

In my previous three articles on this wonderful subject of *Our Great Salvation* I offered some thoughts on how it was planned, pictured and prophesied; and then on when, where and through whom it was worked out. Last time I sought to show that it was even accomplished through the wickedness of those involved in the trials and crucifixion of our Saviour. In this article I want to address two important questions. First, why was the shedding of Jesus's blood necessary in procuring "*such a great salvation*" (Hebrews 2:3)? Secondly, why did His death have to be by crucifixion?

THE SHEDDING OF THE SAVIOUR'S BLOOD

Some have speculated that the Lord Jesus could have died in a variety of ways – maybe through strangulation, asphyxiation or a blow to the head. None of these means of death would have incurred the shedding of His blood, and Paul could still have written, "*Christ Jesus is the one who died... who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*" (Romans 8:34)

So why did Jesus need to die by spilling His blood? The simple answer is that bloodshed was always God's sovereignly-designed method for the forgiveness of sins. This was indicated in the covering that God made for Adam and Eve after they had sinned: "*the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*" (Genesis 3:21) Obviously this required an animal to be slain by God, with the implication that its blood may well have been shed.

The God-designed method for the redemption of Israel centred on the spilling and applying of blood. The people were told: "*every man shall take a lamb... kill their lambs... take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses... And when I see the blood, I will pass over you*" (Exodus 12:1–13) Thereafter, God's relationship with His chosen people was based on the removal of their sins by daily slaughtering animals, spilling and collecting their blood and applying it in various ways. In speaking to Moses, God stated emphatically that this was His appointed way, saying, "*the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls*" (Leviticus 17:11). So, says the writer to the Hebrews, "*under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*" (Hebrews 9:22)

It was against this graphic historical background that John the Baptist declared, on seeing Jesus, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) John's Jewish listeners could not possibly have missed the compelling implication that this man's blood was going to be shed and applied in some way for the removal of the sins of the people. Jesus was well aware of the absolute necessity of giving His blood in His death, for at the Last Supper "*he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*" (Matthew 26:27,28)

The only God-ordained way of salvation is "*by means of his [Jesus's] own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*" (Hebrews 9:12) There is no doubting the fact that God the Father only ever offers sinners "*redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood*" (Romans 3:24,25). The whole work of saving grace is based on the shed blood of God's Son. It is only "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*" (Ephesians 1:7). The only means whereby any of us can find acceptance with our Holy God, Creator and Judge is if "*we have now been justified by his blood*" (Romans 5:9). The joy of full forgiveness is only for those who trust in and rely on "*him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood*" (Revelation 1:5b).

The reason the church exists is because it is "*the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*" (Acts 20:28) True believers are only united to each other in God's church and "*have fellowship with one another*" because "*the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.*" (1 John 1:7)

God's elect people are only such "*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father... for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.*" (1 Peter 1:1,2) They can be absolutely confident of their eternal home because they are secure under the covering of the precious blood of their Saviour. At the chapel where I became a Christian, we used to sing an old hymn which ran,

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Do make sure that you are trusting in Him as your Saviour and sheltering under His shed blood. If you are already a Christian, then, when Satan tempts you to doubt your everlasting salvation, remind yourself that Jesus "*entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption*" (Hebrews 9:12) – for you as much as for anyone else. Why doubt your great salvation when Jesus has given His life blood to save you?

THE NECESSITY OF THE SAVIOUR'S CROSS

Our Lord Jesus, "*being in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" (Philippians 2:8) This last phrase tells us that no other death would have sufficed for the redemption of sinful people. Yet there have often been suggestions made that Jesus could have died other than by crucifixion, and still be the Saviour of the world! His blood would have been shed if stabbed to death or decapitated. The fact is that much of His blood was shed before He was hung on the cross! Members of the Sanhedrin "*began to strike him... And the guards received him with blows.*" (Mark 14:65) We read that "*the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.*" (Luke 22:63). It is more than probable that such blows and beating would have drawn blood, at least to some extent.

Pontius Pilate handed Jesus over to be flogged. The Roman scourge was a whip of leather thongs, with pieces of metal or bone attached, which would rip pieces of flesh from the victim's back until muscles and even bone were exposed, resulting in excessive bleeding. Even that was not the end of the blood-letting, for "*the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head... And they took the reed and struck him on the head*" (Matthew 27:27–30), which would have resulted in bleeding from Jesus's skull. Theoretically, Jesus could have died by shedding His blood at any point during His tortures without ever having been nailed to a cross!

The Old Testament makes it perfectly clear, however, that the death of the Lord Jesus by crucifixion was always to be the solid foundation of our great salvation: "*the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live."*" (Numbers 21:8) Jesus confirmed that that sign, given over a thousand years previously, indicated the manner of His death; for, He said, "*so must the Son of Man be lifted up*" (John 3:14).

Long before crucifixion was known as a method of execution, the Holy Spirit gave David a foresight of how the Messiah would die: "*all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws... they have pierced my hands and feet – I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*" (Psalm 22:14–18) Isaiah foresaw that the Messiah would be "*pierced for our transgressions*" (Isaiah 53:5). All this points to Jesus's death by crucifixion.

Crucifixion was reserved for slaves, rebels, pirates, the most infamous malefactors and 'especially-despised' criminals. The crucifixion of Jesus pointed to the fact that it had been declared to the world for centuries that He would be regarded as "*a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.*" (Psalm 22:6) Truly "*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*" (Isaiah 53:3) His being crucified was proof that the world considered Jesus to be a despicable criminal!

Crucifixion was intended to be a gruesome public display, as was prophesied five-hundred years previously: men would "*look ... on him whom they have pierced*" (Zechariah 12:10); which will be further fulfilled at the end of the world!

Crucifixion was a capital punishment which could only be imposed by the Romans. So we read that, when the Jews accused Jesus before Pilate, he said, "*Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.*" The Jews said to him, "*It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.*" This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die." (John 18:31,32)

Crucifixion was also a public statement that the victim had been 'officially' cursed, for "*a hanged man is cursed by God.*" (Deuteronomy 21:23) So it was that, through crucifixion, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"*" (Galatians 3:13).

That Jesus's crucifixion was necessary is illustrated by the fact that it was considered to be the most shameful and disgraceful way to die. It was not only designed to kill the criminal, but also to mutilate the victim and dishonour the body. This is why Jesus predicted that "*the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified*" (Matthew 20:18,19) – usually by being nailed completely naked to a cross. The humiliation continued while hanging on the cross, for "*those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads... So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him... And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.*" (Matthew 27:39–44)

On the road to Emmaus, the two disciples – who had not recognised the resurrected Lord – said to Jesus, concerning His death, "*our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.*" Jesus replied, "*Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). His death by crucifixion was absolutely necessary in order to procure our great salvation.*

It was through Jesus being crucified that "*his soul makes an offering for guilt*" (Isaiah 53:10) – that is, our guilt. It was there and then that "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree*" (1 Peter 2: 24). This is surely why Paul told the Corinthians, "*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*" and went on to declare, "*We preach Christ crucified... the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" (1 Corinthians 2:2, 1:23–24). Nothing but the death of the Saviour by crucifixion would have satisfied the righteous justice of God His Father. Only His death on the cross could provide the total expiation necessary for the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world! It is in the message of Jesus's blood shed in His death by crucifixion that God invests His great saving power, because it was all designed by His infinite wisdom. Therefore Jesus, being "*delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*" (Acts 2:23)

Jesus himself foretold His death by crucifixion: "*I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die." (John 12:33) We ought never to think of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ as other than fully planned and all according to the will of God the Father from start to finish. How absolutely marvellous it is that the great holy God of the whole universe should so love people like us that He would design such a plan and send His Son, who came obediently and willingly, to complete it in every detail – all so that you and I, and millions of other sinners, could be saved eternally. How we ought to be so full of praise that the great eternal God sent His Son into the world "*to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross*" (Colossians 1:20), thus providing us with "*such a great salvation.*"

Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Make sure that your faith is resting entirely in Him.
