

The Story of Redemption

God Reaching Out to Restore **COMMUNITY**
through the cross of Jesus Christ.



Why Did Jesus Die?
Part 6: The Road to the Cross

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Why Did Jesus Die?

Part 6: The Road to the Cross

There are many different ideas that people have about how and why Jesus died. Some think he tried to lead a rebellion against Rome, and the Roman authorities sentenced him to death for this act. Some think that Jesus was at heart a harmless pacifist, going around speaking about flowers, peace, and love, until one day he went nuts in the temple and was killed by the religious authorities. Others believe that Jesus was a good person who got caught up in a power struggle with political forces beyond his control. As with most misconceptions, many of these theories have an element of truth; however, the true story of Jesus' death is much different. It is a story of confrontation, betrayal, and self-sacrifice, filled with strange twists and turns in plot. Ultimately, though, it is a story of redemption.



1. JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH.

For a period of about three years Jesus went through the countryside and the villages of Galilee teaching, preaching, healing diseases, and casting out demons. In this amazingly short period of time, he set the world on fire with his message of the coming kingdom of God. He knew, however, that he had to take the long road to Jerusalem, the center of power of the corrupt religious authorities. There his ministry and life would come to an end. Three times he tried to tell his disciples of his upcoming death.

17 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 18 "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (Mt. 20:17-19).

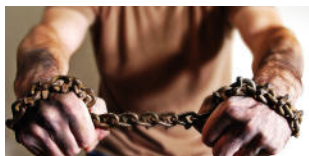
The disciples' reaction to Jesus' foretelling of his death was rather strange.

"The Son of Man will be betrayed."

One time Peter rebuked Jesus, telling Jesus that he did not know what he was talking about (Mt. 16:22). In Peter's mind, Jesus was going to triumphantly kick out the Romans, not die on a cross. The second time they heard of his death, the disciples were appropriately filled with grief, though they seemingly missed Jesus' prediction that he would also be raised to life (Mt. 17:22). The third time, James and John go with their mother to ask Jesus a favor:

to let them sit at the right and left hand of his kingdom—still thinking of earthly positions of power. Jesus says this in response:

25b "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials



Sin enslaves us--but Christ gave his life as a ransom for our sins.

exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:25b-28).

Jesus corrected the disciples’ misunderstanding, telling them that true greatness is measured through service. He also tells us one of the reasons why he would die: to give his life as a ransom for many. This is the heart of redemption.

Ever since the Garden, our world and all of humanity has suffered under the slavery of sin. We see it in the constant wars, racial hatred, and destructive acts of nature. We have probably experienced the hurt from broken relationships, abuse, addiction, loneliness, and the emptiness of materialism. This sin enslaves us, destroying our relationships with God and others. We need to be set free from sin—to be redeemed. And redemption requires a ransom.

A ransom is the price required to free someone from slavery. The ransom that was required for our freedom from sin was Jesus’ death. Jesus would willingly lay down his life to purchase this freedom—his life would not be taken from him. Because of his decision to sacrifice his life, the slavery and death that results from sin would be destroyed. Jesus died to set us free!

Have you ever felt the controlling power or effects of sin in your life?

2. JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, he sent his disciples to a village ahead of them to find a donkey and its colt. He told them to take the donkey and the colt and to bring them back to him.

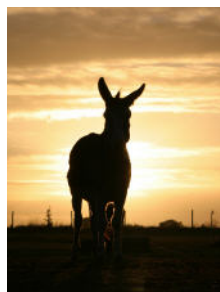
⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!” (Mt. 21:6-9).

What was the significance of this event? By entering Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem in this way. Many in the crowd apparently understood that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, shouting, “Hosanna”—which means, “O Save!” and calling him “Son of David.” The people were excited because their



Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey--showing his humble nature as king.

long-awaited king had arrived, and for a time Jesus had their support; however, they failed to understand what kind of king Jesus was. He was not entering Jerusalem as a conquering warrior, but as a peaceful king riding upon a lowly animal. The throne that he was about to claim was not a golden throne, but a wooden cross.

What misunderstandings do people have about Jesus today?

3. JESUS GOES TO THE TEMPLE.

Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus goes to the temple. As the Messiah, he was a priest as well as a king, and the temple was the dwelling place of his heavenly father. This entrance would mark the beginning of a dramatic confrontation with the religious authorities who ran the temple. Jesus does the following:

- **He cleanses the temple (Mt. 21:12-13).** The temple was where people came to offer sacrifices for their sins. They would give an animal to the priest, and he would sacrifice the animal and offer it up to God. If a person did not have an animal, he would purchase one. For those who came to the temple from out of town, they would have to change money first to buy the animal. Jesus was upset that this business was being conducted in the temple itself, which was supposed to be a place of prayer, not a “den of thieves.” He drove out everyone who was buying and selling in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers.
- **He heals in the temple (Mt. 21:14-17).** After cleansing the temple, all of the blind and lame come to Jesus to be healed. By caring for these unfortunate people, Jesus turns the temple into what it was supposed to be—a place of healing. How did the religious authorities respond? *15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant (Mt. 21:15).*
- **He teaches in the temple (Mt. 21:23-27).** In the past, Jesus had spent most of his time teaching out in the countryside and in villages. Now he was claiming his right as the Son of God to teach in the temple itself—the domain of the religious leaders. They try to challenge his authority, but they cannot answer any of the religious questions that he asks them.
- **He pronounces judgment in the temple (Mt. 21:33-46).** Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard owner who rented out his land and went away on a long journey. When the harvest time came, the owner sent his servants to collect the fruit, but the tenants killed each servant that he sent. Finally, he sent his son, but they killed him too. The point of the parable was that religious leaders did not own the temple—they were tenants.

Jesus heals in the temple--but the authorities are indignant.

They and their forefathers had killed God’s servants that he had sent. Now they would kill God’s son too. Jesus concluded the parable by saying, ⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Mt. 21:43).

Which of the above do you think would have angered the religious authorities the most?

4. JESUS IS BETRAYED.

Jesus’ ministry in “their” domain, his bold teaching, and his pronouncements of doom were too much for the religious authorities to handle. The chief priests began to look for a way to arrest and kill Jesus, but they wanted to do it in “some sly way” because they were afraid of the people (Mt. 26:3). They would find a willing accomplice in Judas.

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. ¹⁶ From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over (Mt. 26:14-16).

For a relatively small sum of money, Judas agreed to betray his master and teacher. Already stealing from the disciples’ purse, his greed overcame him.

The Night of the Betrayal

Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him. As Jesus and his disciples ate their famous Last Supper meal, he told Judas that he knew that he would betray him. If he had wanted to escape from this trap, he could have. Instead, after the meal he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, knowing that he would be betrayed, and knowing that all of his disciples would desert him. When Peter protested that he would never desert him, Jesus said,

“This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times” (Mt. 26:31b).

Peter replied,

“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And all the other disciples said the same” (Mt. 26:35b).

The disciples’ loyalty would soon be tested. Jesus told his disciples that the hour of his betrayal was near, and he asked them to keep watch for the authorities while he prayed.

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Mt. 26:39).

Did Jesus look forward to his death? No. His soul was “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” But there was no other way to redeem humanity, so he bowed his will to the Father’s and accepted his coming death.

Peter declares
he will never
disown Jesus.

In this most crucial hour, the disciples fell asleep during their watch. Three times Jesus prayed, and each time he came back to find them sleeping. The last time Jesus came back, this is what happened.

45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." 49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

50 Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for."

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51 With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

52 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

55 At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled (Mt. 26:45-56).

As Jesus had predicted, not only was he betrayed by Judas, but *all* of the disciples deserted him in his time of need. In the end, he was left all alone

In the end, Jesus' disciples desert him, leaving him all alone.

Jesus had numerous opportunities to escape. He could have run away. He could have let his disciples fight for him. If Jesus had kept low at night, he could have continued to escape his enemies' nets. When they came for him, he could have called ten thousand angels to save him. Instead he rose to meet his betrayer. Jesus willingly walked into their trap.

Why did Jesus die? Corrupt religious leaders were jealous of his popularity and afraid of his power, and they plotted against him. One of his own disciples betrayed him. But ultimately Jesus died by his own choice. Not because he had a death wish, but because he wanted to redeem us.

What do you think gave Jesus the strength to give himself up to his enemies?

In the next part of the story, we will look at Jesus' trial and death as the *Story of Redemption* continues.

QUESTIONS:

Multiple Choice.

1. _____ How many times did Jesus predict his death on the way to Jerusalem?
a. Once b. Twice c. Three times
2. _____ Which disciples go to Jesus with their mother to ask for the right and left hands of power in the kingdom?
a. Peter and Andrew b. Philip and Bartholomew c. James and John
3. _____ Which of the following did Jesus NOT do in the temple?
a. Teach b. Heal c. Cast out demons d. Pronounce judgment
4. _____ Who was praising Jesus in the temple that most upset the religious leaders?
a. The priests b. The children c. The disciples d. All of the people
5. _____ Who paid Judas thirty silver coins to betray Jesus?
a. The chief priests b. The Pharisees c. The teachers of the law

True/False.

6. _____ When Jesus tells Peter that he must suffer and die, Peter at first protests, but then sadly agrees.
7. _____ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was immediately attacked by the religious leaders.
8. _____ The thought of going to the cross was not difficult for Jesus.
9. _____ Jesus had no way of preventing himself from going to the cross.
10. “Hosanna” means “_____.”

Fill in the Blank.

11. A “ransom” is the price required to free a person from _____.
12. Jesus said that the “Son of Man did not come to be served, but to _____.”

For questions and/or to receive part 7 in the *Story of Redemption*, contact:



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