

“The Crucified Messiah”

December 26, 2021

Deuteronomy 27

Psalm 86A

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Deuteronomy 27 lays out the covenant renewal service that Israel was to hold when they entered the promised land.

In Joshua chapter 8, we hear that Joshua did precisely what Moses commands here.

Half the people stand on Mt Gerizim to bless the people.
And half the people stand on Mt Ebal for the curse.

Notice where the altar is built!

The altar is built on Mt Ebal – the mountain of cursing.

Why not Mt Gerizim?

Why not the mountain of blessing?!

That’s why the last verse of chapter 27 is so important:

“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”

You only need an altar because of sin.

You only need the law because of sin!

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 86 –

a song of the humble who come in faith and repentance to the LORD –
a prayer of David – which means that we should sing it in the voice of David,
the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the OT, Israel was taught to think of themselves as being “in David”
in a way analogous to how we are “in Christ.”

So we sing this song as those who are in Christ –

he is the “me” – the first person singular of this song –
and we are joined to him!

Sing Psalm 86A

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7

1. “Suffered under Pontius Pilate” (1 Timothy 2)

Those are remarkable statements:

God our Savior “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”
and

Christ Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all.”

Wait, you can say that as a Calvinist?!

After all, doesn't Calvinism say that God desires the salvation only of the elect?

Doesn't Calvinism say that Christ gave himself as a ransom only for the elect?

No – actually Calvinism says that God desires all people to be saved
and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Calvinism says that Christ gave himself as a ransom for all.

If ever there was a definitive statement of what the Reformed churches teach,
it is the Heidelberg Catechism.

I like the Westminster Confession and Catechisms,

but before the Westminster Confession and Catechisms were written in Britain,
even the Church of Scotland had approved the Heidelberg Catechism
as one of the catechisms to be used in the churches.

And in question 37, the Heidelberg asks:

37. What do you confess when you say that He suffered?

A. During all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end, Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. Thus, by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice, He has redeemed our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtained for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.

Did Jesus Christ give himself as a ransom only for the elect?

Or did he give himself as a ransom for all?

Heidelberg says that he “bore in body and soul the wrath of God
against the sin of the whole human race.”

There is a very simple way of saying this:

the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is *sufficient* for all,
but it is *efficient* for the elect.

In other words, Christ's atoning sacrifice is not limited in its power.

He suffered the wrath of God against the sin of the whole race.

Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for all.

His suffering and death was a full and sufficient sacrifice
to cover the sins of the whole world.

We don't need to be bashful about saying this!

And for that matter, we don't need to resort to saying

that Paul means that Jesus is the ransom for “all sorts of people,”

because Paul isn't talking about Jesus forgiving “every individual” here,

he is talking about humanity as a whole.
Even as Adam brought the human race under God's wrath and curse,
so now Christ ransoms the human race.

But the only way that you will partake of the benefits of the redemption wrought by Christ
is by faith.

And so we say that Christ's atoning sacrifice is sufficient for all
(he gave himself as a ransom for all)
but it is efficient only for the elect
(this ransom is only applied to the elect).

This brings us back to Paul's first point:
God our Savior "desires all people to be saved
and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

If God only elects some to eternal life,
then how can Paul say that God
"desires all people to be saved"?

Let me ask you this:
Does God desire that all people obey him?
Does God desire that thieves stop stealing?
Certainly!

So to say that God desires all men to be saved is a true statement.
God desires (indeed he commands) that all men everywhere repent (Acts 17:30).
But that does not mean that everyone will repent.
It may seem strange to us that an all-powerful God desires something,
but has chosen not to make it come to pass.

Some would resolve this by denying that God really desires it (the hyper-Calvinist).
Others would resolve this by denying that God is really all-powerful! (the Open Theist)

How do I resolve it?
By reminding you that the all-powerful God is also all-wise.
And we are not.

This is the message that we need to hear on a regular basis:
HE is God.
We are not.

We need to remember that by human standards, our God is a little strange!
And that, my friends, is an understatement!

But that is why we need to be careful not to judge God by our standards!

Never in human history has any religion come up with so strange a message as the gospel – that God, the supreme being, would become one with us, in order that he might suffer and die for his creatures.

a. What Did It Mean for Christ to *Suffer*? (1 Peter 2)

As Heidelberg question 38 puts it,

38. Q. Why did He suffer under Pontius Pilate as judge?

A. Though innocent, Christ was condemned by an earthly judge, and so He freed us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.

As the apostle Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:24 –

He suffered – “he bore our sins in his body on the tree,
that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.
By his wounds you have been healed.”

Or in 1 Peter 3:18,

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous,
that he might bring us to God”

His suffering embraces all that he endured in the flesh –

but especially his passion – his crucifixion – his pouring out his life for us!

But then,

b. Why Is Pilate Named in the Creed? (Acts 3)

Both in the Apostles’ Creed – and in the Nicene Creed –
Pilate is named.

Not Adam – not Abraham – not Moses – not David.

The only three humans mentioned in the creed
are Jesus, Mary, and Pilate!

The first reason is because you find Pilate mentioned so often in the apostles’ preaching.

He is named 55 times in the four gospels –
and then three times in three different sermons in the book of Acts,
and again in Paul first letter to Timothy.

And the second reason, is actually rooted in the first:
this happened in history!

The death and resurrection of Jesus is not just a fairy story.

It is not just a legend.
It happened in history at a particular time in a particular place.
And there was a particular judge who sentenced him to death:
Pontius Pilate.

And this is also important because of the particular mode of suffering
that only a Roman governor would inflict!

2. “Crucified”

a. The Cursed Importance of the Cross (Galatians 3/Deuteronomy 21)

This is what the Heidelberg Catechism discusses in question 39:

39. Q. Does it have a special meaning that Christ was crucified and did not die in a different way?

The Apostles’ Creed emphasizes the crucifixion of Christ:
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was *crucified*, dead, and buried.

Why is the crucifixion of Christ so essential to the message of the gospel.
Why is the cross the central image of the Christian religion?
Why is it so important that we preach Christ, and him *crucified*?

Why not stoned?
Why not beheaded?

It’s not just about the pain.
If you want pain, then peel his skin off by hand,
and then fry him slowly in a giant frying pan!
(Some Jewish martyrs died that way)

Why the cross?

The answer to Heidelberg question 39 is brilliant:

Q. Does it have a special meaning that Christ was crucified and did not die in a different way?
A. Yes. Thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay on me, for a crucified one was cursed by God.

This is what Paul says in Galatians 3!
(Please turn there)

Paul says in Galatians 3:14 that the reason why Jesus had to be *crucified*
(not just the reason he had to die, but *crucified* – hanged on a tree)
is so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles,

and that we (Jew and Gentile together)
might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Why is this?

It is because of the curse of the law.

In chapter 3, verse 9, Paul says,

“So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Notice the key words: Abraham, faith, blessing

Then read verse 10:

“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written,
‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide
by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’”

Notice the key words: Law, works, curse.

Paul is contrasting the blessing of Abraham with the curse of the law;
the faith of Abraham with the works of the law.

The blessing comes by faith.

The curse comes by works (or, lack thereof!)

Now, what is the “Curse of the Law”? (3:10)

Paul says that all who rely on works of the law are under a curse,
and he quotes from Dt 27:26 –
which we read earlier.

If you don’t keep the whole law, then you come under God’s curse—the curse of the law.

It is not just murderers, adulterers, and thieves.

Anyone who breaks the law comes under God’s curse.

Paul has already established that God’s blessing comes by faith.

So the only way for the law to bring God’s blessing would be if the law were *of faith*.

But, Paul says, the Law is *not* of faith,

rather, the one who does them shall live by them.

Is Paul saying that the law provided an alternate way to life?

Is Paul saying that, hypothetically,

if an Israelite kept the law perfectly, he would receive God’s blessing?

If you asked Paul that, he would probably have looked at you kind of funny and said,

“What would the point of that be?”

As he says later in verse 21 “if a law had been given that could give life,
then righteousness would indeed be by the law.”

The law was never *intended* to give life.

That was not its purpose (not even hypothetically).

The law was given so that all would be brought under the curse.

Even Jesus.

Yes, you heard me.

The law was given so that all would be brought under the curse.

Even Jesus.

And I might even dare to say *especially* Jesus!

It is absolutely true that Jesus was sinless!

How, then, could Jesus come under the curse of the law?

Lev. 18:5 says “cursed be everyone who does not abide

by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them.”

But Jesus did keep the law – the entire law.

He was innocent.

He was perfect.

So, how did Christ become a Curse for us?

Have you ever wondered how God could declare Jesus guilty for your sin?

If God is just, then how can he declare an innocent man guilty?

I don't care how loving God is,

if God was unjust to Jesus—his own Son—

then he is not a just God.

How can God be a just judge and condemn Jesus for your sins?

Because of the law.

(C. S. Lewis does a lot with this in his concept of the “deeper magic” –

in the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe)

In Dt 27 we hear the curse of the law.

All of the curses of Dt 27 fall upon the guilty—those who have broken God's law.

But there is one curse in the law that has nothing to do with guilt or innocence.

Dt 21:22-23 *And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death
and you hang him on a tree,
his body shall not remain all night on the tree,
but you shall bury him the same day,
for a hanged man is cursed by God.*

Ordinarily, the man would have been executed by stoning,
and then his body would be hanged on a tree as a public warning.

But, by the second century BC, crucifixion entered the scene,
and this passage was increasingly applied to those who were *executed*
by being hanged on a tree.

The curse of the man hanged on a tree was so powerful that the Jews refused to believe
that anyone who was crucified could be blessed by God.

The text is clear: a man hanged on a tree is cursed by God.

It doesn't matter whether he is guilty or innocent.

He is cursed.

Indeed, the Jewish king Alexander Jannaeus hanged 800 Jewish rebels around 100 BC
as a means of bringing them under God's curse.

None of them were ever included in the stories of the martyrs.

The Maccabean literature tells stories of those who suffered for their faith.

But there are *no* crucified martyrs.

Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, tells us of many
who were crucified for their faith—

but they were never included on the rolls of the martyrs,

because no Jew would ever consider death on a cross to be an honorable death.

To be hanged on a tree *is* to be cursed by God.

It doesn't matter why.

Deuteronomy 21 does *not* say that he is cursed by God because he is guilty!

It says he is cursed by God because he is hanged on a tree.

He is put to open shame – naked, just hanging there!

Do you see why Paul says in 1 Corinthians that “Christ crucified” is a scandal to Jews.

When Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 faithful Jews,
they had to regard their brothers as cursed by God.

When Jesus is crucified, for many Jews that would have been the definitive proof
that Jesus *could not* have been sent by God.

The cry “crucify him! Crucify him” takes on a whole new meaning.

Let him be cursed by God!

No one in the first century expected the Messiah to suffer.

The Messiah was the royal king—the anointed one who would triumph over their enemies.

But you could make a case for a suffering Messiah,

if you could connect the Messiah with the suffering Servant in Isaiah.

But a crucified Messiah?

That is a contradiction in terms!

Because a crucified Messiah is a *cursed* Messiah.

And Paul says, *that* is exactly the point!

A crucified Messiah is a *cursed Messiah*.

And that's what we needed!

Because we were under the curse of the law.

And if God is to remain just, and justify the ungodly,
then somehow God must find a way to curse an innocent man,
and remain just while he is doing it.

And back in Deuteronomy 21 God had provided that way,
by declaring a curse on all those who are hanged on a tree.

The exposure of a corpse would stain the land with blood,
and so therefore the curse of God fell on the one hanged on a tree.

But Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,
so that *in Christ Jesus* the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him.

The law was then given to Israel in order to focus God's judgment and curse on Israel.
If Paul is right, and everyone who is under the law is under a curse,
then Israel never had a chance to be justified by the law!
Righteousness was never going to come to Israel through the law!

But that wasn't the point!

God takes the curse that he pronounced upon all humanity in Adam,
and focuses it on Israel.

But he didn't do this to be cruel.

He did this so that he could then focus the curse that should have fallen on Israel
on Jesus.

And because Jesus has taken the curse of the law upon himself through the death of the cross,
therefore, those who believe in Jesus receive God's blessing.

And especially, Paul says,

“so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.”

But he doesn't stop there.

Because when the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles,
there is yet another result.

Notice the two "so that's" in verse 14.

They are not parallel.

They are not the two separate results of Christ redeeming us from the curse of the law.

The second "so that" is the result of the first "so that"

In other words, when the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles,
then *we* (both Jew and Gentile) receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Isaiah 11:2 said that the Spirit would be poured out upon the son of David.

Isaiah 44:3 said that the Spirit would be poured out upon Jacob's descendants,
through Israel, the servant of the LORD.

Ezekiel 36:27 says that the Spirit would be given when Israel is restored from exile.

And Joel 2:28-29 says that the Spirit would be poured out on "all flesh"
when God restored his people in the last days.

And on the day of Pentecost Peter told us that this is exactly what has happened in Jesus.

Jesus has received the promised Holy Spirit.

Who did Isaiah say would receive the Holy Spirit?

Israel.

Who did Ezekiel say would receive the Holy Spirit?

Israel.

But who does Peter say received the promised Holy Spirit in Acts 2:33?

Jesus – when he was exalted to the right hand of the Father.

All that God had promised to Israel has been given to Jesus.

And now God has done as he promised,
and poured out the Spirit on all flesh.

God does not bless Israel, and *then* bless the nations through Israel.

No, Jesus *is* Israel.

The blessing comes through Jesus receiving the curse of the law,

so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

And so now Jew and Gentile both receive the Holy Spirit in the same way:
through faith.

Conclusion:

What does it mean for *you* to have a crucified Messiah?

Glance back at Galatians 2:19

This is the basic statement of Paul's point in this epistle.

"For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God."

How did you die to the law?

Dt 21:23 (“cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”)
I have been crucified with Christ.
Christ’s death on the cross is my death.
The curse that he bore is my curse.
In the crucifixion of the Messiah—
in the Messiah’s being cursed for you—
you died.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

How does life come to the people of God?
“The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God
who loved me and gave himself for me.”

By faith you are united to the death of Christ—
so much so that Paul will say “I have been crucified with Christ.”

Or as he says later in Galatians 5:24:
“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”
Or “but far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (6:14)

When you confess that you believe that he *suffered under Pontius Pilate,*
was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
you are confessing that you also have been crucified with Christ –
and you are no longer the cursed law-breaker you once were.

You no longer live!
– it is Christ who now lives in you!

If you are thinking –
I’ve gone to church all my life – but I never got that before! –
well, then believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!