



## Jesus: On The Cross

It seems most appropriate to begin our exploration of Jesus when he is on the cross. This is the epicenter of his entire mission of stepping out of eternity and into time. He took on human form to do a lot of things, but when you explore all he has done, is doing, and will do, it all meets at the cross where he suffered, bled and died. This scene was the end of his physical existence which was lived as a very poor man, the son of a carpenter from Nazareth. For the first thirty years of his life he lived in relative obscurity, not becoming known until after he was thirty years of age.

His fame spread quickly and caused a lot of turmoil with the elite of that time, resulting in a difficult and dangerous 3 ½ years of ministry. Finally, he was betrayed, abandoned, denied, mocked, scourged, and crucified as a criminal. Those who tormented him, and orchestrated his death, considered the matter of Jesus closed, but that was far from true.

When we read the scriptures about the crucifixion of Jesus we have to remember that they're not writing it at the moment it happened. They're writing about this event not only after it happened, but after his burial, **and** after his resurrection. Years had passed, with their minds and hearts having been opened to deeper, more meaningful understanding by the time they pen these words. So, when they wrote the stories of Jesus, they're writing back through time through the template of the resurrection, because every writer, everyone who is a part of the story, has had their "Road to Emmaus" experience where it didn't make sense to them. Things were unclear to them, and the voice of God seemed distant and impossible to interpret or translate, and yet somehow their hearts burned within them.

His words and his message to them began to open their minds and hearts to understand and to believe. So in John 19 we find a glimpse backwards from John, who was there when all this took place. We see this interesting intersection of a

person who saw the cross coming, who stood in that moment, then looked back and wrote these words for us.

Let's begin in John 19:28.

**19:28** After this Jesus, realizing that by this time everything was completed and in order to fulfill the scripture, said, "I am thirsty!" **19:29** A jar full of wine vinegar was there, so they put a sponge soaked in wine vinegar on a branch of hyssop and lifted it to his lips. **19:30** When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished!" And, with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Verse thirty is the window we want to look through now. Let's begin with the end; the last description of Jesus before his death. "And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

Frankly, I've read the text and I know there's a big movie out there about all this, but before all of that, there was actually a life. So John writes this about the last breath, the final gasp for air. "...and he gave up his spirit".

Have you ever met a moment when you've been defeated or felt like a failure? You're ready to give up; you've lost the dream so you just lost your spirit? Wouldn't it have been more fair or more historically sound to say, "...and they **TOOK** his spirit"? There's nothing in this story, in that moment, to validate John saying he **GAVE UP** his spirit except that John is looking through the resurrection to the crucifixion. He's looking beyond time, in a sense, to the cross.

It all comes together and it all begins to make sense. You know that whole conversation. Who crucified Jesus? Was it the Jews, the Romans, was it us, was it everyone, was it no one? In the end "who?" is not the germane question. The question isn't who crucified God, but if Jesus is God how in the world could he **be** crucified?

After all, if he's God, isn't he all powerful? If he's God couldn't he change the end of the story? If he's God, couldn't he do something about it? **Of course he could!** If he is God, then no one could do to him what God didn't allow to happen. So he "gave up" his spirit, John explains.

This is the divine paradox, the ironic nature of the cross in this moment of absolute hatred. Because, when we look at it from the template of humanity, what we see is an incredible act of hatred toward another human being. And yet, from the template of God, God sees it as an incredible act of love. You see, although the cross is an instrument of violence, God used it as an instrument from which his love flows out to all humanity... the moment when we read, "and he gave up his spirit".

When we talk about God, so many times it seems as though we are the ones who are proactive. That we are the ones so determined to find God; we make God

sound so apathetic and we make ourselves sound so passionate. There is God, aloof in eternity, and here we are struggling so hard to find him. Isn't that the whole essence of religion? We're working so hard to get God to pay attention to us. We're working so hard to get God to like us and we're working so hard to get him to love us and appreciate us. Then if he does notice us, then we work so hard to try to get him to forgive us. But no, no, God just will not be moved will he? He's just so disinterested; he's not really interested in a relationship with us. That's the way we usually seem to describe it. Even if we don't mean to sound that way, we preach, speak, live and act as though that's the case.

But what the cross does is finally define who the actual proactive lover is. Have you ever thought about the oddity that the death of Christ is called the Passion? What a strange language! When we think of passion, aren't we usually thinking about romance? Wouldn't the true passionate person be Casanova, or my all-time favorite, Pepe LaPew?

But using passion to describe the death of a man? When you go to a funeral or are with somebody on their death bed, do you normally think of it as their moment of passion? Usually not; usually when a person is dying there's less of an expression of life. Yet if you look back at an older version of Webster's Dictionary, you'll find that Daniel Webster understood this. The number one definition of passion was not lust or desire or strong emotion, although those are in there. What Webster had as the primary definition of passion for generations was the hours around the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (*Webster Dictionary – 1858*)

So Daniel Webster, when he was trying to help people understand the English language and it's usage, he wanted them to understand that in the English language, the primary usage of the word passion was to describe the suffering and death of Jesus. Why?

Because if the story of God is Jesus, and in this story is the cross, then you have to understand that the events surrounding the cross were God's passionate moment. If you want to know what God is passionate about, then look at the cross. You can get an inside look at the heart of the creator of the universe through the cross of Jesus Christ.

God so passionately hates the destructive power of evil that his passion would drive him to die in order to bring an end to the power of death and sin. And God so passionately loves humanity and so passionately loves YOU that what John is saying is, look, if you can just see God through the cross you'll get it; that God is passionately in love with YOU! God is not the apathetic creator.

In fact, if the story were to be told truthfully, it's not that you or I are pursuing God, but that God is pursuing us. It's not God who should be accused of being apathetic, but us. It's not God who's indifferent; we are the ones who are indifferent toward God. The cross is God's declaration, "You can say whatever you want about me, but don't say I don't love you."

What we find on the cross when John says he “gave up” his spirit is that the crucifixion was not supposed to end up being a conversation about whose fault it was. Talk about the crucifixion is supposed to be a conversation about how God passionately, proactively loves you. He has done everything he knows to do; everything he can do to reconcile you to himself.

Have you every struggled and agonized over how to heal a broken relationship? Have you ever let someone down that you love, or committed an irreversible act that ended a relationship forever? Have you ever violated someone’s trust so badly that, even though you may still talk to them or be around each other, you know that the fragile sense of love between you was destroyed and you would give everything you are if you could just go back and undo the harm? You see, the reality is that the scriptures make it very clear that there’s nothing we can do to reestablish a relationship with God. It’s really all in God’s hands. And because he’s the only one who can, and because he’s motivated by love, he has done what needed to be done. He “gave up” his spirit.

Then he also gives us this odd description. “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished!” And, with that, he bowed his head...”

Now it just seems logical that if a person is dying on a cross the description would be that his head dropped. But remember that John is writing, remembering, reflecting, and placing within this description some truth for us to discover. The word that John uses here is odd; it’s a little bit out of place.

When he says he “bowed his head” the wording used here literally means he rested. The picture here is literally of laying his head on a pillow. Talk about a divine irony that on the cross where man’s hatred was focused on God, God’s love was focused and poured out on us. But then, on this instrument of violence, God gives us a description of peace. “...and he bowed his head”

In fact, it seems that John is connecting this to the imagery in Matthew 8:20 where people are coming to Jesus say, “We’ll follow you.” And Jesus turns to them and says, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Same imagery; that of resting his head on a pillow. Here’s the contrast. Jesus told them that foxes and birds have a better situation in this world than he had. Foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the creator of the universe had **no place to rest** in his own creation. While he walked among us there was no place of safety, no place of security, no place of comfort, no place of refuge, no place of peace. The Son of Man had no place to rest his head.

Then, strangely enough, John opens this window to show us that although there was no place on this earth for Jesus to rest his head, on the cross, this instrument of hate and brutality, in this darkest of moments, God rested his head. That may seem a little strange, but I think you might be able to relate to it if you stop and think about it for a moment.

Have you ever just worked so hard sometimes that you were just exhausted? When you hit that bed, your pillow felt like it was the best pillow in the whole world, and you just laid your head down and went right to sleep? That's the good kind of tired, right? I like the good kind of tired. It makes sleep one of life's greatest indulgences.

But, have you ever gone to bed with a weariness that just does **not** allow you to go to sleep? That usually comes from a different kind of exhaustion. It's not a physical exhaustion. Usually, the weariness that does not allow us to go to sleep is because we're struggling; stressed, overwhelmed by life, have problems we can't solve. That creates enough disruption, doesn't it? But there's an even deeper unrest.

Have you ever gone to bed feeling ashamed, knowing you were guilty and your memories just kept taunting you? Have you ever gone to bed unforgiven for wrongs you committed toward others? Have you ever tried to go to sleep when your conscience was screaming into your brain that you need to make things right, and your soul is in turmoil?

When Jesus was branded a criminal and was **driven** to the cross, in his innocence, in his purity he could rest his head; no guilt, no shame, no stress, no worries.

You see, when you and I come to this cross, we find love passionately poured out into our lives. This was an instrument intended to be a curse, but God intended it as a blessing. This instrument of violence is where we can find peace. And that's the beauty of it, that God understands our need for his forgiveness. He understands that our souls will never find rest outside of him.

Isn't it just like God to take the darkest moment in human history, the moment when all man's hatred is focused on his son, and use that very moment to provide all of us with the opportunity to find peace, love and forgiveness? So Jesus says to us, "Come, all of you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

God is pursuing you, not to hunt you down; this is not God's version of Cops. He's pursuing you because he understands that the very thing you're running from, the one you're running from is the very thing, the very one you so desperately need. And in the strangest way, what you and I have resisted is what our souls have so desperately longed for.

There is a peace that comes from the cross in the midst of this violence. And if Jesus can rest at the cross, don't you think God can give you rest in your most troubling moments? Don't you think God is ready to give you rest in your most chaotic moments?

Then of course there is, “It is finished”, the closing words of Jesus. He gave up his spirit, bowed his head and said, “It is finished”. One word, TELEO. What is Jesus thinking? Doesn’t a man know when he’s been defeated?

Reminds me of the opening lines in Gladiator. Maximus is talking with his general or commander (or whoever) and he says something like, “A people should know when they are defeated.” Would you, or would I. Isn’t Jesus being a bit delusional, or just not getting it? You’ve lost, it’s over, you’re hanging on a cross. You’re one breath from death.

Or is it again this divine irony that God understood what the rules were, but we just didn’t get it. So when he cried out, “It is done”, it is finished, it is accomplished; he was focused on **our** freedom and not his. He was focused on **your** life, not on his.

I know a lot of people who say, “Well, I’m in to Jesus, or I’m good with Jesus” and some who say, “I’ve tried the Jesus thing”. But when it comes to this thing that Jesus is the only way, well that’s a bit much isn’t it? Can’t we just be more inclusive and more open minded?

I understand that. I’m not God, and yeah, it would be great if there were lots of other ways. It would be great if God just took us the way we were, and didn’t have to die for us. You know why I would say this? Because I’m not holy like God is. Quite frankly, my standards are just not up to God’s standards. His standards are much higher than our best standards, so what we want God to do is dumb down his standards to meet our standards. We want our definition of good to be just as acceptable as his measure of good. We want our definition of pure, honest, clean, and holy to be just as acceptable as his measure of purity, honesty, cleanliness and holiness. As long as we look good on the outside, that should satisfy God.

But God says, “Let’s not do that.” You see God is holy in ways and to the degree we can’t even comprehend and he’s not going to dumb down his standards and his holiness. So God says, “How about if I lift you up, instead of letting you drag all of creation through the gutter like you’ve done your own soul. Let me lift you up to a higher level of living that only I can do for you.”

Can you imagine how God sees this thing? Humanity despises him and ignores him. We tell stories on God as if he is unloving and uncaring. We blame him for everything that goes wrong in our lives and in this world. We pretend that we’re the ones trying to meet God’s standards when in fact we create our own standards and try to get God to accept them.

So God sends his Son to those who utterly despise him. He sends his Son because he loves those who will not love him. He loves those who would rather ignore him. He loves those who would rather find some other way to live life, apart from him. So he allows his Son to come and be brutally crucified and killed.

Now, if it was your child, your son, who you sent, and he was brutally beaten and crucified; to die on behalf of others, and after they killed him you said his death was your way to life; his death your path to freedom, how would you feel if everyone said, “Well... thanks a lot, but I just think there should be other ways.” Wouldn’t you pause for a moment and say, “If there was another way, I wouldn’t have allowed my son to be killed.”

You see, the cross was not a romantic experience; it was a brutal death. I think here is where we need to stand on this issue. You have been given the right, by God, to choose. You have the opportunity to love him and to experience his love, or you can choose to reject his love. God created you like that.

If you think another path works, give it a shot. But the problem is that all paths DO lead to the same place... nowhere! There’s only one road that’s been paved by God, NOT by man, and that road is the only way that leads to him. All the other roads lead nowhere... to destruction.

Jesus was God walking among us, so here’s the honest thing to do. Either reject Jesus for who he claimed to be and what he claimed to do for you, or embrace him for who he claimed to be and what he claimed to do for you. I think the greatest disrespect would be to try to recreate Jesus to be who we want him to be. At least treat Jesus with the respect that he understood who he was and what he came to do. What he says is simply this, “I’ve come to do for you what no one else can do for you... It is finished. It was my job, I was the only one who could do it, and my death was for **your** benefit and for **your** life.”

John had to have heard the words of Jesus back in chapter four when he said, “My food is to do the will of my father, and to finish his work.” What John finally understood was that Jesus healed the sick, made the blind see, cleansed lepers and raised the dead, but that was all secondary. The primary reason Jesus came was because God promised his people a Messiah. He promised he would not leave them to their own end. God promised he would walk among us; whisper into our souls; his words would burn in our hearts, and that, if we choose, we could follow God and walk with him through all eternity.

God was faithful to his word, and has proven his love for us.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.