

“Why Did Jesus Die?”

John 1:29-31

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Communion Devotion

The question arises periodically in my Sunday School class, especially when we are studying the atonement. Why did Jesus die? People have a hard time reconciling the idea of a peace loving God with the violent and gruesome death of His own son.

Of course, this struggle is not new. Jesus' own disciples reluctantly accepted a Messiah who was a “suffering servant” but the Jews never could. The crucifixion fit nowhere in their theology nor does it today for many people. In light of this, why did Jesus die on the “Old Rugged Cross?”

To answer this question, we must take note of the words of John the Baptist recorded in John 1:29-31. **“Look, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”** Why did John use the title “Lamb of God?” What did he know that perhaps no one else did at that time? What was he trying to tell Jesus and others? I wish I knew all that was on this insightful prophet's mind. It appears he saw in Jesus a man marked for a tragic, violent, sacrificial death.

But why? Why did the tender babe of Bethlehem die like a criminal at such a young age? I'll propose two reasons, but first, let me tell you the wrong reason for his death. Jesus did not die to appease an angry God. He did not die in order to convince God to love us. John 3:16 refutes that logic. Jesus did not die to appease an angry God but to reveal the compassion of a loving God.

Why did he die, though? Couldn't Jesus have revealed the compassion of God another way? As William Kincaid III writes, “This Lamb of God imagery says something very different from the ‘light of the world’ or ‘bread of life’ imagery. Jesus as the light of the world illumines and brings warmth. Jesus as the bread of life satisfies our deepest spiritual and physical hunger. Jesus as the Lamb of God speaks of one who was on his way to the cross.”

I believe Jesus died for two reasons. **First of all, he died because sin kills.** “The wages of sin is death,” Paul penned in Romans 6:23, and so it is. Sin kills everything it touches, including self-respect, respect for others, a desire to live, potential, influence and relationships. Ultimately, it consumes and destroys our entire life. As Pannenberg wrote, “The most extreme consequence of sin is separation from God through death.”

Am I saying that Jesus died because he was a sinner and sin ultimately led to his death? No, I am saying that he died because we are sinners and “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” II Corinthians 5:21. He died because he took our sins upon his shoulders and all that was due us fell on him, including separation from God through death.

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46. Those words reveal the devastating power of sin and justify the title, “Lamb of God.”

Secondly, he died because he was a faithful servant. He came into this world for one reason and that was to “save his people from their sins” Matthew 1:21. If our salvation meant his death, he was willing to pay the price and he did. He was faithful all the way to the cross.

Strictly speaking from a historical perspective, you could say that Jesus died because of conflict with the religious leaders of his time. That would be true. However, he could have avoided that conflict or evaded the consequences. Why did he let them kill him? Because he came to save his people from their sins and if this was the only way to do it, then he would be a faithful servant. Faithful servants were willing to give their all for their master's cause. Jesus did and we should, too.

As we take communion today, let us do so with gratitude and resolve. Let us thank Jesus for his atoning death and the new life that brings us. Let us also resolve to be a faithful servant who gives his or her all for the master's cause. Following the Lamb of God, we can do no less.