

I. CHRIST’S DEATH ON THE CROSS

A. Christ was nailed to the cross around 9 a.m. on Friday and He died six hours later.

1. The time on the cross can be divided into three distinct periods.

- a. *The first three hours*, Christ esp. endured physical and emotional pain and uttered many of His “cross words”: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 22:34); “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43); “Woman, behold thy Son ... Behold thy mother” (John 19:25-26). During this period there was much activity around the cross. Passersby mocked Him (Matt. 27:39-44).
- b. *The second three hours*, Christ esp. *suffered spiritually* as He drank the cup of God’s wrath. This was the sixth to the ninth hour (12 noon to 3 p.m.). During this period God caused the sun to fail, and brought miraculous darkness over the whole land (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). Darkness is a sign of God’s judgment. That put an end to the mockery, and caused eerie silence to fall upon the scene. God’s judgment was upon the Christ-rejecting world but more importantly, God’s judgment was upon Christ.
- c. *The last moments* Jesus uttered several cries in quick succession: At the ninth hour (just as the darkness was coming to an end), “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Some thought He was calling for Elijah (Mark 15:35-36). Then He said, “I thirst” (John 19:28) and having received vinegar, He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) and “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

2. Christ’s death on the cross was unique.

- a. Christ’s death was remarkably quick. He died slowly and agonizingly for six hours but most victims of crucifixion took days, sometimes even weeks, to die. Death was not by blood loss, but by asphyxiation. So quick was Christ’s death that Pilate was surprised (Mark 15:44).
- b. The Jews did not want the bodies of the crucified men to hang on the crosses because it was a holy festival. To speed up death, Pilate ordered the legs of the men to be broken. Christ was already dead, so His legs were not broken; instead a spear was thrust into His side (John 19:31-34).
- c. Christ’s death was in His own power. Christ determined the moment. Once all was finished, He cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost. This was a commandment which He received from God (John 10:18).
- d. At Christ’s death there was an earthquake, the ripping of the temple curtain, the opening of the graves of the saints and the confession of the centurion (Matt. 27:50-54).

B. After Christ’s death, He was buried.

1. Burial was not usually afforded to victims of crucifixion.

- a. Most likely, the bodies of the two thieves were thrown on the rubbish heap and eaten by birds and scavenging beasts.
- b. The Sanhedrin would have liked that to happen to the body of Jesus but God prepared two men to provide Him with an honorable burial. Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus (Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42).
- c. In addition, the Jewish Leaders went to Pilate and asked for soldiers to guard the tomb (Matt. 27:62-66).

2. Christ was buried so that He would enter into the full experience of death.

- a. While Christ was in the grave, His soul and body were separated. His soul was in paradise and His body was under the power of death (read Belgic Confession 19).
- b. If Christ had not been buried, we would lose comfort: He was buried to defeat the grave (I Cor. 15: 4, 55).
- c. We must be buried because our bodies cannot be resurrected and glorified until the Last Day. But when we die, it is simply a passageway into eternal life and glory. Our bodies corrupt and decay but Christ has promised to deliver them from the power of the grave’s corruption (Phil. 1:23; II Cor. 5:8; Luke 23:43)

II. CHRIST’S DESCENT (Descension) INTO HELL

A. While on the cross, Christ “descended into hell.”

1. This part of the Apostles’ Creed [“He descended into hell”] is controversial

- a. It is impossible for us to know exactly what the early church meant by those words.
- b. Many believe that those words were not in the original version of the Apostles’ Creed
- c. Whatever the early church may have understood, we must follow Scripture.

2. Some false ideas

- a. Some have said that when Jesus died, He went to the place called hell – either, the place of the damned to announce His victory over death; or to the place of the damned to give people a chance to repent after death; or to the abode of the dead OT saints to carry them out of that place [limbus patrum] into heaven.
- b. Others have said that when Jesus died, He went to suffer some more in hell, to finish the work of salvation. *Joyce Meyer teaches that Christ was tormented by demons until God said enough.*
- c. But the Bible says nothing about those things: 1/ There is no limbus patrum. The OT saints went to heaven to be with God in glory. 2/ After death, Christ did not go to any place of torment. He went to Paradise as He promised the thief. 3/ There is no second chance after death.
- d. Some passages: Acts 2:27 (hell = grave); Eph. 4:8-10 (lower parts = this earth; He descended in the incarnation); I Peter 3:18-20 (Christ preached in the person of Noah to the people who are now spirits in prison. He did not preach to them after death).

B. The descension into hell refers to His hellish torments on the cross (LD 16, Q&A 44) [not chronological].

1. Christ's suffering was hellish because on the cross He personally bore in His human nature (body & soul) the wrath of God.

- a. God's wrath is His holy displeasure directed against sin and sinners. God's wrath was directed toward Christ because legally Christ was guilty of all the sins of all those whom He represented.
- b. Therefore, God poured out His fierce wrath upon Christ. Christ became the object of God's displeasure, His intense anger, His settled hatred against sin. Zech. 13:7; Isa. 53:10.

2. Christ's suffering was hellish because on the cross He bore God's curse.

- a. To curse means to speak against. Here is one definition of curse: God's curse is the word of His wrath, expelling from His house those who are not His, causing them to experience Him as a consuming fire, casting them away from Him, forsaking them in utter terror of darkness and desolation, and making them unspeakably wretched" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, p. 582).
- b. God cursed Christ because He was bearing our sins. Legally, God could not curse Christ (or anyone) unless He were guilty. That is why we read that He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

3. That explains why Christ's suffering was different from the other victims of crucifixion.

- a. The two thieves experienced intense physical and psychological pain, but their death was not the satisfaction of God's justice. God did not impute *to them* the sins of all His people.
- b. The two thieves were punished for crimes they had committed against the civil authorities ["We receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23:41)]. Christ was punished for crimes which we had committed against God.
- c. The two thieves suffered the cruelty of men. Christ suffered the just and terrible wrath of God; He drank the cup of God's wrath; He was made a curse; the darkness of God's judgment came upon Him.

C. What did all this suffering accomplish? [A wise God would not have put His Son through this suffering unless He had a purpose in mind].

1. This suffering – the Incarnation, Lifelong Suffering & Obedience, Death and Burial was *for us*.

- a. The word "for" is important -- it means "on behalf of," "for the benefit of" and therefore "in the place of."
- b. The idea is, Christ died in order to earn for us some good, and to deliver us from some evil. The good which He earned for us is everlasting life and glory; the evil He delivered is from sin, death and hell.
- c. So, Christ died *for us* so that we do not die; Christ was cursed *for us* so that we are not cursed; if Christ dies for a person but he still dies, he is still punished, he is still cursed, the word "for" has no meaning.

2. Christ also did something for Himself – this relates to His states.

- a. Throughout His state of humiliation Christ stood before God's Law as guilty. In order to clear Himself of that guilt, He had to satisfy God's Law – perform perfect obedience and suffer punishment.
- b. As soon as He had accomplished that, and declared "it is finished," Christ was innocent before God, innocent of our sins, cleared of our guilt, and worthy of everlasting life and glory.
- c. Therefore, immediately after, and as a reward for His prior state of humiliation, Christ entered glorification.
- d. And all of this was possible because of who Christ is – the Eternal Son of God in our flesh, performing the threefold office of prophet, priest and king.