

How Does the Death of Jesus Save?

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One way to understand the meaning of the death of Jesus is to imagine a courtroom scene in which we are on trial for our sins and God is the judge. Our sins against God are capital crimes. God Himself is our judge, and according to divine law our crimes deserve the death penalty. Death, in a spiritual sense, means eternal separation from God in unending torment. That's a very serious judgment.

By shedding His blood on the cross, Jesus took the punishment we deserve and offered us His righteousness. When we trust Christ for our salvation, essentially we are making a trade. By faith, we trade our sin and its accompanying death penalty for His righteousness and life.

In theological terms, this is called "substitutionary atonement." Christ died on the cross as our substitute. Without Him, we would suffer the death penalty for our own sins....

The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way: "And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). For God to forgive our sins, His judgment had to be satisfied and that required the shedding of blood.

Some object, "Shedding blood seems so barbaric. Is it really necessary? Why doesn't God simply forgive us?" Because God is holy, He must judge sin. Would a just and righteous judge let evil go unpunished? At the cross, God poured out His judgment on His Son, satisfying His wrath and making it possible for Him to forgive us. That's why Jesus shed His blood for your sins, my sins, and the sins of the whole world....

God unleashed His wrath on His Son so that we might be spared that awful fate. This is the central message of the cross and the reason for our hope: God forsook His Son so that He might never forsake us. God assures us, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Isn't that a wonderful promise?

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