

“He Must Die and Rise” Easter Sunday Message | Luke 24:1-12

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This Easter I would like to draw your attention to what the angels say to the women who come to Jesus’ tomb. More specifically, I want to draw our attention mainly to one word in their exchange.

Recall the setting: It is “the first day of the week at early dawn,” Luke tells us, when a group of women who were close to Jesus go to his tomb with spices to anoint his body (24:1). They find the stone rolled away, but Jesus’ body missing. The angels ask, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen.” Then go on,

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man **must** be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” (24:4-7).

They remind the women of Jesus’ words: “remember how he told you ... that the Son of Man **must** be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” (24:4-7).

I want to draw our attention to just one word in this remembrance, “must.” Jesus did not say, “the Son of Man may be crucified,” or “might be,” but that he must be. It is a word that carries the sense of *necessity*. Jesus in fact uses this sense of necessity often when talking about his fate. He said it back in Luke 9

The Son of Man **must** suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Luke 9:22).

He says it again here in Luke 24, when explaining events to the confused travelers on the road to Emmaus,

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not **necessary** that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? (24:25-26).

What sort of predicament, what set of circumstances, could make the gruesome, torturous, crucifixion of God’s son *necessary*? As one writer asks, “What sort of predicament are you and I in that we should require [=necessitate] the crucifixion of the Son of God?”¹ What set of circumstances finds God deeming all this necessary?

This Easter we’ll consider three reasons the cross and resurrection are *necessary*.

I. Because God Has a Plan and Keeps It

¹ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, 200.

The first reason is simply because God does what He says, keeps His word, is trustworthy. The Cross and Resurrection were necessary because God's word had foretold them.

As Luke continues to record the events following Jesus' resurrection, we find Jesus appearing to his confused disciples, explaining:

I told you while I was still with you: Everything **must** be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day (Luke 24:44-46).

God's Word is the revelation of His Will. His will in terms of how he desires us to live and behave. But also, his will in terms of his plan and purpose for the world, for His people. When God shares with us through His Word what he purposes for us, and for His world, it *must* come about, because God keeps his word.

The events surrounding Jesus' death looked just the opposite—like there was no plan, or that God's plan was surely failing. But a few weeks later, after the resurrection, Peter describes these events by noting the hand of Providence behind all things:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up **according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him....²⁷ 'For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption' (Acts 2:23-25, 27).

Peter is saying two things here: first, that God had foretold Jesus' death and resurrection in His Word. This is what Peter means by citing the scripture, "you will not abandon my soul to Hades" (Acts 2:27). And second, Peter is making the point that God has an overarching plan for the world, for his people, and it has always centered on the Messiah, Jesus.

Already in **Genesis 3:15**, as sin and devastation first entered God's world, the Lord foretold the coming of a seed, a person, who would battle the evil serpent, the devil. And though he'd be bruised in the battle, he'd ultimately be victorious. God warns the serpent,

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

Jesus is that offspring, that seed that comes to crush the head of the serpent.²

Two things to bear in mind at this point:

First, history is not purposeless. But neither is it ultimately governed by the decisions of kings and queens, men and women. God has a purpose. And even when evil is at its worst—like when the Son of God is betrayed into the hands of sinners—, God's is powerfully enough to work out His better purposes.

Second, God has revealed a great deal of this purpose and plan to us in His Word. And what God has said in his word, cannot fail. It *must* happen, because God is God, and God is trustworthy. As God says in Isaiah,

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:11)

Why was the cross and resurrection necessary? Answer one: because God planned it, spoke of it—and God Keeps His Word.

II. Because God Is Just

The second reason it was necessary that Jesus die and rise is because God is just.

If you were to ask most Christians why God sent his Son into the world to die, they would answer, *Because God loves us*. And they would be correct. This is precisely how John 3:16 puts it, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3.16). We will get to this reason below.

But while this is correct, love alone doesn't fully explain why a *crucifixion* was necessary. There are a lot of ways to love someone. If God wanted to love and forgive sinners, why didn't he just declare our sins forgiven from heaven? That would have been far less costly to him. Why did he instead send his son to die on a cross?

E.g., The Just King: To grasp this, consider a scenario of an ancient king. This king has total power of his kingdom, and this power includes making the laws and enforcing them. The king loves his people, but they do not keep his laws. They break them so badly that according to that same king's standards, they merit being banished from the kingdom forever. But the king loves them and doesn't want to lose them? What can he do?

² Luke assures us, in Jesus' genealogy, that Jesus' the "son of Seth," the "son of Adam" and Eve (Luke 3:38). Jesus is the promised seed that will come from Eve, the son that will contend with Satan and win. But in the process, be bruised

One of the king's court officials suggests that he just forgive their wrongdoings and cancel their record. "Just pronounce them innocent," says the official, "after all, you're the king and can do whatever you want."

But the king instead heads into the nation's highest courtroom. Says he must accept the penalty for their wrongdoings and proceeds to serve their sentence of banishment, so they don't have to.

Now, why would the king—who can do whatever he wants to—not just declare his subjects forgiven, but instead go so far as suffering the penalty for their wrongdoings himself?

The answer is this: along with being loving, the king is also just. And because he is just, it is necessary that the sins of his people be judged. The king takes the form of his people, takes their place, and allows the judgement to come upon him.

This is the second reason the crucifixion of Jesus was necessary: because along with being loving and merciful, God is holy and just. Because God is just, His own integrity demanded that wrongdoing be judged without partiality, but with full justice.

[T] The third reason why the cross and resurrection were necessary, takes us finally to God's love.

III. Because God Loves Us, Before We Love Him Back

The third reason it was necessary for Jesus to die and rise, is because God loves us. Many people will say that God loves us—but the Christian is saying something more specific, more powerful, when they say, with Paul,

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

Paul says a few important things about God's love here:

(1) For the undeserving: First, that God loved us *while we were still sinners*. This means that God's love is not conditioned by us first loving and obeying him. Our hearts and minds typically think that we have to earn God's love. But God's love works differently: "God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, he died for us."

You might be here this Sunday and be thinking, "God would never love me, not until I get my act together." No, God loves people *when they don't have their act together*. Or, you may be thinking, "I would never be part of a church, churches are full of hypocritical sinners." You would be correct in one sense—churches are full of sinners. You have to be a sinner to even be a candidate to be in a church, because being in a church means you accept that God loved you, even while you were a sinner.

This is so counter-intuitive for us: but God's love moves toward us even before we deserve it.

(2) It Is Extravagant: The second thing Paul's words point out, is the *extent* God went to express his love for us, the Cross: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, *Christ died for us* (Rom 5:8).

Many of us feel frustrated when people talk about love, but don't show it. We understand, intuitively, that love, to be genuine, must be expressed and live out over time. The sacrificial display of God's love is extravagant: We sense it in the words of John 3:16, "He gave his own only Son." We see feel it in what Christ suffered for us on the cross.

(3) It Is Personal: And we must feel it in how personal this all is—friend, this was done for *you*. Saint Paul lived by this personal nature of this love:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And 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 (Gal 2:20).

The sufferings and death of Christ are not just how God loves the world abstractly; they have to do with *me*, with *you*. They are about Christ's love for you. It is *your* sin he bore. It is *your* face, *your* story, *your* life, that he loves. It is for your hope, that he has been resurrected.

Close: We close with words from one of the earliest recorded Easter sermons. **Saint Melito, bishop of Sardis**, said the following of the Risen Christ Easter Day in the year **AD 170**.

I,' He says, 'am the Christ. I am the One Who destroyed death, triumphed over the enemy, trampled Hades under foot, bound the strong one, and carried man to the heights of Heaven. I,' He says, 'am the Christ. Therefore, come, all families of men, you who have been befouled with sins, and receive forgiveness for your sins. I am your forgiveness, I am the Passover of your salvation, I am the Lamb which was sacrificed for you, I am your ransom, I am your light, I am your Savior, I am your resurrection, I am your king, I am leading you up to the heights of Heaven. I will show you the eternal Father and I will raise you up by my right hand.'