

The Cross: God's Eternal Purpose

1. The Pivotal Event in the History of the World

- A. It was an ordinary early spring day as dawn broke in the eastern Empire.
 - 1. There was a chill in the air the night before; a fire to keep warm.
 - 2. But to the Jews, the day was significant as it was their most solemn feast day.
 - 3. But more than a chill was in the air. A showdown had been building for the past three years between the establishment and an upstart new teacher who violated sacred traditions and challenged long-held interpretations of Scripture.
- B. The Jewish leaders determined that this teacher was more than a nuisance; he was a *danger*. And so, during the feast that commemorated the sparing of the firstborn, the Jewish high court pressured Pontius Pilate to murder the Son of God.
- C. And so God, who visited His creation in love, compassion, and good will, was “*taken by lawless hands, crucified, and put to death*” (Ac 2:23). It was a moment in history that changed the world.
 - 1. God's expectations of mankind changed: “the times of ignorance” which God had patiently endured were gone forever (Ac 17:30). A new covenant in place.
 - 2. True forgiveness was provided – for every sin that had ever been and would be committed – for every human being who desires forgiveness on God's terms. How valuable God saw this life: *one* life worth the souls of *multiplied millions*.
 - 3. Even the measurement of time changed. And essentially, *no one noticed*. God decreed that the significance would have to be **sought for** by faithful hearts. *This we will do in these lessons*.

2. The Cross: Foreknown and Foreordained

- A. Danger: Would not the death of God's Son imply the *weakness* of God, especially to the Jew who had seen centuries of God's power manifested over enemies?
- B. Not if God leaves a “paper trail” documenting in detail what would transpire:
 - 1. Jesus looks back from His resurrection: Lk 24:25-27, 44-47.
 - 2. Such OT passages as: Gn 3:15; Ps 22:1-2, 6-8, 12-18; 52:13-53:12.

3. Jesus, Himself, knew what lay in store and prepared His disciples for His death:

- a. First in veiled references: Jn 2:19, 22 (temple); 3:14 (lifted up).
- b. Then more clearly: Mt 16:21-23. Peter does not yet understand: he has seen Jesus calm storms, raise the dead, cast out demons, confront the Pharisees. How is it possible that He would not be with them into His old age??

C. After Jesus' death, the disciples understood that His death was *predetermined* rather than a failure or contingency plan: Ac 2:22-23; 3:18; 4:27-28; 13:27-29.

3. What We Learn About God from His Eternal Purpose

A. We learn that He is *patient*.

- 1. God bore with humanity over a long period of time until mankind matured enough to appreciate the cross: "*these times of ignorance God overlooked*" (Ac 17:30). God did not excuse sin, but He didn't express His full wrath against man.
- 2. And He *remains* patient, waiting for all who will to come to Him: "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise ... but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet 3:9).

B. We learn that He is *powerful*.

- 1. God controlled nations, kings, armies, nature – even sin and rebellion – in order to provide forgiveness. Satan's best efforts through the ages couldn't thwart His purposes.
- 2. That great power is now directed toward our benefit – 2 Pet 1:3.

C. We learn that He is *gracious* – 2 Tim 1:8-10. How thankful we should be that the Creator is a *benevolent* Being and that His power is tempered by love.

Conclusion: Has the "day that changed the world" *changed YOUR life?* We have had 2000 years to reflect upon and learn the significance of this death. We now know things hidden to prophets and angels (1 Pet 1:10-12). What does Jesus' death *mean to you?*