

Jesus' Death: What's The Big Deal?

Do you find yourself struggling to understand life concepts that other people seem to be able to understand? (How to parent kids successfully, how to have a good marriage, etc.)

Does it feel like no matter how hard you try, you aren't getting the results you want?

Does it feel like something is missing in your life?

Does church feel empty (or fulfilling in the moment, but that moment is easily lost)?

Does the Bible feel irrelevant or hard to understand?

Do a lot of things in life feel like a struggle?

There is one thing that can change it all.

That feeling of struggle is there for a purpose. The purpose is to reveal to you that you aren't doing well on your own and in your own strength - that you aren't able to achieve the results you want on the basis of your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). That you, in your humanity, cannot achieve the perfection you desire. That you can't save yourself or your spouse. But there's someone who can. And he wants you to know him so that he can show you his perfect plan.

Acts 17:26,27 says that God has "marked out [your] appointed time in history so that [you] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." The struggles of life draw us to him. And you know that he is there because "what may be known about him is plain to you, because God has made it plain to you; for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - can be clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:19-20).

And then "at just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6).

That seems like a weird thing for someone to do: to die for you. For what? What's the point? What does Jesus dying for you accomplish? Lean in, and I'll tell you, because this will change everything.

God requires perfection. Not “good enough.” Not “better than other people.” Not “more good than bad.” Perfection. That’s what God requires.

That’s what you’re striving for. You know that if only you could create the perfect life, you’d be happy. Perfection is the goal.

Perfection is also the original intention. God created the world perfectly. But our striving to do things our way and our desire to control our own destinies messes everything up.

And you’re not in charge. Did you know that? Sometimes we think we are or we want to be or we feel like if things would just go our way then everything would be fine. But God is in charge, and he has a perfect plan - one that you might not understand while it’s happening, but that you will be glad you went along with once you see what he does with it.

God wants to get us back to the perfection that He created and that we desire. But he won’t just simply wave his hand and make everything better, because that would be acting against our freedom to make decisions for ourselves. And he doesn’t want to take that free will away from us, because people who aren’t free to choose aren’t free at all - and he wants us to be free. So he allows the process of learning to take place until we learn that we can’t save ourselves.

His plan starts with rules - the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20). Have you kept them perfectly? If you can keep them perfectly, then you can save yourself. How are you doing with them? Do you ever misrepresent the truth? (You shall not lie.) Do you put other people or things before God in your life? (You shall have no other gods before me.) Do you claim to know him but do things that you know profane his name? (You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.) Have you ever been angry with someone? (Jesus said that anger toward someone is committing murder in your heart.)

So you’re not doing well, are you? God says that no one is righteous - not one of us (Romans 3:10). None of us can keep the whole law, and whoever tries but “stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10).

God gave us his laws and commands to make it clear that we can't do it on our own. He says that "no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin" (Romans 3:20). He wants us to realize that, no matter how hard we try, we can't ever be good enough to get ourselves back to that perfect world that God created.

In fact, our sin is so serious that the consequence of our sin is death. This is why there has been death since Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree that God told them not to eat from, warning them that if they ate from it "you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:17). Prior to that, they had access to eat from the Tree of Life, which gives us life forever, but we no longer have access to that. Romans 6:23 reminds us that "the wages of sin is death."

Not only that, but there is no forgiveness for sins unless someone sacrificially pays the death penalty. This is why there were animal sacrifices prior to Jesus, because "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).

But Jesus came to shed his blood and die sacrificially in our place, taking the consequence for our sin upon himself, and making us perfect and cleansed from sin. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood, to be received by faith" (Romans 3:25). It is by faith in Jesus' sacrifice that we are saved, not by works so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

When you know without a doubt that Jesus died and rose from the dead so that you could have life, and you look to him as "Lord" and the only true authority on life, then you yearn to know what he has to say (like a deer pants for streams of water as it says in Psalm 32:1). When you trust that he has the answers, then you turn to the One who will show you the way.

His answers and the things he has to say about life are all found in the Bible. When you believe that, you "accept it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13) and the Holy Spirit will "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13) and will "teach you all things" (1 John 2:27).

That's not to say that suddenly you will know all the answers - it just means that you will have access to the answers. The learning process to get to those answers can be slow, because, even with the Spirit of God, you still have a human brain, and it takes time for your current template to incorporate the new information you are learning in order for you to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:12)

From this transformation comes all that you need to live an even better life than what you could create yourself, because through his Word you will get to know him and how he wants you to live. That means no more striving, instead there is patience for your journey. No more faking happiness, instead you speak truth. And no more wondering about what happens after death, instead you know that you have eternal life to look forward to.

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Are you afraid that you have sinned and will be living a life separated from the only God who can give you the life you’re looking for (both now and for eternity)? Be thankful that Jesus has provided a way for you to live life to the fullest. Accept the sacrifice he made to pay your penalty. And watch what he can do with your life when it is surrendered to his authority.

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best” (Philippians 1: 9,10)