

The death of Christ

John Houghton ©

A. Introduction

1. Who could believe it? The Messiah dies! After all these centuries and inside three years of ministry apparently it is all over. The twist is unexpected, shocking, scandalous, senseless. Yet it was long anticipated – Isaiah 52:13-53:12.
2. The events of the last week of Jesus' life are so important that they occupy the bulk of the Gospel narrative.

B. The last week

Sunday	The triumphal entry (Palm Sunday).
Monday	Jesus cleanses the Temple.
Tuesday	The Sanhedrin challenges his authority. Jesus predicts AD 70, future world history and his second coming. Mary anoints Jesus at Bethany. Judas strikes a deal with the authorities.
Thursday	Jesus eats the Passover. Judas leaves and Jesus teaches the disciples and prays for them. Gethsemane.
Friday	Betrayal & arrest. Questioned by Annas the former high priest. Condemned by Caiaphas and Sanhedrin. Peter denies Jesus. Jesus is formally pronounced guilty. Judas commits suicide. Jesus is tried by Pilate. Jesus appears before Herod Antipas. Pilate sentences Jesus to death. Jesus is scourged and mocked by the soldiers. The crucifixion. The veil of the Temple is torn. Old Testament saints experience temporary resurrection. He is buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. He preaches to the imprisoned spirits.
Saturday	He Sabbath in the tomb.

Sunday Jesus is raised from the dead.

C. Why did Christ die?

1. Jesus came as a servant-king. Throughout the Old Testament the twin themes of a suffering servant and of a sacrificial victim are prominent. The Jews failed to equate this with the Messiah, so they could not understand how Jesus could be both.
2. Yet Jesus knew that the root issue concerned how sinful rebellious mankind could be at peace with a righteous Judge. Forgiveness is free, but justice demands satisfaction. Love is expressed in the gracious gift of a sacrifice on our behalf (1 John 4:9-10). Jesus was that willing offering, and died in our place on the cross to fulfil all the Old Testament prototypes and promises of redemption.
 - a. He is the substitute for Isaac (Genesis 22:13-14);
 - b. He is the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:5-7 cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7);
 - c. He is the sacrificial offering (Leviticus 17:11 cf. Hebrews 10:1-4,11);
 - d. He is the suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:4-7 cf. 1 Peter 1:19).
3. The theme of substitution and exchange is central to the cross – 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10-14. We are more than just not well; our sicknesses, social, psychological, physical are the consequence of a deeper malady that had to be addressed. The cross obliges us to face that fact. Sin is properly punished and righteousness is freely bestowed on all who believe – Romans 3:21-26; 5:1.
4. Jesus accomplished everything necessary for our redemption and for the salvation and transformation of the human race, and for the reconciliation of the entire cosmos.
 - a. A new covenant – Hebrews 8:7-13.
 - b. A new Lord – Philippians 2:8-11; Rev 5:9-10.
 - c. Peace with God – Romans 5:1-2.
 - d. Peace with one another – Ephesians 2:11-17.
 - e. The fulfilling and superseding of the law – Galatians 3:10-14
 - f. Forgiveness and acceptance through grace alone – Ephesians 2:8-10.
 - g. The defeat and disarming of the principalities and powers – Colossians 2:14-15.
 - h. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit – John 16:5-7.
 - i. The reconciliation of all things – Colossians 1:19-22.
 - j. The healing of all ills – Isaiah 53:4-5; Revelation 21:4-5.

D. Christ is risen!

1. Jesus called himself the resurrection and the life. Yet he died and was buried (John 19:30). Did he really rise bodily?
 - a. The 'swoon' theory and the Docetist heresy both deny that he physically died.
 - b. The 'death/rebirth myth' theory spiritualises the events.
 - c. The 'stolen body' theory proclaims it a fake.
2. None of these theories provides evidence to disprove that of the eyewitnesses. The historical evidence for the resurrection is compelling.
3. Witnesses to Jesus' death and burial.
 - a. John the apostle (John 19:32-37).
 - b. Joseph & Nicodemus (John 19:38-39).
 - c. The Centurion (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:44-45).
 - d. The Mary's & the soldiers (Matthew 27:61-66).
4. Witnesses to his resurrection
 - a. Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9).
 - b. Other women including Mary (Matthew 28:9).
 - c. Two disciples (Luke 24:13-15).
 - d. Simon Peter (Luke 24:34).
 - e. Ten apostles (John 20:19, 24).
 - f. Eleven apostles (John 20:26).
 - g. 500 brethren (1 Corinthians 15:6).
 - h. All the apostles (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9) .
 - i. Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8).
 - j. James (1 Corinthians 15:7).
 - k. Apostles at the Sea of Tiberius (John 21:1).
 - l. Apostles in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-17).

5. The resurrection of Christ is central to the Christian faith.
 - a. It vindicated Jesus' Sonship (Romans 1:4).
 - b. It set him on the heavenly throne of David as the God-Man (Acts 2:30-32).
 - c. It makes possible the justification of sinners (Romans 4:25; 8:34).
 - d. It confirms him as the mediating High Priest (Hebrews 7:24-25).
 - e. It guarantees both future judgement (Acts 17:31) and future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).
6. The coming of Christ changed the course of world history irrevocably. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us, and governing the progression of world history. One day he will return to the earth to take up his rightful and righteous reign over the nations (Mark 13:32-37).
 - a. We are called to wait patiently for that time, watching and praying in spite of all opposition.
 - b. We are commissioned to hasten that time by proclaiming the good news to every nation.
7. Jesus' kingdom is not based on military conquest, nor miraculous demonstrations – these produce fear and fascination, but not love and transformation. He wants new hearts for a new world – the real meaning of 'born again' – 1 John 4:9-10.