

The Third Great Truth About Jesus

He was Qualified to Die for Us

*The **third** of several studies by Major General Sir Laurence New
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In the first and second of these studies we saw that as ambassadors for Christ we have not only to live lives that are seen to be consistent with our faith, we have also to be able to explain the truths about Jesus to those to whom we have earned the right to speak. We have also to recognize that whereas we can lead someone to the foot of the cross we can never bring them to new birth; that is the work of the Holy Spirit whose servants we are.

In part 1, we rehearsed the evidence for Jesus' **immaculate conception**; in part 2 we saw the **evidence for His deity**. In this third study we will see that without both of these unique qualities **Jesus could not have died in our place**.

Why did Jesus have to die? If I may put it irreverently, the Creator has always had a problem in relating to His creatures. How can holy God be reconciled to unholy man? How can holy God go on smiling on men and women who continue to ignore Him? No wonder we feel remote from Him. The great prophet Isaiah put his finger on the problem, "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save.... But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you" (Isaiah 59:1,2).

Under the first covenant this separation was mitigated by the sacrificial system based on the tabernacle and, later, the temple as laid down in Numbers chapters 15, 28 and 29. The offerings, many of which involved the shedding of blood, climaxed in the Day of Atonement during which the scapegoat was driven out into the wilderness. These forms of reconciliation were acceptable to God; but after many decades God let it be known through the prophet Jeremiah that He was tired of these sacrifices and He was going to give them a new covenant unlike the old covenant. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Under this new contract between God and His people Jesus Himself would replace the sacrifices, most noticeably the lamb; reconciliation would be achieved henceforth by Jesus on the cross.

I will never forget the first time I saw this deep truth explained in terms that I could believe and understand. We were in a packed York Minster and David Watson was speaking. He held his left hand palm upwards. On it he placed a large black notebook. He pointed to a light suspended above the pulpit and said, "That light represents God and this hand represents us; we cannot enjoy the light, we cannot be illumined by it, we cannot be encouraged, held back, inspired by it, because there is a barrier between us and God, the barrier of un-confessed and un-forgiven sin represented by this book". It was a crystal clear illustration of the diagnosis of our problem as spelled out by Isaiah.

But then David Watson, again quoting Isaiah, illustrated the solution of the problem: "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). As he reminded us of this prophecy, he transferred the barrier from his left hand and laid it on his right hand, representing Jesus on the cross. "Look at us

now” he said, “there is no barrier between us and God. We can hear Him, speak with Him, be directed and held back by Him, we can laugh with Him and weep with Him. But lest you should think this too easy, too much like cheap grace, look at the price which was paid by Jesus. Despite knowing always that He must die in our place as the sacrificial lamb, Jesus was utterly shocked to find that He was totally cut off from the Father on the cross; the barrier was now upon Him; He had become sin. **His separation was shocking, total and unique.** Search the Scriptures and the history of the church and you will find no other case of a champion of God being forsaken by God at the point of his severest trial. But for Jesus that sacred stream of communion which had always been there suddenly wasn’t. He was completely and utterly rejected by God. Mercifully His separation was not only shocking, complete and unique; **it was finite.**”

Just before He died, Jesus called out “It is finished” (John 19:30). The Greek word is a commercial term meaning paid for, receipted, settled. Some of the disciples were slow to understand that Jesus had paid completely, once and for all, the price of our separation from God. Paul understood and states that “God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ [on the cross]” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

We must note one final point. A contract has to be both offered and accepted. The new contract between God and us, His followers, has no effect unless it is accepted by each of us individually. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life**” (John 3 v16). We must not only believe in order that we might understand; we must accept in order that we might have life.

In the fourth study we will see the evidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead.