

Lecture 5: The Cross

It was a beautiful fall day. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, and there was not a cloud to be seen. It was a bit warm and humid, but there was a cool breeze. It was a great day to be outside – which was very fortunate, considering that’s where Professor Grimes was going to have to hold his class. He had managed to round up a few chairs, but despite his best efforts he could not locate an unoccupied classroom. Every room that had not been destroyed was already taken.

So the professor had found a nice grassy spot in a field by the campus (far away from where Andy was picketing), and informed his reluctant students that they would be meeting in the great outdoors.

Rob Brewer was not convinced that meeting outside was a good idea. “What are we going to do if it rains? Do I need to start bringing an umbrella?”

“An umbrella is always advisable in the

case of rain,” Professor Grimes replied. “However, I have put in a requisition for a tent and I hope to have it in my possession by the next time we meet. That should shelter us from the elements.”

“But not from the heat,” Isaac commented. “It’s just way too hot to be meeting outside. This is the warmest fall I’ve ever seen.”

“Then I guess you will just have to suffer,” the professor replied cheerfully. “Speaking of which, suffering is going to be our topic for today. We will be studying the cross of Christ, and we will begin our lecture by talking about the nation of Israel.”

“Israel?” Iris asked. “What do they have to do with it?”

“Everything! You see, long ago God chose Abraham and told him that He was going to turn him into a mighty nation. Abraham believed God’s promises, and God kept His word. Abraham’s descendants moved to Egypt during a time of great famine, and while in Egypt they grew into a mighty nation. However, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and abused them terribly. So God

raised up Moses and used him to rescue His people from Pharaoh. Moses then led them to Mount Sinai, where God gave them His Law.”

“The Mosaic Law,” Brad said.

“Right. God gave them that law and told them that He would bless the Israelites if they kept it, but He would curse them if they disobeyed it. As it turned out, Israel utterly failed at keeping the Mosaic Law. Oh, they might serve God for a short time, but they would always fall away. Time and time again God sent prophets to urge them to repent, but the people ignored them. They were stubborn and insisted on doing things their own way. They were a hard-hearted and rebellious people – much like us, really.”

Overheard Grimes heard the roar of a helicopter. He glanced up and saw that it was a news chopper, which seemed to be taking video footage of the Rutledge Building. Apparently it wasn’t every day that an entire campus was condemned for code violations.

Iris spoke up. “Weren’t there sheep involved? And sacrifices?”

“Yes there were,” Professor Grimes

replied. "A big part of the Mosaic Law was something called the levitical system. God set aside the Levites to maintain the tabernacle. The Levites who descended from Aaron, Moses' older brother, were set aside as priests. It was their job to offer sacrifices on behalf of the sins of the people."

"And those were animal sacrifices, right?"

"Right. A number of different types of animals were sacrificed – such as birds, cows, and sheep, among others. There were six major types of sacrifices and each one carried its own meaning. There were also special holy days that had their own special sacrifices. If you ever take my Levitical Studies course you will learn all about the details of this rather complicated system. But the point is that sacrifices were offered on behalf of the sins of the people. In order for the people to obtain forgiveness for their sins, something innocent had to die."

"That doesn't seem very fair," Brad remarked. "Those poor animals didn't do anything wrong."

The professor nodded. "That was the whole point. If those animals *had* done

something wrong then they couldn't have been sacrificed, because it wouldn't have done any good. The sacrifice had to be innocent because only an innocent creature could take upon itself the punishment that the guilty person deserved. That is how forgiveness works. You see, God simply cannot say 'Oh, you're sorry, so we're all good now. You're free to go.' Your sins *must* be punished. God cannot sweep them under the rug and pretend that they never happened. The only way you can escape punishment is if some innocent person suffers in your place. That is the only way you can ever obtain forgiveness."

Iris spoke up. "So you're saying that animals had to die on behalf of people?"

"That is the way the system worked. However, it didn't *really* work. Hebrews 10:4 tells us that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away our sins. Animal sacrifices simply could not bring forgiveness. The real purpose of that system was to point the Israelites to their need for a Savior. God gave them the Law to teach them that they were incapable of keeping the Law. God gave them

the sacrificial system to teach them that someone was going to have to die in order to purchase forgiveness for their sins. Galatians 3:24 says that the entire system was a schoolmaster that pointed us to Jesus – the One who would keep the law perfectly (because Israel could not do it) and who would die in our place (because He was innocent of all wrongdoing).

“This is why the identity of Jesus is so important. He had to be utterly sinless because if He ever sinned He would not be innocent, and only an innocent party could suffer on behalf of the guilty. He also had to be born of a virgin, because if He was not He would have inherited the sin nature of Adam and would then be just as guilty as the rest of us.”

“But only if He sinned,” Brad said.

Professor Grimes shook his head. “The Bible tells us that when Adam sinned, that sin made all of his descendants guilty as well. Psalm 51:5 says that we are sinful beings from the moment of conception – which occurs long before we are even born. In other words, we are already guilty in the sight of God

before we even take our very first breath.”

“But that’s not fair!”

“It is *vital*,” the professor replied. “Romans 5:12-19 tells us that since Adam’s sin made all of us guilty, Christ’s sacrifice can make all of us forgiven. That is how it works. We are made guilty by the sin of one man, and we are set free by the sacrifice of one man. Incidentally, this goes right back to what we talked about in our last class. Since Adam’s sin brought death into the world, Christ’s sacrifice can defeat death once and for all. The fall of Adam can be undone by the victory of Christ.

“So Christ fulfilled the plan that God had made before He even created the world. He—”

Brad interrupted. “What do you mean, before He created the world? Mankind didn’t even exist back then!”

“That is correct. However, God knows all things and has a perfect knowledge of the future. Before God even created mankind He already knew everything that we would ever do. He knew that His perfect world would be destroyed by sin, and He knew that Adam would fall and mankind would need a savior.

Revelation 13:8 tells us that God planned for His Son Jesus to die on the cross before He even created the world. Jesus created the world *knowing* what He would have to do and what it would cost Him to save it.”

“Wow,” Iris exclaimed. “We were worth that much?”

“Goodness, no!” the professor replied. “The lives of all of mankind combined are worth infinitely less than the life of the Son of God. Our value doesn’t even *begin* to compare to His. Psalm 8:1 tells us that God’s name has been glorified above the Heavens, while Romans 7:24 says we are utterly wretched, sinful men. Jesus did *not* say ‘Well, their lives are worth much more than mine, so I’d better go and save them.’ Quite the opposite. John 3:16 says that Jesus saved us because He *loved us*, not because we were worth it. His great, unfathomable love for us – a love we could never earn or deserve – compelled Him to save us even though the price was unfathomably high. The cross is *not* a testament to our worth. It is a testament to the surpassing love of God.

“So, when the time was right, Jesus took

on the form of a man and was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. The one who had been God for all of eternity became the God-Man – fully God and yet now fully Man as well.”

“What was the point of that?” Iris asked. “Was that really necessary?”

“Absolutely. In order to die in the place of men Jesus had to first become a man. Also, Hebrews 2 tells us that He was made like us in every way so He could be a faithful High Priest – someone who was tempted as we are, but who never sinned; someone who could understand our pains, because He Himself suffered pain as well. Since He went through trials Himself, He can help those who are tempted and who are troubled.

“Jesus did exactly what His Father commanded Him to do, and exactly what was prophesied in the Old Testament. He led a perfect life, He suffered, and He died a cruel, torturous death on the cross. He was the Lamb of God who died for the sins of the people. He fulfilled the Old Testament system and put an end to it.”

Isaac spoke up. “But the Jews kept sacrificing animals after Jesus died. They only

stopped when the Romans destroyed the Temple. In fact, the Jews today want to build another Temple so they can go back to sacrificing animals.”

“That’s true,” the professor agreed. “But that is because they rejected their Messiah – which had terrible consequences. In Matthew 23:33-39 Jesus pronounced a curse on the generation that had rejected Him. He warned them that God would judge them for the blood of all the martyrs in the Old Testament, and He would leave their house desolate – and that is exactly what God did. The reason Jerusalem was sacked in 70 AD and the Temple was destroyed was because the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. That was God’s judgment upon them.

“Yes, the Jews did try to continue on with the sacrificial system, but that did not please God. That was an act of rebellion, not an act of obedience. After the Resurrection God gave them clear signs that what they were doing was wrong, but they refused to listen.

“For example, once a year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest offered a sacrifice for the sins of the entire nation. During that

holy day the High Priest received two goats. One of these goats would become the sacrifice, while the other goat would be driven away. The choice of which goat got sacrificed was made by casting lots. The priest would blindly reach into an urn that had a white ball and a black ball, and would select a ball with each hand. The white ball indicated the sacrifice and the black ball indicated the goat that would be driven away.

“After the lots were chosen, the white ball goat was sacrificed and two crimson strips were taken. One strip was tied to the goat that was about to be driven away, while the other one was tied to the Temple door. Amazingly, each time the lot was chosen the white ball *always* appeared in the priest’s right hand. Each time the goat was driven away, the crimson strip on the door turned white as soon as the goat had disappeared. This behavior never changed – until Christ died.

“For the forty years that followed His resurrection, until the Temple was destroyed, the white ball always appeared in the left hand and the crimson strip no longer turned

white. The priests knew exactly what that meant: *the sacrifice wasn't working anymore*. God wasn't accepting it. The odds of that ball appearing in the left hand 40 times in a row is more than a trillion to one, but Israel still refused to listen.²⁷ Since they rejected their Messiah and refused to repent *even after Jesus bodily rose from the dead and appeared to hundreds of witnesses*, God destroyed Jerusalem and scattered them among the nations."

"That's freaky," Rob commented. "How could they miss a miracle like that?"

Professor Grimes shrugged. "Keep in mind that that very same generation had actually seen Jesus *in person* and they missed that. They saw Him heal the blind, cast out demons, and raise the dead, and they missed that. They crucified Jesus and He then rose back to life on the third day, and they missed that. There was no amount of evidence that could convince them – not even *Jesus literally coming back from the dead*.

²⁷ "Talmudim on Temple Doors", Wendy Wippel, omegaletter.com

“This leads us to a very important truth: what convinces someone to become a Christian is *not* our evidence or our arguments, but the power of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:1 says that we were dead in our sins. Just as a dead person won’t respond to you no matter what you say to them, people who are dead in their sins are incapable of responding to God. In order for a person to become saved the Holy Ghost has to spiritually raise them from the dead. He has to change their heart before they can respond and be converted.

“I Corinthians 1:21 tells us that God has chosen to use the mechanism of preaching the gospel to perform this miracle. In Mark 16:15 Jesus commanded His Church to go through the world and preach the gospel. As the gospel is preached, God works through it to convert people and save them. In other words, it is *not* the job of missionaries to save people. Instead it is the job of missionaries to preach the gospel. The Holy Spirit is the one who works through the gospel to save the lost and bring them to Christ. As Christians we are simply the messengers.”

Professor Grimes glanced at his watch. “There is a great deal more I could say about Christ’s ministry, trial, and crucifixion, but I see I am running out of time. However, your textbook does cover those topics, so I suggest you pay close attention to what it says – it will be on your next exam. The main point I want to bring out is that just as the lambs in the Old Testament were sacrificed for the sins of the people, so Jesus Christ was literally sacrificed for our sins. He was nailed to a real Roman cross, where He suffered, bled, and finally died for our sins.

“After Jesus was dead He was buried in a tomb, and three days later He arose back to life. He died a physical death and experienced a physical resurrection. By coming back to life He proved that He was exactly who He said He was – the Messiah, the Son of God, who came to take away the sins of the world. He paid for our sins, accomplished our atonement, and conquered death itself. Jesus then appeared to His astonished disciples, commanded them to spread the gospel to the nations, and ascended into Heaven. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that He is in Heaven now making

intercession for us.”

Iris spoke up. “But one day He will come back.”

The professor smiled. “Indeed He will – and that is something we will talk about in our very last class. But for now it appears we have run out of time. Incidentally, I want to remind everyone that our second exam will take place during next week’s class, so make sure you are prepared for that. That test *will* be a significant part of your grade. Also, since that class will be taken up by the exam, we will continue our discussion of the Church in the following session.”

Isaac spoke up. “It is really hot out here. Like, seriously. It’s hot. Isn’t there something you can do?”

“Can you turn down the sun?” Wally asked. “Or maybe move it? That might help.”

Grimes smiled. “As I said earlier, I am in the process of acquiring a tent. That should act as shade and keep the sun from scorching your delicate heads. However, remember that you are here to learn, not to be comfortable. While I *can* promise to teach you the class material, I *cannot* promise you a

comfortable, trouble-free life. You may be forced to endure the horrible fate of spending a beautiful day outdoors, and you may have to invest in some sunscreen. Class dismissed!”

After the class left, the professor gathered up the chairs they left behind, folded them up, and carried them away.