

Why Was Jesus' Death Unique?

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[0:00] He put it on a reed and offered it to him to drink.

The rest said, let him alone. Let us see if Elijah will come to see him or save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his voice, not his voice, his spirit. And then behold, the veil of the temple was torn into from top to bottom and the earthquake and the rocks split. And the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

And coming up out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, truly, this was the Son of God.

And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

[1:22] All right? Now, throughout history, you know that the people of God have been persecuted. Persecuted and many of them executed because of their uncompromising faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the notable ones, of course, we have listed in Scripture and some of what happened to them, some of the details in history about how they were martyred, persecuted. Some of it is according to tradition. But we could begin definitively back there with Deacon Stephen. You know, there was a day when deacons were stoned to death.

And it's a good thing we don't do that anymore today. Amen. I knew I'd get some amens there. But Stephen was stoned to death. He was stoned to death by a group of Jews under the watchful eye of a certain Saul of Tarsus, later to become the Apostle Paul.

That happened about A.D. 34. James, the Apostle of Jesus, another Apostle, the brother of John, was beheaded in A.D. 44.

[2:39] Philip was scourged, thrown into prison. By the way, Philip, another deacon. And afterwards, crucified A.D. 54. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was beaten, then stoned.

Then, if that wasn't enough, they took a club and they beat him over the head until he was dead. Matthias, you might remember, who took Judas' place among the number of the Apostles.

Matthias was stoned and then beheaded. Peter, according to tradition, was crucified, hanging upside down. Andrew, that's Peter's brother, was crucified.

Jude, brother of James, crucified. Paul was beheaded. And all of the Apostles, save John, John the Apostle, only one of the twelve that died of old age.

All of them, but John died a martyr's death. And the list goes on from there. Under the persecution of Nero in 67 A.D.

[3:45] Then came Domitian in 81 A.D. And then the persecution under Trojan in 108 A.D. And under the persecution of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus in 162 A.D.

Are you getting this, Dan? And the names go on and on. There was a guy by the name of Severus and Maximus and then Decius. And also the names of those who have been martyred are, of course, too numerous to mention.

Some of them martyred or executed by crucifixion. Some stoned, some beheaded, some chopped into pieces. Some boiled in oil.

Some scalded by hot water. And worse, if it's possible for it to be worse than that. Tremendous persecution.

And many of God's people died excruciating deaths, cruel deaths, and were persecuted for their faith. And even before the New Testament, the book of Hebrews tells us about certain believers

who were tortured because of their faith.

[5:01] Read about that in Hebrews chapter 11. They were scourged and stoned and sawn into pieces, slain by the sword. And we don't even know their names.

They remain nameless in the annals of history. So a lot of martyrs, huh? A lot of people who died. Some of them horrifying deaths because of their faith in Christ.

And so I've listed several there and there are many more that we could mention. And you might be thinking, well, what about the most important martyr of all? Well, who would that be? You say, well, Jesus, of course.

But Jesus was not a martyr. Jesus was not a martyr. Jesus' death was unlike any other death.

It was not a martyr's death. Now, certainly, it was not unique. His death was not unique because of the mode of death.

[6:05] He was crucified. And many, many were crucified in that day, before Jesus' day and after Jesus' day. According to history, the Persians invented this kind of cruel form of execution.

The Phoenicians, they say, later barred it and enhanced it. And the Romans perfected it, according to history. And literally, the Romans literally crucified tens of thousands, multiplied thousands of people by crucifixion.

But you're thinking, now, wait a minute, you're dodging the real issue here. Let's get back to what you said about Jesus not being a martyr. That he did not die as a martyr. Well, that's right. He didn't.

Jesus did not die a martyr's death. He did not die for a cause. Jesus did not die on that cross for what he believed in.

That's not what it was about. And that's why his death was unique. Now, thousands of people have died because they would not compromise the truth and what they believed in.

[7:13] And only a handful of their names are recorded in history. And most of them that were recorded in history, we've forgotten all about. And, but wasn't Jesus one of them?

Wasn't Jesus the first Christian martyr? No, he was not. Jesus, you see, was the one and only Savior of the world.

He died as a Savior. Not as the first among many martyrs to follow. Jesus' death was unlike any other in all of history.

There has never been a death like his. Never. Never. And there never will be either. And I would say that just here by way of introduction, I would say that for two reasons.

And I kind of alluded to one of these reasons this morning, just kind of in passing. But Jesus' death was unique because of who Jesus was.

[8:15] First of all, because of who he was. Jesus was the Son of God. Now, he still is the Son of God. I mean, he was the Son of God. He was equal with God. He was God. And so Jesus was the only one, then, who did not have to die.

He being God. To put it another way, or as I put it this morning, Jesus was the only one in all of history who chose to die. Now, you know, again, I might remind you that you might choose to die early.

You might choose the time of your death. You might choose the method of your death. But you're going to die one day anyway. You might change things up. And, you know, you might also take steps to prolong your life and to hopefully delay the ultimate and the sure outcome.

And that is going to be death. When it comes to death, ultimately, you and I have no choice in that matter. We really don't. I don't care how much exercising you do and how well you eat and two things that I am a failure at.

And so it's just going to be that way. Last I heard, the stats on death are one and one die. Just the way it is. And it's been that way.

[9:41] It will continue to be that. But Jesus, though, on the other hand, was the only one in all of history who chose to die because he was the only one who didn't have to die. And he chose to die.

And it was what compelled him to make that choice that matters most to us, right? I mean, that's what matters. He was compelled by love.

He was compelled by love. Love for me. Love for you. And so that leads to the second reason why Jesus' death was unique. And this is the one that we'll flesh out here tonight.

And that is because of what his death accomplished. That's what makes it unique. What it accomplished. That no other death could ever accomplish.

And so let's just focus on that, focus our attention on that tonight. In fact, we might just ask God. You know, we could start there and just say, God, could you show me why Jesus' death was unique?

[10:49] We might just ask that. That why his death was unique. Just ask God. Why God, was Jesus' death on the cross clearly different from all others?

Could you just simply spell it out? Lay it out for us, kind of, you know. As to what his death accomplished that no other death has accomplished before his death and since his death. Just lay it out for us, God. Well, in a sense, and I read the text a moment ago, that is a question that's already been asked. In fact, Jesus asked that question. Do you remember?

There in our text, in verse 46, where it's first quoted in the Hebrew. In fact, the only phrase in the Greek New Testament that is brought over to us in the Hebrew.

And then it's given to us in the Greek. And then, of course, we've translated into English. He said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[11:50] That's the question that I just asked a moment ago. It is Jesus, in effect, saying, God, would you lay it out for us here why I'm dying?

Why you've forsaken me here on this cross? We need to understand one little thing before we kind of get into this and see what the rest of the text says to us.

When Jesus asked the question, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He used a particular word in the Hebrew that is translated why, can be translated why.

We have it that way in our English. But in the Hebrew language, there are two words that could be translated why. And they mean something, each of them means something a little bit different. In fact, I would say to you, the best way to understand it is that one of these Hebrew words looks backward and the other looks forward. The two words, one of them Jesus used, the other one is the word *maduah*.

[13:03] *Maduah*. And it looks backward. And it really is asking why or for what cause have you forsaken me?

And it's looking backward. What have I done to deserve this? This is how we might use the word why. What has happened here? What went wrong? Why am I being treated this way?

What has happened to bring me to this? Now, do you think Jesus would really ask that kind of question? Well, he didn't use that word *maduah*. He used the word *lama*.

We have it there in the text. *Eli, Eli, lama, sabachthani, lama*. And it also means why, but it looks forward. And it really could be translated wherefore.

Or to what end? Or for what purpose? You see, that one little word, why, and understanding the meaning of it, makes all the difference in the world in how we understand Jesus' point here.

[14:13] Jesus is not questioning God. He's not questioning and complaining to God and depressed and thinking, Why, God, have you done this to me?

What did I deserve? What did I do to deserve it? You know Jesus is not doing that. And so rather he used the word *lama*, looking forward. And in effect we could paraphrase it and say, and have Jesus saying, God, the Father, give a demonstration of why you have forsaken me here.

On this cross. Why I'm here. Why I'm dying. Give a demonstration of it. And that's what we have in the text that follows. Both Matthew and Mark record this saying of Jesus.

Record it just this way. Mark leaves the question unanswered. Matthew is the one that gives us, records God's answer to the question. And so this cry of Jesus from the cross, I will say to you, and as we look at the rest of the text, I think you'll agree with me, God's answer to his question is spectacular.

And it is a supernatural reply from God that we have coming next. And I, you know, begins with kind of some apocalyptic things.

[15:48] One commentator described it as apocalyptic fireworks. God demonstrates how Jesus' death was unique from all other deaths.

And he does it through a series of miracles that we have recorded right here in the text. And I read it to you a moment ago. Jesus' death was unique, first of all, because of the sovereign response to his cross.

That's number one. The sovereign response to the cross. Now, Matthew tells us about two cataclysmic events that occurred just before Jesus' death and one right after Jesus' death.

First, the darkness. The darkness there in verse 45. And now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land.

Darkness. Now, what is this all about? This darkness. Well, in the first place, it's a miracle. This was not some kind of natural phenomenon. That's kind of a contradiction of terms, a natural phenomenon.

[16:59] This was not something that could be explained by some freak thing that happened in nature. This was a miracle, a direct miracle. It was supernatural, this darkness.

And Matthew, of course, was operating on the Jewish system of timekeeping. And so, we're to understand that the darkness occurred at noon. High noon. That is when the sun was at its highest point in the sky.

And it lasted for how long? Three hours. Lasted three hours. And it was not an eclipse, a natural eclipse of the sun.

God didn't just, you know, just get lucky and time this thing just when there was an eclipse of the moon. As a matter of fact, it could not have been a natural eclipse because the Passover always happened at the time of the full moon.

And that, then, would make it impossible for an eclipse to occur at that time. So, this was not a natural eclipse. Now, Matthew is not specific here in the text about the density of the darkness.

[18:06] A lot of speculation about that. And, you know, theologians just love to get off into those things. I kind of do, too. But it just doesn't tell you how thick the darkness was.

I have an idea it was a darkness you could feel. And I have an idea that it was a darkness that concealed something that God the Father was doing at that moment.

We'll get to that a little bit later. And so, we don't know anything about the density of it. We also do not know anything specifically from Scripture about the scope of the darkness. Just how widespread was it?

Now, I really believe that God supernaturally eclipsed the sun. Now, God could cause darkness just to happen in some general locale.

He could do that. But I just kind of think that God supernaturally eclipsed the sun for three hours.

Now, God can do that. Right? Certainly He can.

[19:02] By the way, He's done it before. If you know your Scripture. He did it, first of all, in Moses' day when He plagued Egypt with darkness. That was supernatural.

You can read about that in Exodus chapter 10. In Joshua's day, God did that. He made the sun stand still for 24 hours. You can read about that in Joshua chapter 10.

He did it in Hezekiah's day when He backed up the earth's rotation, thereby causing the sun to shine on a certain location for a longer, a little longer.

You can read about that in 2 Kings chapter 20. Isaiah 50 verse 3 speaks of God darkening the sun.

Joel chapter 2 verse 31 also speaks of God darkening the sun.

Revelation chapter 9 and verse 2 speaks of God darkening the sun. The prophet Amos wrote these words in Amos chapter 8 and verse 9. He said, Could be a reference to the day when Jesus died.

[20:16] But what does it all mean? That's the most important thing to get at here. Not trying to analyze the darkness and, you know, how God did it and whether it was natural to any degree or what kind of dark.

That's not the important thing. The important thing is what does it mean? And we need to understand it's an apocalyptic demonstration, I believe, of God's response to the cross.

But before we say anything more about that, let's add the second miracle here. And it comes after Jesus' question. And that's the earthquake. In verse 51, Then behold, and I'll skip through the first part of it, and earth, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.

So first we have darkness, and then we have an earthquake. An earthquake. And it was a severe quake. It split rocks.

That's a pretty major earthquake. And again, I believe we're to understand that this is a miracle. But the two together, what do they speak of?

[21:31] The darkness at noontime and earthquakes that split rocks. What is all this about? Well, I think clearly that it's about God's divine judgment.

At that moment, that's what it was demonstrating. His divine judgment upon sin. Throughout the Bible, you can find numerous examples of where darkness is connected with God's judgment, His divine judgment.

And also, you can find in the Bible where earthquakes are connected with God's divine judgment. Every earthquake? No, because somebody's out there thinking, well, what about the one over there in Japan?

No, I, but clearly in the Bible, those two things point to or used by God as demonstrations of His divine judgment.

And so, the cross is where the Lamb of God was put to death, crucified, and the Lamb of God, that's Jesus, is where your sin and my sin was placed upon Him.

[22:37] every lie you have ever told, even the little white lies, every hateful word you've ever spoken, every selfish act you have ever committed, every immoral deed, every single sin, every single sin, big and small, and only humans, you know, speak of sins as big and small.

But every sin, every sin was placed there upon Jesus Christ, the sacrificial Lamb, and that Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, said, Father, forgive them.

And the implication being, judge me, judge me for their sin. God's response then was to pour out His wrath and His judgment upon His Son, Jesus Christ.

The wrath and judgment that was meant for me that I deserved. See, don't ever get to thinking that God is soft on sin.

That's one of our problems in our culture. We just have kind of you know, settled in to the idea that God is not as serious about sin as He once was like back in the Old Testament days.

[24:06] Don't ever get that idea. In a sense, your sin eclipsed the sun for three hours. The S-U-N.

Your sin and my sin shook the earth and split rocks. my sin and your sin was laid more significantly was laid on Jesus and God focused His wrath and judgment upon Him.

The sovereign response at the cross. And those two phenomena point to that as demonstrations of it. That's why Jesus' death was unique among all others who have died even those who have died for the cause of Christ.

Secondly, God demonstrated how Jesus' death was unique with and I want to call it the shadow removed by His cross.

The shadow removed by His cross. Verse 50 here in Matthew 27 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit then behold the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

[25:22] That's an interesting miracle. It is a miracle. The veil of the temple you know was that that curtain huge by the way curtain that was that served the purpose of barring entrance into the Holy of Holies the most sacred place in the temple.

it separated the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Now only a certain few could even go into the Holy Place but only one man could go into the Holy of Holies and that was the high priest and so this veil was there to bar the way to separate those two places.

Now you know you need to get some sense of the magnitude of this miracle because this curtain this veil was not like the ones you've got hanging there you know kind of treating some kind of nice treatment for your windows at home.

the veil was 60 feet long 30 feet high and about 4 inches thick. it was composed of 72 squares of material sewn together and it was so heavy Josephus the Roman historian tells us it was so heavy that it required 300 men to lift it into place and God ripped it in two like the power team would rip a phone book into actually that's a poor comparison God just ripped it in two from top to bottom now that may be interesting to you but the more to the point question is why did he do it well the veil represented again as I've said the separation you know or served as separation between the holy place and the holy of holies holy of holies being the the signifying the very presence of God and so the veil represented the separation that existed between

God and man because of sin just plain and simple again no one was permitted to pass through that veil into God's presence except the high priest and then only one time of year on the day of atonement when he would enter into the holy of holies with the blood of the unblemished lamb and that blood was to take care of the sin of the people for one year and inside the holy of holies was the ark of the covenant and we could all kind of picture that because we've seen raiders of the lost ark and we know what that looks like maybe you've seen pictures of it too and that's inside the holy of holies and inside the ark of the covenant were few things but most significantly the two tablets!

[28:32] had been broken broken by God's people and so it was required by God's instruction for the high priest to enter into the holy of holies with the blood and on top of the ark above the law was the mercy seat and the high priest would sprinkle the blood on that mercy seat and so when God

would look down at his laws that had been broken he would see that they were covered by the blood it's an incredible picture wonderful picture and all that took place inside the holy of holies but you could not go there because the veil was there to bar your way you couldn't enter into that and so this represented two very important things for us God was teaching that we are not acceptable in his presence because of our sin and the veil represented that barrier and he was also teaching us that we need a blameless substitute for our sin that substitute whose death would pay for our sin his blood would pay for our sin now don't miss this it's very important the temple in

Jesus day was simply a shadow as interesting as all that is and as I've described it and you've heard it described before and it's kind of alluring to think about the temple and then before that the tabernacle that was the model for the temple that would come later and we think about all of that and and yet we need to quickly realize that it was just a shadow just a shadow it and and all all of the materials used and all of the decorations and all of it even the dimensions of its construction its architecture all of it was just a shadow is something that pointed forward to something real even the ritual of the sacrifices as I've described the high priest would perform each year it's just a shadow Colossians 2:17 says speaks of it as a shadow of things to come

Hebrews let me read that to you Hebrews chapter 8 and verse 4 for if he were on earth he would not be a priest speaking of Jesus since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law who serve now listen to this the copy and shadow of heavenly things as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle that came before the temple for he said!

this be that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain because it's a pattern it's a shadow of the real and so listen the tearing of the veil at the exact moment of Jesus death communicated a clear message didn't it from God what message would that be that something new is now in place here a new covenant had just been established Hebrews tells us about that as well in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 19 listen to it therefore brethren having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus now we can enter into the holy of holies how by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which he consecrated for us through the veil that is not this curtain that I described a moment ago through the veil that is his flesh his flesh his flesh and so the veil was rent from top to bottom see

Jesus is our great high priest now and entering through that veil into the holy of holies he did so not bearing the blood of goats and of lambs but bearing his own blood he entered in to the holy place and he willingly offered his blood and God accepted it the proof being his resurrection and he said that's God says that's what I was looking for I'm fully satisfied we don't need this anymore and he ripped the veil into a demonstration of how Jesus death was unique now of course the Jews chose the shadow over the Savior didn't they they decided they want to embrace the shadow and reject the Savior and so by the way they remade or mended the veil and put it back up and then God took care of it too in a few years and in 70 AD he destroyed so why was

[33:32] Jesus death unique his sovereign response to the cross the shadow removed by the cross number three the saints revived after his cross and this is interesting too verse 52 and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the graves after his resurrection this occurred after the resurrection of Jesus they went into the holy city and appeared to many isn't that strange very strange to think about this happening seems that the earthquake did something more than just kind of shake the earth it also apparently opened some tombs some tombs of some believers and the Bible says that after the resurrection of Jesus many that's the word in the text many dead believers were resurrected came back to life they were resurrected how many is many

I don't know probably twelve or more just judging from how the word many is used in the language we don't know how many were they merely revived like Lazarus to die again and you know or were they they raised to eventually be taken up to heaven with Jesus I don't know Bible just doesn't tell us I really think it was the second of the two I think they were resurrected and they appeared to family members friends so that this miracle could be verified validated and then they went on up to be with Jesus because they were resurrected now that's an incredible miracle but what does it mean I say that this miracle demonstrates perhaps the most compelling reason why Jesus death was unlike any other death because his death conquered death and so here's

Jesus hanging on the cross God the father my father give a demonstration of why I'm here why I'm dying on this cross and one of those demonstrations was to prove to guarantee the resurrection of believers to guarantee it he gave a demonstration of that that Jesus death conquered death one

day you and I will be part of that we'll experience the very same thing that those those saints in that day after Jesus resurrection experience you and I will experience that one day some of us will be raptured just go straight on and be changed in a twinkling of an eye some of us maybe all of us will be dead in the grave at least our bodies will be when Jesus comes and we will experience a bodily resurrection and that's going to happen

John writes the hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice and shall come forth they that have done good under the resurrection of life and they that have done evil under the resurrection of damnation so Jesus death not like any other death the sovereign response to the cross the shadow removed by the cross the saints resurrected after the cross and then there's one more very quickly the sinner redeemed the sinner redeemed because of the cross verse 54 so when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened they feared greatly saying truly this was the son of God son of God that's interesting isn't it here's this centurion because of his rank being mentioned here we understand he was in charge of this whole the whole proceedings here and the bible does tell us very clearly that he heard the the or saw the darkness and he also felt the earthquake so he witnessed those two things and he also

I think we can safely assume that he heard everything Jesus said as he was hanging on the cross when he said father forgive them for they do not know what they're doing or to tell us die it is finished he heard him when he said into your hands we said to the father into your hands I commit my spirit he heard all those things witnessed the the phenomenon but I think it's likely that he knew even more than that again being the centurion in charge of the prisoner Jesus he very well may have been there at his trial just speculation but he was the man in charge of the prisoners he would have been the one there that would have been would have received the order from Pilate to crucify Jesus well really other things before his crucifixion so he may have been at the trial he may well have heard the trial the things that were said there he you know and witnessed all of those things and the reaction of the

[39:16] Jewish leaders as well as some of Jesus response though they were few and the charges and all those things he most likely was there when Jesus was being prepared for the cross in cruel fashion he would have been consenting in that maybe leading that maybe participating in that I don't know he certainly was there when they drove the nails in Jesus hands and in his feet when they raised that cross up his cross and put it in place and this centurion was there to witness all of these things and I don't know how this happened other than to say it was certainly the work of a gracious God that his heart was touched by this and I believe he was saved there some who would dispute that and say that he wasn't really saying that much

I think it's pretty clear he had placed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at that moment see that too was a demonstration of why God the Father had forsaken God the Son upon the cross and I would say it was the beginning of the fulfillment of what Jesus predicted when he said I if I be lifted up from the earth above the earth will draw all men unto myself and so why was Jesus death unique well it was his cross that made it unique and what it accomplished the sovereign response to the cross the shadow removed at the cross the saints revived after the cross and sinners redeemed because of the cross Thank you.