

**The Death of Christ**  
**St. Matthew 26:17-25**

The events surrounding the betrayal of Jesus Christ are well known. Matthew records that Jesus met with His disciples on the night He was betrayed to celebrate the Passover feast. As they sat together Jesus pointedly says, "one of you will betray me." He further informs His disciples of coming events by saying, "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him..." (verse 24).

One of the most profound of the basic truths of the Christian faith is that concerning the death of Christ. He spoke often of His death. On the night He was betrayed He instituted what we know as the Lord's Supper or communion. The very symbols utilized speak of His death. In Matthew 26:26-30, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to His disciples with the words, "this is My body". He then took the fruit of the vine and gave thanks, saying, "this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Luke records that when Jesus took the bread, he said to His disciples, "This is My body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19). We can readily see that the Lord's Supper consists of elements that represent His body and blood. Jesus said the bread represented His body "given for you" and the fruit of the vine His blood "shed for many". These emblems speak of the great truth of the death of Christ.

Just prior to observing the Passover with His disciples Jesus had told them, "the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified" (Matthew 26:1-4). He also said that He had come to "give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). On at least three other occasions according to Matthew, Jesus had given the disciples advance information about His impending death (Matthew 16:21-23; 17:22-23, and 20:17-19).

Taken together, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ sum up the great truths of the Christian faith. Without His death we could not be saved. Without His resurrection we would have no hope. It is for this reason, the very importance of the gospel message, that the writers of the four gospels all tell of His death, burial, and resurrection. Even though the four gospels are not identical in every detail, they all agree on the important facets of the gospel. It is interesting to note that the word gospel simply means "good news". Certainly the teaching that Jesus died, was buried, and arose is good news for fallen man.

It is not surprising then that the Apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthian believers considered this simple message the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul makes the following argument: he tells the reader that he will declare the gospel which he preached, which they received, in which they stand, by which they would be saved, if they held it fast. What was this teaching he referred to? It is none other than the gospel! Paul says simply, that Christ died for our sins according to the scripture, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scripture. This is the gospel. This is what will save us. Nothing else will suffice, not any doctrine, opinion, practice, belief, or teaching of man, only the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. First, in order of occurrence was the death of Christ.

In order to better understand the great significance of His death, we should first examine what His death was not. His death was not simply the act of a martyr. There have been many throughout the ages of time who have died a martyr's death. Stephen was the first Christian martyr (Acts 7), but he died because of his faith in Jesus. Our Lord died, not as a martyr, but as the one who could save us from our sins. Jesus described His

function in John 10:10 when He exclaimed, "I have come that they may have life and that more abundantly".

Again, the death of Jesus was not an act of vengeance by an angry God. As Jesus so eloquently stated in John 3:16-17, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Jesus paid the price for our sins in accordance with the very will of God. This plan was first described by God in Genesis 3:15 in response to the sin of Adam and Eve. God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, or even touched it, they would die. Because of the cunning subtlety of Satan the human race broke God's law and as a result, must die. But even at this dark juncture of human history God shows that He has a plan for the redemption of man. This redemption finds its culmination in the death of Jesus for our sins.

Some people act as if the death of Christ were the only important part of His life. As Christians we could not be saved without His death, but we need to realize that His very life was important, that every facet of His life holds great importance for us. While His death is very important, His resurrection is likewise important, for without it our faith would be vain (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). So, while Paul recognizes the importance of His death (1 Corinthians 2:2), he also understands that other facets of His life are equally important. John shows that the atonement began with His birth (John 1:14).

What then does His death mean to us as Christians? It means our sins are forgiven. In the communion we remember His body given for us and His blood shed for the remission of our sins. This fact illustrates how very important the Lord's Supper is for the church. We could come together upon the first day of the week, sing and pray, give of our means for the spread of the gospel and for the needs of the saints, and hear a

wonderful sermon, but if we did not remember His death through the communion the service becomes an empty ritual. When we come together upon the first day of the week in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament and gather together to share in the bread and fruit of the vine we are continuing an observance that began almost 2000 years ago. When we consider that somewhere, someone in the world has met every first day of the week since the beginning of the church to observe the Lord's Supper, we can begin to appreciate the importance of the death of Jesus.

Again, the death of Jesus shows us the suffering of God. Jesus stated clearly that He would lay down His life for the sheep (John 10:15-18). He did this to reclaim the soul of man from the power of sin and death. His death shows the righteousness of God. The prophecies of Isaiah show this. Compare chapter 59 where he says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God" with chapter 53 where he says, "He was bruised for our iniquities".

The death of Jesus shows us the only true path we can follow in life. We are crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). We are conformed to His death (Philippians 3:10-11; Romans 8:29; Romans 12:2). But we are also raised with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). His death is remembered each time someone is baptized (Romans 6). Let us rededicate ourselves to a proper understanding of the death of Christ, one of the greatest, if not the greatest principles of the Christian faith. Truly, Jesus is the Lamb of God, "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).