His focus to His disciples in a deeply profound manner, culminating in the intimate gathering known as the Last Supper. During this sacred meal, the disciples remain unaware of the spiritual forces at play, even as Jesus, aware of the betrayal to come, quotes from Psalm 41:9; signalling the meticulous unfolding of God's sovereign plan. It is during this meal that Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, a profound symbol of the impending sacrificial death He was to endure as the Paschal Lamb. It was also at this time that Jesus humbly

washed the feet of His disciples, demonstrating the selfless love and servanthood that epitomized His ministry. As the evening progresses, the weight of the impending sacrifice is palpable, culminating in Jesus' agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here, the Son of God submits fully to the will of His Father, laying the foundation for the redemption of the elect. The scent of blood is as thick as ever as Jesus prepares to fulfil His mission.

Scriptural References: Matthew 26:17-56; Mark 14:12-52; Luke 22:7-53; John 13:1-18:1.

Good Friday

As the coils of the serpent tighten, victory appears elusive. From a human vantage point, all hope seems lost, exemplified by Peter's impulsive attempt to intervene forcibly. Judas' betrayal, sealed with a kiss, ushers in a sequence of five distinct trials—both religious and secular—as authorities interrogate the Son of Man. Before the pseudo-king Herod Antipas, the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy unfolds as Jesus, resembling a silent lamb led to slaughter, refrains from defence. Led to Golgotha, the hill of crucifixion, the Lamb of God endures six agonizing hours upon the cross. There, he drank the cup of God's wrath and, though sinless, bore the weight of sin itself. The apex of redemption arrives as the Suffering Servant echoes the Psalmist's lament, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The viper's strike pierces his hands and feet; he is surrounded by mocking dogs and encircled by a band of villains. Those who gaze upon him, the one they have pierced, mourn bitterly, their sorrow akin to that of an only child or a firstborn. The Author of Life is laid to rest among the wicked donated by Joseph of Arimathea. How can the death of one man suffice to atone for the sins of many?

Scriptural References: Matthew 26:57-27:66; Mark 14:53-15:47; Luke 22:54-23:56; John 18:1-19:42.

Holy Saturday

The cacophony of chaos simmers down. The exuberance of the triumphal entry and the fervour of teaching in the Temple now feel like distant memories. Silence reigns supreme within the confines of the tomb—a Sabbath unlike any before. Just as God rested after completing His work of creation, so too does Jesus rest, following the fulfilment of His salvific mission. A created stone is used to seal up the Rock of Ages. Yet amid the stillness, anticipation builds as the dawn of the greatest day in history approaches...

Scriptural References: Matthew 27:57-66, Luke 23:50-56

Easter Sunday

Christ, the Son of God, emerges victorious over the shadowy dominion of death, neither abandoned to the abyss nor succumbing to decay. His Resurrection stands as the cornerstone of the Christian faith, a resplendent affirmation of His emphatic triumph over Sin and Death. In this divine act, God's redemptive design is unveiled, showcasing His sovereign authority to vanquish death's grip and extend the promise of New Life to all who would believe in the Son.

Through the Resurrection, Jesus substantiates His divine identity and affirms His role as the conduit of eternal life for believers. As He emerged from the tomb, so too are we, united with Him in His Resurrection, elevated to heavenly realms in Him. This historic event stands as the linchpin of salvation, a resounding declaration that the Battle has been decisively won.

As the apostle Paul affirms, the Resurrection is not a peripheral doctrine but the very essence of faith. Without it, our faith would be futile, and we would remain ensnared in the bondage of sin. Yet, through the Resurrection, we are infused with a Living Hope—a hope that transcends the temporal confines of this life and extends into eternity.

In the words of our Glorious Lord, Jesus Christ: “I am the Resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” This profound invitation beckons us to run to Christ and receive the transformative power of the Resurrection and anchor our hope in the eternal promise it embodies.

Do you believe this?

Scriptural References: Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-21:25.

We Are All Criminals: But Which Kind Are You?

By Kwesi Sena · June 4, 2024



“And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”” (Luke 23:43)

Crucifixion is one of the cruellest forms of execution ever invented by man. Unlike other forms of capital punishment, where the convicts could expect a quick dispatch, with crucifixion the condemned person is tied or nailed to a large wooden cross, beam or stake and left to hang until eventual death.

In the Roman Empire, this punishment was reserved for the most hardened of criminals. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, had to endure this form of punishment, not because of his own sin but for the sins of those who the Father gave to the Son.

In his commentary on the future death of Christ, Isaiah, the prophet who lived 700 years before Christ, prophesied in Isaiah 53:4-5, “Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

The day before, Jesus had been betrayed by one of his disciples (Matthew 26:47-56), which was also foretold centuries prior in Psalm 41:9. The events leading up to his crucifixion did not take place in a corner; it was a front-page news. He was summarily arrested while praying with his disciples and initially arraigned before the Jewish Council (Matthew 26:57-68). However, lacking the authority to condemn someone to death, the Council took him to Pilate, the Governor overseeing Jerusalem at the time. After much back and forth, Pilate eventually cowered to the demands of the Jewish crowd and handed Jesus over to be crucified.

The date and time for the crucifixion was finally set. It was the most anticipated event at the time. It was a frenzied atmosphere as the young and old, rich and poor, men and women, the powerful and the lowly all made their way outside the city gates to witness what was the most consequential event in the history of the universe, as the Author of Life succumbed to death.

The fact that Jesus was going to be crucified on the day was no secret; for those who had gathered at the “Place of a Skull”, it was the reason they were there. However, as you read the account of the crucifixion, it is not immediately clear if the crowd had any idea there would be two criminals who would be crucified alongside Jesus.

As I peer in two thousand years later, it is the conversation between Jesus and the two criminals that piques my interest as I re-read Luke’s account of the crucifixion recently.

The Three-Way Conversation

St. Luke reveals the three-way conversation that transpired between Jesus and the two criminals who were crucified along with him. Interestingly, only Luke records this conversation in detail.

“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The fact that these three men still had the energy to have a conversation on the cross is still a mystery to me, but that is precisely what happened. The accounts of Matthew and Mark seem to suggest that both criminals reviled Jesus (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32). It is unclear at what point the criminal on the right hand (according to tradition) had a change of heart, but in Luke’s account, only one criminal is mentioned to have reviled Jesus. Without remorse for his evil actions, he “railed at him [Jesus], saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

Is this not how the world often reacts toward God? Through our rebellious actions, we have brought the beautiful world He created into ashes. Yet, our heart frequently rages against him for the evil we see around us (Proverbs 19:3). Even when he has provided a way to restore his good creation, we

spurn his grace and instead continue to dictate how we want him to save us. The posture of the first criminal perfectly describes our fallen world—a rebellious people who refuse to repent even when we are faced with the consequences of our actions.

But the criminal on Jesus' right hand provides a picture of God's grace and what repentance can accomplish in our lives. Luke tells us, "But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

A Right View of Self and God Leads to Repentance

The fact that he was suffering was unquestionable, yet he acknowledged the holiness and justice of God to judge him for his sin. He knew that his actions deserved the just condemnation of God. King David hinted at this in his model repentance prayer in Psalm 51:3-4: "I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."

This criminal did not only acknowledge his sinfulness and the justness of God's punishment, but he also understood the sinlessness of Christ and somehow perceived through the eyes of faith that Jesus had the power to change his situation. The fact that he was a condemned criminal deserving of death was not lost on him, but like that contemporary hymn, he knew, "What love could remember no wrongs we have done; Omniscient, all knowing, He counts not their sum; Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore; Our sins they are many, His mercy is more."

It was this divinely given revelation that inspired his request to Jesus in verse 42, "And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." How did this hardened criminal, condemned to the highest form of punishment within the Roman Empire, come to the realization that there was a paradise of which he could be part? I don't believe he had woken up that morning rehearsing what he would ask Jesus when they hangout on the cross together. However, through a divine act of grace that enabled him to see Jesus as the Christ and himself as a condemned criminal, he received pardon for all the crimes he had committed from his birth until the moment of his crucifixion.

Oh, that we might receive this divine eye-opening grace that would enable us to see Jesus for who he is and who we truly are: criminals who rightly deserve our condemnation!

It is important to remember that this is true not only for those who are yet to be saved but even for those who are already saved. Apostle John, in his appeal to the saints in Asia Minor, wrote,

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

A Promise of Paradise

After acknowledging his sin and the justness of God's judgment, the criminal on the right hand of Jesus threw himself at the mercy of the God who has revealed himself as "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..." (Exodus 34:6-7).

No one would ever receive a greater promise than what was received by this criminal on the day of his crucifixion. In verse 43, we read Jesus' response, "And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." What a grace and what a mercy! This criminal brought

nothing to the table except his sin, yet even he was not beyond the reach of God's loving arm. He woke up in prison but reclined in the evening in paradise. The good news is that this promise is not only for him; it is for all who would repent and put their trust in the risen Saviour.

If you are not yet a follower of Christ, just like this criminal, no sin is too great, and no distance is too far. "Jesus ready, stands to save you, full of pity, love and power." So, "Arise and come to Jesus; He will embrace you in his arms." For, "In the arms of your dear Saviour, O, there are ten thousand charms."

And if you are already a blood-bought follower of Christ, what a joy to know that if you died today, you will be with Jesus in paradise. Hallelujah!

Boasting in the Cross

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · April 5, 2024



14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world ... 17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. (Galatians 6:14, 17)

Paul's great aim in this epistle to the Galatians is the defence of the gospel. The core of this gospel, which he expounds throughout the book, is the fact that we are justified (meaning, 'made right')

with God, or counted ‘as if we have never sinned’) through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross alone, apart from works (anything we ever did or will ever do).

The recipients of his letter—the Galatian church—had been led to Christ through Paul’s preaching (we see this in Gal. 4:13) and the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. As Paul recounts, they had begun their Christian journey well, having put their faith in Christ (see Gal. 3:2) and been filled with the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 4:6). They consequently walked in step with the Spirit, outworking what He worked in them at their conversion, even in the face of persecution (Gal. 3:28-29).

But then, a faction of the Jewish Christians, who regarded the Levitical laws of the Old Testament as binding on all Christians, came to the Galatian church, preaching what Paul calls ‘another gospel, which is no gospel at all’, and were leading some members of the congregation astray.

In Apostolic Astonishment, Paul retorted:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:6-9)

What was the content of this ‘other gospel’? Essentially, these Jewish false preachers were telling the Galatian Christians that faith in Christ alone was not enough to save them; they needed to keep the Jewish laws, specifically those regarding circumcision, or else their Christianity wouldn’t be complete. To which Paul responded:

2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal. 5:2-3)

Isn’t Paul being a bit too harsh? Is one small compromise such a big deal? Indeed, it is! Any attempt to add to the finished work of Christ on the cross is a slap in the face of Jesus, as it suggests he wasted his time going to the cross – we are well capable of achieving our own salvation without his help.

Paul encouraged the Galatian Christians not to allow themselves to be enslaved again under a set of rules (5:1). Faith in Christ means we are free from the ‘curse of the law’ (3:13). Practically, this means we live by faith in Christ for every aspect of our Christian lives. We no longer rely on our own strengths or abilities. We derive our strength and worth from the finished work of Christ on the cross.

In the cross:

- 1) We have total forgiveness for our sins (2:16). We owed a moral debt we could not pay. Christ paid the debt, and thus, our slate has been wiped clean and our sins ‘blotted out’ (Isa. 43:25, 44:22; Mic. 7:18-19; Heb. 8:12, cf. Jer. 31:34)
- 2) We have an inheritance waiting for us in heaven (Gal. 3:29). As an initial deposit and foretaste of what is awaiting us in heaven, God has given us His Spirit as a guarantee (Eph. 1:14)
- 3) We have become heirs with Christ – meaning we share His life and righteousness and have become members of God’s family. We are His royal sons and daughters (Gal. 4:7)

- 4) We are filled with God’s Spirit and can call God ‘Abba, Father!’ (Gal. 4:6). We are no longer slaves to sin but have become God’s children. We don’t have to prove ourselves to our Father; this is the critical distinction between a ‘son’ and a slave. Father loves us just because He loves us, in spite of us.

As Paul comes to the end of his letter, where we pick up our opening passage, he recaps everything he has been telling the Galatian Christians. He encourages them to put no confidence in the flesh but fully and only trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross. His summary statement, found in Chapter 6:11-17, can be summed up in this way:

“Boast in the cross!” “That is all that matters!”

Paul makes a similar conclusion to his letter to the Philippians. In the final chapter, he writes,

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—”

Paul uses the same root word (*kauzáomai*) translated as ‘boast’ in our opening passage. Thus, to boast in the cross is the same as to glory in it. This is contrasted with putting confidence in the flesh, which here represents ‘works’ or our own efforts, strength, abilities or merit.

Practical implications

What does it mean to boast or glory in the cross? Strong’s Greek Concordance defines *kauzáomai* as “living with ‘head up high,’ i.e., boasting from a particular vantage point by having the right base of operation to deal successfully with a matter”. Strong provides the word’s etymology, as likely derived from the root, *au ēn* (“neck”), i.e., what holds the neck up high or upright. Thus, to boast or glory in this context refers to living with God-given confidence.

In light of Paul’s teaching in Galatians, I suggest the following practical applications of boasting in the cross.

1) Daily living at the foot of the cross

To boast in the cross means recognising that so far as my efforts didn’t save me, neither can they add or take from my salvation. It is very easy to mentally assent that we’re saved by grace through faith alone yet live as though our salvation depends on our works. Living by faith means daily living at the foot of the cross, drawing from the power of Christ already at work within us (see Ephesians 3:20) to live the Christian life.

The questions below offer a quick test as to whether we’re walking the talk so far as living by faith is concerned.

- a) Do you feel the need to ‘prove yourself’ to God so He doesn’t regret saving you?
- b) Do you pat yourself at the back for being a ‘good person’, e.g., ‘a good giver/tither’, ‘good husband’, ‘good father’, ‘good child’, or whatever else you hold yourself to be good at? Or you reckon that you are what you are solely by the grace of God?
- c) Do you find yourself thinking God ‘owes’ you certain blessings because of your obedience or service to Him in one way or another?
- d) What is the first thought that comes to mind when you consider people whose lives are contrary

to the gospel – for example, that drunk or addict in your neighbourhood? Do you find yourself thinking, ‘I thank God I’m not like that’?

2) Treasuring Jesus more than anything in the world

Is Christ your greatest treasure? To Paul, having Christ was everything. Even if living a gospel-centric life meant he would be persecuted, he didn’t mind. He was content to ‘bear on his body the marks of Jesus’. Boasting in the cross means being able to say with Asaph, “Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is nothing on earth I desire besides you” (Ps. 73:25), and with the hymnist, ‘S me w Yesu a, me w ade nyinara, s Yesu b me a, ade nyinara ab me” [If I have Jesus, I have everything, if I lose Jesus, I have lost everything]. Is Christ enough for you? Would you be content if God never did anything else for you after the cross?

In the same breath that Paul said he boasts in the cross, he added, “by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”. In other words, nothing in the world was worth comparing to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ via the cross.

3) A life of devotion to Christ

Jesus said that those who have been forgiven much love much (Luke 7:47). Glorifying in the cross means that we henceforth live every moment of our lives with the cross in view. To Paul, that meant being branded for Christ! He declares, “From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17).

Isaac Watts, in his classic hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, writes:

*When I survey the wond’rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but Loss,
And pour contempt on all my Pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.*

In the final stanza, he avows:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Watts is right. A true appreciation of the cross will culminate in only one response: a life sold to, enamoured, and entranced by the One who loved us and gave Himself for us that we might be forgiven.

Faithful Preaching: Christ and Him Crucified

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · March 23, 2016



1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

If the preaching of the Gospel is to have any effect in the lives of its hearers, it needs to come in power, in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. In our opening verses, the apostle lets us in on the reason the call of the Gospel is effectual in those who believe it. To these people, the Gospel comes in full conviction, as a result of the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. It does not rest on human wisdom or eloquence.

Paul wrote elsewhere in a parallel verse saying, “my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” and then he explained why: “so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). Faithful Gospel preaching is Christ-centred and Christ-exulting. Paul writing few verses earlier in 1Cor 2 had this to say: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,” (1 Corinthians 2:2-3).

Here we find one unique characteristic of Gospel preaching as taught in the New Testament; it does

not draw attention to the preacher, but to Christ, and His resurrection. The manner of life of the apostles among those whom the Lord sent was that which sought to magnify Christ, and make less of themselves. They were “in weakness and in fear and much trembling,” — clearly desiring that nothing in them will get in the way of their making Christ exulted above all. Paul was therefore bold to remind the Corinthian Christians of the kind of life they lived whilst amongst them — one that sought to make solely Christ and His death on the cross known to all.

Nothing except Christ and Him crucified

The message of the cross is the heart of all that God has done for the salvation of men; and the one thing that must be preached at all times. If our messages don't emphasize this, it falls short of Gospel preaching.

What does it mean for the apostle to preach Christ and Him crucified?

These two things are absolutely crucial – The person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Work. To make Jesus Christ known is to preach His person – His incarnation, life, death and resurrection – in order to reconcile fallen man back to God. God came in the flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The son of man (Christ); the second person in the Holy Trinity came to seek and to save that which was lost. He only could fulfil the righteous demands of God's holy law by his life of perfect obedience and unlock for us the gates of heaven.

It is tragic that many preachers can teach on Salvation without mentioning the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ! But it takes only the God-man to do this. It is His atoning work, His death on the cross and His resurrection that paid the price for our Salvation. This is why Paul sought to make Christ's work and His death known, with fear and trembling. This was the first thing he and the other apostles preached:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1Corinthians 15:1-4).

His words in the passage above are very instructive: he delivered to them as of first importance, the Gospel! He did not put anything before it. Isn't it a travesty that we ever so often do exactly opposite that – place other things before the Gospel? Christ died for our sins! He was buried and raised on the third day so that we might be forgiven! If you have not come to terms with and believed this, then you are lost and not saved.

You cannot believe in the gospel unless you first believe in the doctrine of the wrath of God against sin! His death on the cross was a substitution for our sins. He died for you and me! Why did he die for us? Because of what is true about you and me! The Biblical truth is that we are all fallen creatures! This is universally true of everybody, and we are under the wrath of God! (Romans 1:18). But how can I know that Christ's death was sufficient to atone for my sins and the wrath of God? Because God raised Him from the dead! The Bible is careful to say that God raised Him (Jesus) from the dead – to prove that His death was sufficient once and forever to satisfy God's wrath and the requirement of the law! Romans 4:24-25 is re-assuring in this regard: “...It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up

for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

The Results of Faithful Preaching

Not founded on human efforts, the result of faithful preaching is equally divine and spiritual. Faithful Gospel preaching produces converts who are truly Christ-like. When the apostles preached faithfully, the results were disciples who imitated The Lord Jesus Christ; full of joy in the Holy Ghost, even in much persecution. Their preaching produced saints who turned from idols to serve the living God, and lived their lives in hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The testimony of exemplary Christian living of the Thessalonian Christians, as recorded in our opening passage, was reported as far as to Macedonia and Archaia.

How does this compare to what pertains in our day? Do we emphasize the cross in our messages? Is Christ and His work truly at the centre of our sermons? Do we seek to present the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit or do we rely on our eloquence and charisma to ‘move’ our hearers? Do we seek God’s face in tears and humility for the salvation of souls? Could the state of Christianity as we have it today be a reflection of the dearth of faithful Gospel preaching?

My prayer is that God will grant us faithful teachers who will seek nothing except to know Christ and to make Him known. And may God grant that our generation will be filled with faithful Christians whose lives will model the Gospel wherever they find themselves — that others seeing our good works will come to the saving knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Resurrection

The King Is Risen

By Kwesi Sena · March 27, 2016



1 Corinthians 15:19-22

Today, Christians worldwide are gathered to celebrate our hope in Christ — Easter Sunday. It is the day our hope in Christ was secured. The grave could not hold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, he defeated death and therein is our hope.

In Luke 24, there is a story about two disciples on their way to Emmaus when Jesus joined them. They were lamenting over their dashed hope of the deliverance of Israel. They longed for deliverance from Roman rule through Christ. However, Christ their deliverer a few days ago was brutally murdered on a cross—the most humiliating way to die. With His death, went their hopes. But as the narrative progresses, we see a hope that is higher than deliverance from Roman oppression. They encountered the Resurrected Christ. He is alive! The grave couldn't hold Him.

The believer's hope is tied to the resurrection of Christ. It is a hope that is beyond the grave. Hope that makes us endure suffering because we know the glory that awaits us. The hope that made Paul count all his achievements as garbage.

What is this hope?

Paul gives us a hint in 1 Corinthians 15:19-22: “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

In this passage Paul was responding to those who deny the resurrection of the dead. He started by saying if there is no resurrection of the dead, then among all people we are the most to be pitied as Christians. He points to Christ's resurrection as the basis for his certainty. Christ is the firstfruit, and once you have the firstfruit it signifies that the rest of the harvest is going to come in.

This is the Christian's hope, it is the hope that our present life is not the end of the story. The hope that our mortal bodies will be changed to the same glorious body of Christ. The hope that God is going to wipe away every tear from our eyes — there will be no more death, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. In Revelations 22:4, we are told we will see the face of God and we will be with him forever. That has always fascinated me, because I know most of us are looking for something great, many of us are on a wild goose chase for something that will blow us away. We are always looking for that experience that will take our breath away. This is it, to see the face of God and still be alive.

But sadly, this hope is not for everybody. In 1 Corinthians 15:21 & 22 we are told that sin entered the world through one man and with this came death as well. In Genesis the bible tells us that God created the world, and he said everything he created was beautiful. There was no death, there was no pain, there was no chaos. He then created man in his own image to have dominion and authority over everything he has created. Just as he gave authority to man to rule, he also wanted man to know that he did so under authority and so he gave a command not to eat from a particular tree. God told man that the day he ate from the tree he will die.

This was not only a physical death, it was spiritual death first and foremost. A life lived in separation from God in pain and torment forever. Man disobeyed God and sided with the devil, believing the lie over the loving and gracious care of God. Through Adam's disobedience sin entered the world, and with sin came death. Man became an enemy of God.

There are some who vehemently protest why Adam's sin should become their sin. But my answers to that is, really? Every personal sin we commit is actually rebellion against God. We sin because that's who we are.

We are sinners, not because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners.¹

But that is not the end of the story, John 3:16 tells us God looked at the depravity of man, and his loving heart was moved with compassion. He sent his Son into the world to reconcile the run away man to Himself. There are two things Jesus accomplished. He lived a perfect life as a man. He obeyed perfectly all the commands of God. The one we could not obey. Then he also went on to pay the penalty that was hanging over our heads as enemies of God.

So here we have two things, the perfect life of Jesus, and the payment for sin. And God has said anyone who will come, Jesus' payment will be credited to them and His perfect record will be theirs as well. What an awesome invitation! However, this invitation is not open ended, because God has appointed a time when everyone will give an account of all that they have done with their lives. We will all appear before the judgment seat of God, and at that time Jesus will not be a saviour, he will be a judge (John 3:36).

Christ has risen and it is the reason for our hope. To those who have come to know Him as their Saviour, He will return not to die again but to receive us to Himself and we will be with Him in all eternity. To those who don't know Him, that day will be a day of terror and gnashing of teeth. He will come as a judge. Are you ready to meet Him?

1: R.C. Sproul, Essential Truths of The Christian Faith

Five Facts About The Resurrection

By Enoch Anti · April 1, 2018



John 20

Christians worldwide are celebrating the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ today. The resurrection is a fundamental Christian doctrine upon which Christianity stands or falls. Without the resurrection, Christianity has no hope to offer. Paul makes that point clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:11-19.

In the gospels; the events leading to the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ are well documented. But for the purpose of this article, we would look to the gospel according to John and specifically, Chapter 20. We will consider five points about the resurrection clearly taught in the text.

The Resurrection Is historical.

The empty tomb of Christ points to a true historical event. Christ was crucified. He was buried. And he resurrected. Dr Simon Gathercole of the University of Cambridge in an online article noted that,

*The historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth is both long-established and widespread. Within a few decades of his supposed lifetime, he is mentioned by Jewish and Roman historians, as well as by dozens of Christian writings. Compare that with, for example, King Arthur, who supposedly lived around AD500. The major historical source for events of that time does not even mention Arthur, and he is first referred to 300 or 400 years after he is supposed to have lived. The evidence for Jesus is not limited to later folklore, as are accounts of Arthur.*¹

To establish the historicity of the resurrection, let's look briefly at three points worth considering.

(i) It happened on a specific day.

The resurrection is recorded to have happened on the first day of the week which is a Sunday. Jesus was crucified and buried on a Friday. He rose on the third day. The disciples will further adopt this day as the Lord's day—the day of worship. That day became the believers "solemn assembly" when they met to worship (Deut. 16:8, Jn 20:19; 26, Acts 20:7).

ii) There Were Eyewitness Accounts

Jesus didn't vanish into thin air when he resurrected. He showed himself to people as proof of his resurrection. Mary Magdalene (vv. 1-2; 11-18), Peter, John and the other disciples (vv.3-10; 19-20), Thomas (v.26). In Jewish tradition, witnesses must be two or more to be admissible and the events met that criteria (See Deut. 17:6; 19:5).

(iii) The Resurrection Wasn't A Hoax.

Before Christ resurrected, there were fears his disciples will steal his body and feign a resurrection (Matt.27:62-66). However, firstly, the disciples were not expecting a resurrection to go to the extent of faking one (vv. 2; 9). They had also locked themselves up for fear of the Jews and there was no indication they had the capability of stealing the body (v.19). Moreover, the tomb, according to Matthew was under security guard (Matt. 27:66). Finally, the folded grave cloths defeats a robbery. What grave looter has the luxury of time to nicely fold grave cloths?

(iv) There Was An Empty Tomb

That there was an empty tomb is evidence for the resurrection. If Christ didn't resurrect, then his body must have been seen in the tomb. However, all who came to the scene looked into the tomb and didn't see Christ's body. Mary Magdalene thought the body had been stolen. Peter and the other disciples looked into the tomb and saw nothing. There was simply no body in the tomb. A very informative article from the gospel coalition by Paul Rezkalla, titled 4 Reasons to believe in the empty tomb is worth our attention in this discourse. These four points are (i) The empty tomb predates the gospel, (ii) the body was buried in Jerusalem, (iii) the empty tomb was discovered by women and (iv) there were claims of a stolen body. [2]

A Fulfilment Of Scripture

John speaks of the resurrection in relation to Scripture: “for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead” (v.9). Jesus, while he was with them also spoke of his death and resurrection (John 2:19-22). Paul also speaking of the resurrection says it is “in accordance with Scripture” (1Cor.15:1-3). The resurrection happened as Scripture prophesied. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus rebuked the disciples for not believing what was spoken of him about the events in Scripture of his death and resurrection:

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

We see Christ walking them through Scripture—the Old Testament—and opening their eyes to the truth of what was written about him.

The Resurrection Is The Foundation Of The Great Commission

When Christ appeared to the disciples, he charged them with the great commission: “Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (vv.21-23).

Christ sends the disciples, gives them his very breath of life — the Holy Spirit and puts authority in their proclamation of the gospel which when believed brings life, and damnation to those who will not believe. Because Christ rose, the disciples had the power and basis upon which to witness about the gospel (1Jn. 1:1-3, 1Pet. 1:16-20). Paul says “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1Cor.15:14 ff). Christ rose from the dead and that’s the hope of believers and sinners who will run to him in faith. Matt Permann in an online article titled Historical Evidence for the Resurrection points out seven reasons for which the empty tomb gives credence to the resurrection. And he mentions preaching of the gospel as the first. He wrote:

...the resurrection was preached in the same city where Jesus had been buried shortly before. Jesus’ disciples did not go to some obscure place where no one had heard of Jesus to begin preaching about the resurrection, but instead began preaching in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus had died and been buried. They could not have done this if Jesus was still in his tomb—no one would have believed them. No one would be foolish enough to believe a man had raised from the dead when his body lay dead in the tomb for all to see. [3]

The Resurrection Teaches Christ’s Divinity.

One thing we cannot miss in John’s gospel is Christ’s divinity. John opens his book with: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. (John 1:1). Thomas’ response to Christ in v.28 is instructive: “My Lord and my God!” Being a Jew, that would have been a blasphemous statement if Christ was not God. And knowing who Christ was, he would have rebuked Thomas if his assertion about him was inaccurate. Again, we will note in the text that, when Thomas first told the disciples he would see the marks on Christ’s hands before believing, Jesus wasn’t present. But in Christ’ second appearance to the disciples, he showed Thomas his

crucifixion marks:

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. (vv26-27).

Christ's omnipotence and omnipresence is displayed in that event. He knew Thomas' doubts though he wasn't physically present when Thomas expressed those doubts. All things are bare and naked before God (Heb. 4:13). Christ is God. Peter tells us it was impossible for death to hold him down (Acts 2:24).

Faith And Eternal Life In Christ

John ends his account by saying:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God , and that by believing you may have life in his name (vv. 30-31).

To John, this is his overarching motive for writing his gospel account; that people will come to faith in Christ. The end goal of Christian ministry is leading people to faith in Christ by the preaching of the gospel. Anything else apart from this has no grounds. All we do as Christians and ministers of the gospel must have this one goal: that people "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God , and that by believing [they] may have life in his name." Anything else is, borrowing Paul's words, to be counted as dung.

Notes:

1 Dr Simon Gathercole, What is the historical evidence that Jesus Christ lived and died <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/14/what-is-the-historical-evidence-that-jesus-christ-lived-and-died>.

2. Paul Rezkalla, 4 Reasons To Believe In The Empty Tomb, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-reasons-to-believe-in-the-empty-tomb>

3. Matt Permann, Historical Evidence for the Resurrection, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection>

The Resurrection: Hoax or Historical?

By Ebenezer Foster-Nyarko · July 31, 2017



On the 9th of April, 2017, BBC News carried an interesting news article of a survey they commissioned. The headline reads: “Resurrection did not happen, say quarter of Christians”. The survey claims that “A quarter of people who describe themselves as Christians in Great Britain do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.”¹

Responding, Reverend Dr Lorraine Cavanagh, the acting general secretary for Modern Church, which promotes liberal Christian theology is quoted to have said:

I think [people answering the survey] are being asked to believe in the way they might have been asked to believe when they were at Sunday school.

Science, but also intellectual and philosophical thought has progressed. It has a trickle-down effect on just about everybody’s lives.

*So to ask an adult to believe in the resurrection the way they did when they were at Sunday school simply won’t do and that’s true of much of the key elements of the Christian faith.*²

We live in a day and age where definitions and propositions are frowned upon, particularly when it comes to matters of faith. This sort of anti-precision attitude has somehow filtered into the church. We’re told, “don’t judge” “it doesn’t really matter what one believes as long as you’re morally

upright, surely God won't reject you!" "Christianity is a religion of love".

But what has the Bible got to say to all this? Does it matter what a man believes, as long as he claims the name "Christian"?

Firstly, Christians are so named because of their belief in a historic person, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). Secondly, apart from the mighty signs and wonders and signs with which God attested or endorsed Jesus to the whole world, there can be no Christianity.

What are these signs or proofs that God used to authenticate Jesus? And to what purpose or end?

This is what Peter speaking on the day of Pentecost had to say:

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36).

Previously, he had expounded:

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it... This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing (vv. 32-33).

The thrust of Peter's teaching here is that God has proved to the world beyond every reasonable doubt that Jesus is Lord and Christ, in that although He died, He was raised to life – an event that was witnessed by Peter and many others to whom the Lord showed Himself alive after His resurrection. The resurrection of Christ did not happen in a closet – it is a historic event that was witnessed by real, historic people who lived in Jerusalem at the time. Eyewitnesses documented it and passed it down to those who believed in Him. His tomb is still empty! Paul writing a short while later recounts how the Lord after His passion (suffering, death and resurrection) showed Himself to the apostles, to about five hundred disciples at the same time, and last of all to Paul himself as he journeyed to Damascus (Acts 15:1-21).

It is faith in Jesus Christ, His death which atoned for our sins, and His resurrection from death that saves (Romans 10:8-10). This is the content of the Gospel message.

No one can claim the title "Christian" who trivialises the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such a person is nothing short of a false disciple and an imposter. A denial of the resurrection of Christ is a denial of Christ and Christianity:

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1Corinthians 15:14-20).

The resurrection of Christ forms the very nerve and fibre of the Christian faith. It assures all who

believe in Him that they will live after death, be raised on the last day, just as Christ was Himself raised from the dead. Faith in the resurrection is the bedrock of the believer's faith in the afterlife – a life that will be spent with the resurrected Christ in eternity. Any “Christian” faith that is not founded on the death and resurrection of Christ is no Christian faith at all. A professing “Christian” who denies faith in the resurrection of Christ has no hope for the life after death, and is of all people to be most pitied!

The progression of societal thought and norms, the expansion of human knowledge and achievement, or the development of scientific thought and discoveries cannot change the truth of God's Word. People are free to believe what they may – this is a fundamental human right; nonetheless, the foundation of God stands firm and sure: The Lord knows them that are His (2Timothy 2:19). And all such, according to the Bible, are those who truly believe in their heart that Jesus is Lord – born of a virgin, lived a life of perfect obedience, died for the sins of many, was buried and rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures.

Someday He will come again, to judge the living and the dead (1Peter 4:5; 2Tim 4:1), and all true believers shall reign with Him forevermore (Rev. 20:6; 2Tim. 2:11-12)! Hallelujah!

Notes:

1. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-39153121>
2. Ibid.

Jesus Christ Was Not Crucified, Says Islam

By Enoch Anti · September 4, 2017



Last week, in response to our online article “Is Jesus The Only Way?” a reader, a Muslim, remonstrated with us with regards to the person and work of our Lord Jesus. According to him, Jesus was not God; but only a prophet of God.

What interested me most in that conversation was his denial of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. This is because, if you take away the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the whole foundation of Christianity comes crumbling down. Obviously if Christ didn’t die by crucifixion, then he didn’t rise. And if he didn’t rise, then there will be no resurrection. And if there is no resurrection; there is no hope for the Christian (1Corinthians 15:12-18). Ultimately, if Christ was not crucified, then the Apostles and Jesus himself were all liars; and the Bible a fraud. The death and resurrection of Christ is the hope upon which the foundation of Christianity stands. And Islam calls that into question. “The bible says Jesus was not sacrificed for the sins of mankind”, this reader asserted. When asked what his authority was, he quoted Psalm 91. The Qur’anic narrative on the crucifixion confirms Jesus was not crucified, he claimed. In this article, I will provide a response to his assertions and claims, with particular respect to the Psalm he referred to.

Psalm 91:10-15 reads:

no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For he will command

his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot. “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him (Ps. 91:10-15).

Here is The Qur’anic narrative also

They [The Jews] declared, ‘We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been so]. And those who differ in this matter are in doubt concerning it. They have no definite knowledge about it, but only follow mere conjecture. But they certainly did not kill him. God raised him towards Himself. God is almighty and wise (Qur’an 4:157-158).

The argument being made was, Psalm 91, as a Messianic Psalm rules out any possibility of a crucified Messiah. “No harm will overtake you“, he emphasised. He continued that as Psalm 91 foretold, the angels would “lift him (Jesus) up” and furthermore, the Qur’an states that “God raised him up”; what the Qur’an reports about Jesus being in fact the fulfilment of Psalm 91:11-12 he affirmed. “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands...”

“They certainly did not kill him. God raised him up to Himself”, was the final plea.

So here we stand, with the Qur’an apparently correcting the Bible. The only problem is that, this is simply a misinterpretation.

I will now address three points in defending the crucifixion of Christ.

The Bible Doesn’t Contradict Itself

Firstly, we should bear in mind that Psalm 91 doesn’t obliterate all the other Scriptures in the Bible pointing to a suffering Messiah. One of the first principles of hermeneutics—the science of interpreting Scripture—is the analogy of faith. R.C. Sproul in his book *Knowing Scripture* states that,

The analogy of faith is the rule that Scripture is to interpret Scripture: Sacra Scriptura sui interpret (Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter). This means, quite simply, that no part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture.¹

Simply, God’s word—the Bible—doesn’t contradict itself. The crucifixion was God’s plan as much as his promise of protection was. When God promises to protect us; it doesn’t mean the absence of trials, temptations, or even death.

Jesus won’t bypass the road to Calvary. God’s steadfast love doesn’t mean the absence of pain, not for Jesus and not for us. God showed him salvation (Psalm 91:16), but remember the empty tomb came after a blood-soaked cross.²

While protection of the Messiah was spoken of in Psalm 91, we must also note that, a suffering Messiah was also prophesied in Isaiah 53. It is only proper that when interpreting the Bible, we look

at it as a whole. Also, if we read the Bible, we will indeed see the Messiah was protected and angels did bear him up. Examine Christ's encounter with Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). After the whole episode, we are told "angels came and were ministering to him [Jesus]."

The Crucifixion Was God Ordained

Secondly, Christ's death was God's ordained plan. In Acts 2:22-23, we are told that Jesus was killed "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God". So, anyone who calls the death of Christ to question is calling God's plan to question. Christ didn't die a reckless death where God was unable to protect him.

In fact, God offered Christ up for the sins of the world. He was put up as a propitiation for the sins of the world (Matt. 1:21, Jn 3:16, Rom. 3:25, 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). A striking observation one may make reading through the gospel of John is the many assassination attempts, so to speak, on Jesus' life. But none succeeded because his "time was not yet come" (Jn. 7:6; 10:39). Jesus only died at the time appointed by God through crucifixion.

A Moral Dilemma

Who is Jesus? A liar or a messenger of God (borrowing the Islamic description of Christ). Now Jesus on numerous occasions spoke about his death. If he didn't die on the cross; then we are faced with a moral dilemma: was Jesus a liar or a messenger of God?

Considering the person of Jesus, his moral virtues and the perfect life he lived; if his words about his death, are not true, then we will have to reconsider how we view him. Either he is a liar or he is who he claims to be—the Son of God.

In fact, Islam does acknowledge a Jesus who is a "Messiah, and a messenger of God" in the very place they question his crucifixion. The question we have to ask of Islam is that, can a Messiah and Messenger of God lie? Was Jesus a liar to have spoken about his death, if it was never to be?

Consider these words spoken by Jesus:

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40).

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (Matt. 16:21).

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (Jn. 2:18-19; 21-22).

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11).

Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial (Jn. 12:7).

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour (Jn. 12:27).

These are some few words spoken by Jesus himself. If he didn't die by crucifixion, then he lied when he spoke these words. Is the person of Jesus as recorded in Scripture consistent with a liar?

No. Lying is sin and the Bible tells us Jesus was without sin (Heb.4:15). By the Biblical narrative, there is no reason to doubt the Crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, if Christ was not crucified; as Paul said, we will be of all people the most miserable.

Notes:

1. R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* , Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009, Kindle Edition
2. Online article, Why you don't have to fear terror by Jonathan Parnell, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-you-dont-have-to-fear-terror>

The Resurrection Of The Body

By Kwesi Sena · October 5, 2016



1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Recently, in a conversation with a friend, we spoke soberly about the universality of death and how all of us are confronted by its reality, whether great or small, young or old, male or female, rich or poor; we are all subjected to the power of this great enemy. With every passing day each of us gets closer to the grave. I have a friend who is not particularly excited when you wish him a happy birthday. According to him, every birthday reminds him that he is getting closer to the grave. So for him there is nothing happy about a birthday.

However, as tragic and universal as death is, it is not the most important puzzle to solve. Considering the fact that the soul doesn't die; the most important questions we should be asking are;(i) What happens when I die? (ii) If my soul lives on, where will it be? (iii) Will it be in a happy place? (iv) Where will God be when I die? (v) Will I see God? (vi) Will I meet my friends in the afterlife?

Every religion has something to say about death and what happens when we die. Buddhism and Hinduism believe that after death one is reborn into another body. Existence, they believe, is a cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. They also believe that depending on your deeds in one's previous life, they will be born in one of six realms. If you've been good in your previous life, you get to be reborn as a higher specie in your next life. The ultimate goal is to enter nirvana (their form of

heaven) and escape the cycle of life. The Muslims also believe in the continued existence of the soul. They believe that on the last day Allah will recreate the decayed bodies of all dead people and then there will be judgment. Some believe all Muslims will eventually go to heaven. Those who did some bad things in life may be punished for a while in hell and eventually go to heaven.

Equally, like all these religions, Christianity also believes in life after death. However what sets Christianity apart from all the others is that we believe in a personal Saviour who died and was resurrected. So the Christian's belief about life after death is not mere speculation. I am yet to meet a Buddhist or a Hindu who can tell me what species they were in their previous life. They have no idea because their belief about life after death is pure speculation. I will like to examine the Christian's hope of resurrection through the eyes of the first century believers at Corinth. Paul had received a letter from the church in Corinth about various matters, some very disturbing. There was division in the church, cases of sexual immorality, confusion over the Lord's Supper, disagreement over the gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly speaking in tongues, and the list goes on.

Now, one source of confusion was about the resurrection of the dead. Living in a Greco-Roman culture which had weird views about life after death, it was possible their belief in the life after death was getting influenced by the prevailing wisdom rather than the Bible. The Greek belief in the life after death ranged from nonexistence to a shadowy and immaterial existence in an underworld. Some people in the church believed that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they had already entered into their spiritual, "heavenly" existence. The body was just a hindrance waiting to be done away with at death. They had therefore denied the body in the present, and had no use for it in the future. That pretty much explains why there was sexual immorality of various kinds in the church. With such a distorted view, it didn't matter what they did with their bodies.

Paul, addresses this particular sin saying, "...The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1Corinthians 6:13-20).

You see, their view of the resurrection had huge ramifications for their present life. And it does for us as well. In 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, Paul sets out to help them renew their minds about the resurrection of the body and how that should affect how they lived.

- 1) The Certainty of the Resurrection
- 2) The Mystery of the Resurrection
- 3) The Implications of the Resurrection

The Certainty of the Resurrection

Paul first and foremost appeals to the resurrection of Christ as the basis for the Christian's own resurrection. "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"(v.12). There is a chain of consequences for such a denial, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." (vv.13-15). The correlation for

Paul was very clear. As compelling as such an argument is, there were people who could still not wrap their heads around it. Yes they believed Christ has been raised from the dead. But that is Christ, what about us, how could that happen? Right in verse 35, we see what the confusion was in Corinth. They could not understand it, and that means it cannot be true. That's the problem with many of us even today. We measure truth by our ability to understand it. If we cannot understand something we conclude that it cannot be true. We limit the power of God by our finite minds. For many, the idea that Jesus the Son of God could die to save sinners doesn't sit too well in their finite minds, and that is what has kept them from accepting Him as their personal Saviour.

The Resurrection And The Natural World

Paul draws an analogy from the natural world of agriculture to paint a picture of the resurrection. "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (v.36). Besides the fact that the seed must first die, Paul also emphasises that the final product is totally different from what is originally planted: "And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body." (vv37-38). He further appeals to the different kinds of bodies that exist in nature, how the human body differs from that of animals or birds or the fish. Then in vv.40-41 he makes allusion to the galaxies "There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory."

From everyday natural experiences he draws lesson for the reasonableness and certainty of the bodily resurrection of the Christian (vv.42-44). Further, Paul compares this to our natures both in the first Adam and the last Adam who is Christ: "Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."(45-49).

The First Adam And The Last Adam

In our first Adamic nature we are like the seed that is planted, we must first die to attain the new nature which is after the order of the last Adam. We will have the same kind of body Jesus had when he was raised from the dead, the perishable for imperishable, dishonour for glory, weakness for power and natural for spiritual. Spiritual here is not referring to a ghost-like or immaterial form. We will have real bodies, except that this body will be pure and holy, not susceptible to decay and corruption. Just as Jesus had a physical body after his resurrection and could be touched and seen, we will also have recognisable bodies after our resurrection. There will be both continuity and transformation.

The resurrection is a work God does: "God gives it [the seed] a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body." When we consider the fact that it is God who works out all of this in creation, there should be no doubt that he is also able to accomplish this in us. A denial of the resurrection is a direct denial of the power of God. So regardless of what the Corinthians believed about the power of the Holy Spirit, the show-off of spiritual gifts and their elaborate "churchianity", their beliefs about the resurrection was anti-Christian. Like the Corinthians, is it possible that we ourselves have denied the resurrection, perhaps not with words but with our actions?

The Mystery of The Resurrection

By Kwesi Sena · December 4, 2016



This is the second in series on the resurrection. You can read the first in the series above.

Now, when Paul uses the word mystery, he is not referring to some unexplainable fact or a Harry Potter kind of mystery. For him mystery is something that was hidden before but is now made clear. For instance when he wrote about salvation being a mystery in Ephesians 3, he is not saying Salvation is something that can never be understood. What he is saying is that it was hidden in time past but, has now been revealed through the revelation of Jesus Christ. When we read back to the first part of v.35, “how are the dead raised?”, it appears the resurrection was shrouded in darkness for the Corinthians, and so Paul gives further insight in vv. 50-53 “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality”

The Corinthian Christians were of the view that once they become Christians and have been filled with the Holy Spirit, they have assumed their spiritual state here on earth. No wonder they laid so much emphasis on speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts. In their mind, the heavenly reign

Jesus spoke about is to be achieved here on earth. Does that sound familiar? There is a brand of Christianity today which teaches that once you become a Christian, you have entered your heavenly inheritance. You should enjoy all the benefits of heaven here on earth. For such people the kingdom is already consummated. As long as you have enough faith, you can live the kingdom life here on earth. But Paul says here, wait a minute brothers! Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither can the perishable inherit that which is imperishable. All the benefits of heaven are suited only for an imperishable body. As long as we are in our earthly bodies, we cannot claim the full rights of the kingdom. The point here is that there is no enjoyment of heavenly blessings without the proper dress.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-6, Paul who was himself looking forward to the resurrection writes; “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling ...For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened..., but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee”

Paul is reminding the Corinthians it is impossible to enjoy the benefits of heaven with flesh and blood which is subject to decay. If you look at his earlier analogy in vv. 41 & 42, he emphasises there are different bodies for different existence. Flesh and blood is fitted for this fallen world, while our transformed bodies will be fit for our heavenly dwelling.

There is one thing I am sure we can all agree on, no matter how strong a person's faith they will die at some point, unless the Lord comes first. Imagine someone who claims to be living his heavenly life here on earth growing old and dying. What does that say about the victory which has been achieved? If death comes after we have enjoyed our best lives, it means death has the last word. That's why we must not place the cart before the horse as the Corinthians were doing: “Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven”(v.45).

Paul is saying here that our best life is in heaven. It is only when we put on our heavenly bodies, when the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality we can finally see the face of God and live: “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”(v.54). It is only when death, the last enemy is defeated, that we can truly say that we have arrived. Until then “we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling”

You must not misunderstand me, Jesus Christ defeated death and all who have repented of their sins and put their trust in him share in this victory. However this victory has been inaugurated, it is awaiting its final consummation, death will finally be swallowed up in victory and the perishable will put on the imperishable. How do we know this is true? Paul says that God has “given us the Spirit as a guarantee” The presence of the Spirit in the life of a believer is a down payment of the full inheritance to come. This is where the Christian hope comes from. Though for a period we experience sickness, grow old and die, death does not have the final say. There is a seed of God in us which will come forth in a glorious way when Jesus comes back. And in case we are still alive when the Lord Jesus returns, we will all be changed into our heavenly and imperishable bodies. And that

is what Paul calls the mystery of the resurrection. The emphasis here is not so much about death as it is about our transformation: “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

One day out of this life, death will finally be swallowed up and its sting taken away, because the believer will be in his perfect state, never to struggle with sin and its effects again. As natural as death may seem, it wasn't the original plan. Death is a great reminder of our sin and disobedience to God: “the sting of death in sin”(v.56). The fearful part is that physical death is not the end of it, anyone who continues in rebellion against God into their death has a fearful expectation of a second death. This is where God, the righteous judge will condemn all rebels to eternal damnation. But you don't need to subject yourself to this horror my non-Christian friend. Great was our sin, and great was our punishment, death hanged over all of us. We were in slavery to death. But God in compassion sent his Son into our world. He who knew no sin took on the form of a man, came to our world and perfectly obeyed the law and died the death we deserved.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Have you trusted in this Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and reconciliation to God?

Life After Easter

What Next After Easter?

By Kwesi Sena · April 3, 2024



Easter has finally come and gone. Sunday Church Services have ended. WhatsApp messages wishing one another Happy Easter have been sent. Easter eggs and chicken have been eaten. Now we can get on with our lives. For some people, it had been an intense week of prayer and fasting, observing the passion week. For others, the wait is finally over, they can now go back to eating meat or indulge in whatever they were abstaining from during the 40-day Lent period. One more item on our to-do list as Christians can now be crossed off.

We're in the Company of the Apostles

If what I have said so far describes you in anyway, you should not feel strange, you are not alone. It was the story of Jesus' Apostles too. In chapter 20 of his gospel, John documents the resurrection account and how Jesus revealed himself in different settings to his followers after his crucifixion. The sorrow and sadness had now been turned into joy and excitement. The tomb is empty! Jesus is alive again, praise God! But the question was, now that Jesus is alive, what next?

In chapter 21:1-3, we read, "after this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said

to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” ”

Like most people, after celebrating the resurrection, Peter and his co-apostles went back to their life as usual, back to fishing. A lot of things had become clear, they now understood that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, and this had been proven by his death and resurrection. It was now time to get on with life. However, John records that, “they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.”

Jesus then appears and performs a miracle that enables them to have a bumper catch. He also set-up a fire and they barbecued some of the fish and enjoy a delicious breakfast (John 21:4-13). John adds a little footnote in verse 14 which says, “this was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.” Jesus had walked with his disciples for three years before his death; and within that time, he told them of the reason for his coming and gave them tasks to accomplish. It is therefore interesting that the disciples seemed to have moved on with their lives after Easter. Had they forgotten so soon about all the ambitious plans they and Jesus had together?

Love for Jesus Must Reflect in Everyday Acts of Service to Him

It is for this reason that Jesus’ short interaction with Peter in John 21:15-17 is instructive for all Christians, especially after Easter. This passage is primarily about the restoration of Peter and its implications for his future ministry as the lead apostle. But it is also a reminder that our relationship with Jesus must not end with Easter. He calls us to renew our love for him. An all-consuming love that will cause us to sacrifice our very lives as Peter ultimately did, knowing that the reward will be far more than worth it. In that passage we read:

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Three times in this passage, Jesus asks Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Some commentators have opined that Jesus asks the question three times to correspond to the number of times Peter denied him. Regardless of the connection, a repetition is always meant to signify emphasis. Peter, on the other hand felt offended that Jesus would ask him three times if he truly loved him.

I guess you can’t blame Jesus, can you? After all, this is Peter we are talking about. Just before his betrayal and crucifixion, he vowed, “though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away...even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” Yet his 3-time denial of Jesus prior to his crucifixion is forever a part of the gospel account.

In this encounter with Peter in John 21, Jesus teaches us that a love for him must reflect in daily acts of service for him. Three times he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” And three times, he tells him, “Feed my sheep.” Peter had just celebrated the first Easter and he was ready to move on with his life, but Jesus draws his attention to what it means to say you love him.

The reason why Jesus came was to gather together all his wandering sheep into his kingdom (John

10:1-18). His death and resurrection had accomplished this goal; his charge to Peter as the lead Apostle was to take care of the sheep whom he had purchased with his precious blood. This was Peter's charge. But the call to serve Jesus and his cause has not only gone out to Peter. All of us who have tasted of the goodness of God through the death and resurrection of Christ are called to lay down our lives for him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

My prayer is that you would not be so quick to move on with your life after Easter, but the gratitude and affection you feel for the sacrifice and atonement of Christ will reflect itself in daily acts of devotion and sacrifice to him. That we will be committed to sharing the good news with those of his sheep that are still outside the fold, to call them to repentance and obedience. That we will be committed to his bride, the church, for which he died.

Hope for the Dead

By Kwesi Sena · March 31, 2024



“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25-26

Nothing strikes fear into the hearts of men more than death. The Bible refers to it as the last enemy, and rightly so. Throughout the history of human existence, men have tried to find ways to prevent death yet with all the technological and medical advancements, the cure for death continues to elude the wisdom of men. The reason why death conjures such an emotional and opposing response is that it is not natural. Even though it is the only constant among men, it is the most unnatural phenomenon. There is only one place in the Gospels where Jesus is recorded to have wept, and it was at the tomb of one of his closest friends. As Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus, he was overcome with emotions as he witnessed the heinousness of death (John 11:28-35). He knew it was not meant to be this way.

Why is Death Unnatural?

Death is not natural because man was meant to live forever. We are first introduced to the idea of humans back in Genesis 1:26-27, where God the Father, in a heavenly council consisting of the three

persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit) verbalized the idea. Contrary to the claims of evolutionary science, Scripture is very clear that man was created by someone. Humans did not just evolve; they were created by God for a specific purpose.

Man is too purposeful to have just evolved by mere chance. In Genesis we read, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Later on in Genesis 2:5-7, Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit provides more details of how the creation of man took place. He writes, “5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up – for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground, 7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.’

It is verse 7 that establishes that man was never meant to die. Even though we are told earlier in chapter 1 that man was created in the image and likeness of God, it is here that we come to appreciate what that statement means. After forming the man from the dust, God breathed into his nostrils, then man became a living creature. That breath from God, is not just a wind or air, no, it was ‘zoe’, life itself. The eternal God who had existed from eternity past, who has no end, breathed into man and he become a living creature. If our source is God, then we were never meant to die because whatever has its source in God cannot die (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Why then do we die if our Source is the Eternal God?

Just as life as a concept originated with God, death as a concept was first introduced to us by God. We are first introduced to the idea of death in Genesis 2:13-14, as a consequence of disobeying God. As he gave man the terms of reference for his existence, he also spelt out the consequences of disobedience. We read in verse 16 “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, v.17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’

This would not just be a physical death, but most tragically, a spiritual death. Death is primarily a life that is disconnected from its source. When a flower is cut from its tree and arranged into a bouquet, it looks nice for a few days, but because it is severed from the root that supplies it life, it is only a matter of time before it physically dies off. Therefore, when God told Adam that he “shall surely die” if he disobeyed, it was spiritual death of being disconnected from the source that he had in mind. The physical death was only a matter of sequence.

That is why when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were driven away from the Garden (Genesis 3:1-19), they did not immediately experience physical death, but once they were disconnected from the source of life, it was only a matter of time before death as we know it physically became a part of the human experience. The first death is recorded in Genesis 4, when Cain killed his brother Abel, which was the first evidence of a life disconnected from its source.

However, unlike the flower bouquet which dies off and is gone forever, the soul of man lives on forever because he was created by the breath of God. Man was supposed to have an eternal life – a life lived in constant union with God. What we now have after the fall of Adam and Eve is a perpetual life, a life that goes on forever but lived outside of union with God. Such a life is a miserable life! At the

time of physical death, it is only the dust part (Genesis 2:7) which disappears but the real person of the soul lives on. Despite attempts by science and technology to make our present world a better place and also to extend our physical lives, our greatest problem which is a severed relationship with the source of life continues and does even after death. What we need as humans is more than just a few more years or even decades in the world in its present form – infested with wickedness and evil of every kind. Our true need is a restoration of our union with God, to have our eternal life back.

Jesus, the Hope for Dead People

It is for this reason that our opening text is such a comfort to all of us dead people. As a matter of fact, that is how the Bible describes all of us in Ephesians 2:1-2, we are dead people! But there is hope even for dead people. In John 11:25-26, as Lazarus' two sisters, Martha and Mary were overcome with grief and sadness that Jesus wasn't there to prevent their brother from dying, Jesus once and all held out the solution to our greatest need as humans. He told them, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

The sisters of Lazarus were at this point only thinking about the physical death of their brother, but Jesus in his response to them helps us to understand that true life is more than the physical one we have now, it is beyond the grave. "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." Is it possible for someone to live even though he dies? And is it really true that "everyone who lives and believes in me [Jesus] shall never die?"

How do we reconcile these statements with the many faithful and God-fearing people we know who have died? What Jesus is teaching his followers in these verses is that true life is more than staying physically alive, it is rather a life fully restored in union with God and does not matter whether we are physically in this world or the next. What we call eternal life. On that faithful day, Lazarus was physically brought back to life, but we also know that he physically died again. But, once a person believes in Jesus, the power of death is forever broken. So, we can say together with Apostle Paul, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

How Does One Obtain this Hope?

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Three times in this short text, Jesus uses the word "believe." However, he was not just calling them to believe in something or an idea, rather he was calling for a belief in him as a person. No leading figure of any religion has ever claimed this or called their followers to put belief in them as individuals. All of them spoke of themselves as showing others the way to life, but here Jesus says of himself, "I am the resurrection and the life." Belief in him is the key to overcoming death. Elsewhere in the book of John, he referred to himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life."

What is it about Jesus that makes him unique and gives him the audacity to make these astonishingly outlandish claims about himself? And how does he cure those who believe in him from death anyway? It is because Jesus is God himself. As we saw back in Genesis 1:26-27, the decision to create man was made in a divine council consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is what Christians refer to as Trinity. The God of the Christian is one God consisting of three

persons. They worked together to create the world, and they worked together in bringing about the redemption of man after the fall. The Father planned our salvation, the Son accomplished it, and the Holy Spirit applies it to the individual.

In his role as the Accomplisher of salvation, the eternal Son of God took on the nature of man, what theologians refer to as the incarnation. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 2:17, says, “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” The only way Jesus could qualify as an acceptable substitute for the sins of men was if he is like them.

But unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus was tempted in every way, yet did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). He is the only man who obeyed the Father perfectly and this qualified him to receive all the promises of God. Even though he is the sinless one, he chose to take on himself the punishment that all humanity had incurred through our willful disobedience of God. This punishment was what he bore when he was crucified on that Good Friday some two thousand years ago. What an irony, the only one who obeyed perfectly is also the one who suffered the most gruesome death.

But praise God, Jesus did not remain dead. On the third day, he was raised from the dead and God has declared his substitutionary atonement – his payment for the sin of mankind acceptable. And has declared that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This is what it means to believe in Jesus. A turning from self-reliance to complete reliance on the finished work of Christ for your right-standing before God. This is how one moves from death to life. This is the only hope for dead people like us.

The reason why politicians and diplomats are crisscrossing the globe and scientists are doubling efforts in search of a cure to some of the deadliest diseases is because we all acknowledge that something is quite not right with our world today. But the brokenness we see today is only but a faint echo of what is in store for this world and anyone who does not believe in Jesus. Luke, in Acts 17:30-31 writes, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Even if humans were allowed to live a million years on this earth, no amount of scientific and technological advancement will help us overcome death. Our only hope is in Christ and that is why Easter is such a joyous occasion for Christians. Because on this day two thousand years ago, our sins not in part but the whole was nailed to the cross. God the Son came down that we may be raised heavenward. Christ is Risen Indeed!

Foul Winds and Fragrances

By THEO ARYEE · April 11, 2023

I drifted from the fields of endless love
Ruined by the choking airs of lustful desires
Tossed by the foul wind of raging sin
And an enemy—The prince of the power of the air
I lay trampled and wasted by the world
A dormant vessel of lost potential

The caring gardener picked me by his grace
Through faith he mended and planted me
Holy vineyard of blessed life
Aromas of a holy life

May I live rooted to the cross
Bearing fruit, abundant fruit
Flavours that serve the earth
Fragrances that delight heaven

This is true Easter
That Jesus died
And I with Him.
That Jesus is alive
And I with Him.

May I live rooted to the cross
Bearing fruit, abundant fruit
Flavours that serve the earth
Fragrances that delight heaven