

WHAT HAPPENED AT CALVARY?

LUKE 23:39-49

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The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ stands at the center of the history of mankind. It marks the culmination of the entire mediatorial work of Jesus Christ on behalf of God's elect who are by nature guilty, defiled, and depraved. The Bible teaches us that before the foundation of the world God chose a people out of Adam's fallen, sinful race and determined to save them and give them all eternal blessedness and the whole inheritance of grace --

- *Ephesians 1:4 -- According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*
- *2 Thessalonians 2:13 -- But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:*

But God is holy and righteous and just. He always deals in truth. His judgments are always based on truth without respect of persons. Wherever His holy law and justice finds sin, it demands death. Wherever His holy law and justice finds righteousness, it demands life. So God could not give His chosen people, guilty sinners, the least of His blessings apart from His holy law and justice being satisfied. ***"The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20).*** God will ***"by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7).*** Therefore, before God could give eternal life and the least of His favor and blessings to any one of His elect, He had to provide a way to remove their guilt and defilement, to redeem them and atone for their sins so as to satisfy His holy law and justice. He had to provide a righteousness that would enable Him to be just and yet justify the ungodly, a righteousness that would demand the entire salvation of the whole election of grace.

For this reason, when God chose His people out of Adam's fallen race, He chose them in His Son, Christ Jesus. He appointed Christ as their Representative and Surety, and He conditioned all of their salvation upon Christ. He determined to give them all spiritual blessings IN and BY CHRIST --

- ***Ephesians 1:3 -- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: {4} According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: {5} Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, {6} To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.***

In time, God the Father sent His Son into the world to become incarnate, and by obeying the law and dying on the cross establish for His people an everlasting righteousness of infinite value whereby God could be both a just God and a savior (*Isa. 45:21*). During His time on earth, Jesus continually told His disciples that He must suffer and die on the cross to fulfill all the conditions of the salvation of His sheep by establishing this righteousness in His obedience and death (*John 12:27*). He was sent for this purpose, and His crucifixion made an atonement for sin. It was the establishment of righteousness to enable God the Father to be both a just God and a Savior and to insure the salvation of all whom the Father had given Him before the foundation of the world. His death was a victory, not a defeat. It is spoken of as an accomplishment, not a failure (*Luke 9:31*). His death paid the ransom price for His people. We preach Christ and Him crucified which means that He accomplished the redemption of all for whom He lived, obeyed, and died. We are going to consider this great event in this study -- "WHAT HAPPENED AT CALVARY?"

I. THE EVERLASTING COVENANT OF GRACE WAS COMPLETELY FULFILLED.

In the Bible, redemption and salvation are spoken of as the results of an everlasting covenant. Christ's blood is called "*the blood of the everlasting covenant*" (*Heb. 13:20*). This means His death marks the culmination of the fulfillment of the terms of that covenant. That everlasting covenant is revealed as being between God the Father and God the Son. As stated, and according to the terms of this covenant, God the Father chose a multitude of guilty, hell-deserving sinners out of Adam's fallen race. The conditions of this covenant were perfect satisfaction to God's law and justice,

perfect righteousness, which no sinner could produce even by his/her best efforts (**Rom. 3:20**). According to the terms of this covenant, God the Son agreed to take upon Himself the responsibility of saving all whom the Father had given Him. **"And the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa. 9:6)** -- This refers to the government, the fulfillment, establishment, and maintenance of the everlasting covenant of grace.

According to the terms of the covenant, God the Son had to become incarnate, be made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law's curse (**Gal. 4:4-5**). He obeyed the law perfectly, even unto the death of the cross, and thus satisfied all the conditions of the everlasting covenant of grace in time. In this great work He by Himself established for His sheep an everlasting righteousness of infinite value by which God the Father could justify them, the ungodly. This is what was finished at Calvary (**John 17:4; 19:30**). Salvation itself was not finished as multitudes for whom Christ died were not yet born. Redemption was finished, the covenant was fulfilled, righteousness was brought in, the ground of salvation was finished. It is all attributed to His obedience and death on the cross as He satisfied law and justice in shedding His own blood, the **"blood of the everlasting covenant."**

Christ, by Himself, for His people, fulfilled all the conditions of the everlasting covenant of grace. He insured the salvation of all whom He represented, all for whom He lived, obeyed, died, and arose again. He shall not lose even one of them as His righteousness demands their salvation and final glory. He paid their debt in full, and they must receive the benefits of His payment. To say that even one could finally perish is to cast shame and reproach upon His blood and His righteousness. Just as sin demands death, righteousness demands life. This shows us that the Gospel message is a specific truth revealed in the terms of this covenant. The Gospel is the preaching of the terms of this covenant. Therefore, we must define the Gospel as **GOD'S PROMISE TO SAVE SINNERS AND GIVE THEM THE WHOLE INHERITANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE BASED ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**. Any so-called "gospel" that places salvation conditioned on the sinner, or based on any other ground, in any way, to any degree, or at any stage is a false gospel, another gospel, which is not another, because this is not grace (**Gal. 1:8**).

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES WERE FULFILLED.

The whole Old Testament is mainly God's revelation of His purpose to save sinners based on the righteousness of the promised Messiah. From the very first revelation of this promise in **Genesis 3:15** all the way to the last chapter of **Malachi**, there is one continual and progressive revelation of both the Person and accomplished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament teaches how that sin demands death and that righteousness demands life. But it also teaches how there is no righteousness to be found among sinful humanity. God must send His Son to accomplish it and provide it for His chosen people if anyone is to be saved. All of the sacrifices of the Old Testament that were ordained and commanded by God were but types of Christ and salvation based on His substitutionary atonement. Every time a sacrifice was made, God intended it to teach the Gospel principles of REPRESENTATION, SUBSTITUTION, SATISFACTION, and IMPUTATION, all by Christ, the promised Messiah. All the types and pictures of the Mosaic Law were, in essence, a "**schoolmaster to bring [Israel] unto Christ, that [they] might be justified by faith**" (**Gal. 3:24**). Israel's whole history as a nation had no eternal significance except as it was a revelation of God's redemptive glory in Christ and as a preparation for coming of the Messiah to establish righteousness for His people.

Christ is **the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world** in that He was appointed before the world was ever created. He is the "woman's seed," Abel's lamb, Noah's ark, Abraham's sacrifice, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Passover lamb, the rock from which the water of life flows, the bread and the manna on which we feed, the tabernacle, the altar, and the mercy-seat where we meet with and find acceptance with God on the basis of Christ's blood, the Great High Priest who stands in our place. All of the types of the Old Testament pointed to and pictured salvation conditioned on Him who was to come, the Messiah, who would bring in righteousness by His obedience unto death.

All of the prophecies concerning the Messiah pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "**that prophet**" of whom Moses spoke, the son of David, the one greater than Solomon. He is the forsaken one of **Psalms 22**, the Shepherd of the Sheep in **Psalms 23**, the King of glory in **Psalms 24**. He is the child born and the son given of **Isaiah 9:6**. He is the suffering servant of **Isaiah 53**. He is the Lord our Righteousness of **Jeremiah 23:6**. We could go on and on and on as the Old Testament is full of such prophecies concerning the Messiah and His work of accomplishing righteousness, salvation itself, for His people. Consider the following scriptures:

- *Luke 24:27 -- And beginning AT MOSES AND ALL THE PROPHETS, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. {44} And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written IN THE LAW OF MOSES, AND IN THE PROPHETS, AND IN THE PSALMS, concerning me.*
- *John 1:45 -- Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, OF WHOM MOSES IN THE LAW, AND THE PROPHETS, DID WRITE, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*
- *John 5:46 -- For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: FOR HE WROTE OF ME. {47} But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*
- *John 8:56 -- Your father Abraham REJOICED TO SEE MY DAY: and he saw it, and was glad.*
- *1 Corinthians 15:3 -- For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES; {4} And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES:*

The whole Old Testament pointed forward to Christ as revealed in the Gospel of eternal salvation and final glory based on His righteousness alone. **Every Old Testament believer knew and believed this Gospel of salvation based on the righteousness of the promised Messiah and looked forward to His coming.** The whole New Testament records His first advent and points sinners to the Messiah who has come and has already established a righteousness whereby God can justify the ungodly, and it points us to the risen Christ who will come again, subdue all things unto Himself, and glorify His church.

III. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD WERE HONORED, MAGNIFIED, AND REVEALED.

On the cross of Calvary God displayed His **redemptive** glory. This is the revelation and honor of every single attribute of His holy character. God displays something of His glory in creation, in providence, and even in condemnation, but it is only in the redemption of sinners by the Lord Jesus Christ that we see every attribute of God's character working consistently together to accomplish God's sovereign purpose to save His people from their sins. This is God's highest glory. This is His *shekinah* glory. This is ***the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6)***. In the redemption of sinners based on the righteousness of Christ, we see God's holiness, justice, truth, righteousness, His hatred of sin, as well as His love, mercy, grace, and compassion, all actively engaged to save His elect based on the blood of Christ. All that God is in His essence, His very Being, was magnified and honored and revealed in this great salvation by Jesus Christ -- ***For in HIM dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9)***. This shows us three important truths that reveal God's definition of the Gospel --

- **(1) THE MAIN ISSUE IN THE SALVATION OF SINNERS IS THE GLORY OF GOD.** As we have seen, the reason Christ had to go to the cross was to glorify His Father in the salvation of sinners.
- **(2) THE MAIN ISSUE IN THE GLORY OF GOD IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, THE ONLY GROUND OF SALVATION.** The only way in which God could be glorified as both a just God and a Savior is based upon the righteousness of Christ.
- **(3) THE SUM OF ALL THESE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD IS EXPRESSED IN THE WAY GOD IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AS A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOR, OR AS THE GOD WHO JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY, AS THE GOD WHO IS BOTH JUST AND JUSTIFIER.** Consider the following --

Most people today, due to ignorance and wrong teaching concerning the cross and the atonement, believe that salvation is primarily a matter of God's love and compassion. Although God's love and compassion is certainly a primary concern in salvation, and we must never diminish God's love and compassion, sinners must see that salvation is primarily a matter of law and justice. This is why people today do not know the true Gospel. The cross of Christ proves that salvation is a matter of law and justice. Where, then, does God's love, grace, mercy, and compassion come into the picture? God's love, grace, mercy, and compassion provided in the Person and work of Christ what His holy law and justice required --

- ***1 John 4:10 -- Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the PROPITIATION for our sins.***

"Propitiation" means atonement, satisfaction to God's law and justice. Consider again how God determined before the foundation of the world to glorify Himself in the salvation of a multitude of guilty, hell-deserving sinners whom He sovereignly chose out of Adam's fallen race. But God could neither save nor bless even the first one apart from His holy law and justice being satisfied. God is holy and righteousness. He cannot clear the guilty, and the soul that sins against Him must surely die. Therefore, it is impossible for God to be glorified in the salvation of sinners if salvation is conditioned on sinners or anything that proceeds from their persons --

- ***Romans 3:19 -- Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. {20} Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.***

In order to be glorified in the salvation of sinners, God conditioned the salvation of all His elect upon His beloved Son. God the Father appointed God the Son to be their Representative, Substitute, Mediator, and Surety. He sent Him into the world to become incarnate, to obey the law, to die for their sins on the cross, all to establish a righteousness whereby He could be both a just God and a Savior, both just and justifier --

- ***Romans 3:21 -- But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; {22} Even the***

righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: {23} For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; {24} Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: {25} Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; {26} To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

God the Son incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, was smitten of God, and *it pleased the Lord to bruise Him (Isa. 53)*. It pleased the Lord in the sense that God was satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ for His people. God's holy character was honored and magnified in the Person and work of Christ who established a righteousness for His people. This was the way in which Christ glorified the Father (*John 17:1-4*). For example, God's *rest* in *Hebrews 4:10-11* is the satisfaction He took in the revelation of His attributes in the obedience and death of Christ. Sinners enter that *rest* by faith when we see that God is just to justify us based on what Christ accomplished for us. Here is where we see in full view the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, how God can be just to justify the ungodly based on the righteousness of Christ. Here is where we see the actual imputation of sin to Christ, where the sins of God's elect actually and legally became His (*2 Cor. 5:21a*). Here we see how God's wrath *justly* fell upon Christ who knew no sin in His own Person. He became accursed for us and died the just for the unjust (*Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 3:18*). All of this was so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (*2 Cor. 5:21b*).

Here is where God the Holy Spirit brings lost sinners into a saving knowledge of God and causes them to turn from their idols to serve the true and living God. This is how the God of redemption identifies and distinguishes Himself from idols and calls on sinners to seek Him, to look unto Him and be saved (*Isa. 45:20-25*). When sinners savingly see how God can only justify them based on the righteousness of Christ, then they come by faith to the God who justifies the ungodly expecting salvation based on the righteousness of Christ according to His promise. Then they repent of ever imagining that they could have been saved based on any other ground (*Phil. 3:7-10*). A sinner must see this glory of God in order to be saved. This does not mean that a sinner must be able to express in theological terms each attribute of God and how it applies to salvation. It does mean that a sinner must see and know how God can be both a just God and a Savior, how God can be both just and justifier of the ungodly. A sinner must know that God can only save him, keep him, bless him, and glorify him, based on the imputed righteousness of Christ.

At the cross of Christ we learn ó

A. The reality of sin –

1. **Legally**, as we view sin imputed to Christ, we learn that wherever sin is imputed, God's law must pronounce a curse. God's law demands death wherever sin is imputed. Christ did no sin, knew no sin, He was holy, harmless, and undefiled (**Luke 23:14,41; Heb. 7:26**). Yet, when sin was charged to His account, God had to punish it in Him.

2. **Morally**, as we view fallen mankind, we see the essence of sin lies in the fact that fallen men love darkness and hate light (**John 3:19-20; 7:7; Acts 4:26-28; Heb. 13:12-13**). Why? It is because the "**carnal mind is enmity against God**" (**Rom. 8:7**). This shows that all men by nature are in state of guilt, condemnation, defilement, and unbelief, and all their efforts to save themselves are dead works. But by nature we refuse to believe this because we will not submit to God's standard of good and evil, of saved and lost. Fallen humanity judged Christ to be cursed of God. We as fallen humanity revealed our hatred of holiness when we crucified the Lord of Glory.

B. We learn the reality of righteousness --

1. **That righteousness is the standard of judgment for all mankind (Acts 17:31) --** At the Judgment, sinners will not be compared with other sinners. They will be compared with Christ, and all who come short are sinners, and the wages of sin is death (**Rom. 6:23**). We must have a righteousness that answers the demands of God's law and justice, or we will perish. We cannot produce it. God the Holy Spirit cannot produce it through us. God sent Christ to produce it, and we must receive it by faith, by trusting that He has met all the conditions and that His righteousness is all we need as to the ground of salvation (**Rom. 10:9-10**).

B. That just as sin demands condemnation and eternal death, righteousness demands justification and eternal life. Just as where sin is imputed, death must be the result, where righteousness is imputed, life must be the result. Christ died, but He did not stay dead. God the Father brought Him out of the grave, because Christ satisfied law and justice. He paid the debt for His people. He drank damnation dry for them and provided the ransom price of righteousness that demands their full salvation

and final glory (*Rom. 4:23-25*). The reality of righteousness teaches us that all for whom Christ lived, obeyed, and died, **MUST BE SAVED**. He cannot lose even one of them because He fulfilled all the conditions of their salvation. He provided a righteousness that enables a holy and just God to remain holy and just and still save sinners. All for whom Christ died shall be saved. They shall hear and believe God's Gospel and repent of dead works. They shall come to faith in Christ and repentance.

The false notion that He died for everyone conditionally (if they will believe) denies the reality of sin in that it makes salvation ultimately conditioned on the sinner, and it denies the reality of righteousness in that it says that even though Christ died for the sinner, that sinner may never be saved because he may never meet the condition of faith. It says that multitudes will perish even though Christ paid their debt and provided a righteousness for them. It says that His death alone, in and of itself, was not sufficient to accomplish their salvation. It says His death, His righteousness, His atonement, does not make the only difference between heaven and hell. It accuses God of being unfaithful and unjust because it says that even though God promised to save those who perish, He either could not or would not, and it says that God sends them to hell even though their debt was already paid by Christ. Such notions dishonor God and deny Christ, and sinners need to see this and reject such deadly error before it is too late.

C. We learn how God saves sinners.

1. The ground of salvation is the righteousness of Christ, the entire merit of His obedience and death on behalf of sinners. If you come to God on any other ground, you will perish. If you come to God on this ground alone, you shall be saved.

2. The instrument is the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the means is by faith in Christ. This is seen in the example of the thief who was saved (*Luke 23:42-43*).

- He was a guilty, hell-deserving sinner. In Matthew's account even this thief mocked Christ at first (*Matt. 27:41-44*). Had salvation or any part of it been conditioned on one such as this, he would have surely perished.

- He was brought effectually under the Gospel. He was brought to understand who the man on the middle cross was - the Messiah sent of God to save His people from their sins. This thief was awakened to understand that this Person was the Lord our Righteousness.
- He was brought to faith in Christ. His faith went above circumstances. What did this thief see with the physical eye? He saw a defeated, suffering, wretch, hanging on a cross. He saw a weak, helpless man (less than a man). What did he see with the eye of faith? He saw the Lord of Glory, the King of Kings who would be coming soon into His mediatorial kingdom. He saw the Savior. And recognizing His own sin, and realizing that sin brings condemnation and death, He turned to the only One who could save him and said, "***Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.***" This thief knew that Christ was fulfilling all the conditions of His salvation. He trusted in the righteousness of Christ as his only ground of salvation, and he rejected all else.

This is what every sinner needs to see, understand and believe. God has promised eternal salvation for every sinner, from a thief on the cross to a religious Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus, who comes to Him pleading the merits of the blood and righteousness of Christ. It is true that God chose a people before the foundation of the world and sent Christ to save them. It is true that Christ died for them alone and that they will be saved. But it is also true that they will hear and believe God's Gospel and repent of dead works. These truths do not bar you from heaven. These truths do not keep you from believing and repenting. These truths glorify God, exalt Christ, and exclude boasting in ourselves. These truths insure the salvation of sinners, because if God had not chosen some, and if Christ had not died for them alone, none would be saved. You are commanded right now to believe and repent, to receive the benefits of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. You are commanded to trust Him and His righteousness alone, and to reject all your works and efforts and experiences. If you refuse, you have no one to blame but yourself and your own natural hatred of this light of truth. But you have every reason to believe, because God is faithful to save sinners who believe and trust in Christ.