

# The Great Purpose of Jesus

Jesus is described as being sent by God, the Son of God who spoke the Father's words. He was sent for a purpose and he declared he came to make a future life possible. This purpose filled his thoughts throughout his ministry from the very start when John the Baptist pointed to him as *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). We can see what this purpose is when we look at some of Jesus' sayings.

## Born to Die

Towards the end of his ministry we read that Jesus *"steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem"* (Luke 9:51). He was fully aware that he would die there after he had been scorned and crucified. But this same determination marks his whole life and work, and shows that from the start he had that end in view. He recognized that he was born to that end. The expressions he used would make no sense from anyone else's lips, but belong to him distinctively.

*Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day (Matthew 16:21).*

*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10: 45).*

This is the key to his work. He would lay down his life to save us from death.

In a conversation which reveals how our needs are met in Jesus' death on the cross, John chapter 3 looks back to an incident in the early days of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. A plague of serpents was sent to punish their disobedience to God, and many of them died. God told Moses to put a bronze serpent on a pole, and that those people who were bitten should look at it. For those who performed this simple act of faith, healing and life would follow.



Jesus' belief in the Old Testament as God's word shines out in all he says. This event is used as a parable of what he would do for all men and women, because they are suffering from sin and its effects – death. A parallel is drawn between the serpent lifted up on a pole, whereby those Israelites could be saved from death by serpent bite, and Jesus' crucifixion through which mankind as a whole can find everlasting life.

*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of*

*Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:14–17).*

These are some of the best known and best loved words in the Bible and are precious to Jesus' followers as being the very heart of the gospel. God's love and human need; the given Son who died; the promise that dying mortals might not perish but have everlasting life. We must stress the contrast between perishing and having everlasting life. The one describes our present state: we now have only this life and then we cease to be. Apart from God's love and the gift of His son, that would be the whole story. But a sequel is now possible, for everlasting life is promised to those who believe God and try to please Him.

## **Life-Giving Work**

God loved the world and gave His Son; and this work of Father and Son is the subject of many sayings of Jesus, showing that in him God was providing for us to share the divine life.

As we continue in John's Gospel, Jesus further explains his work. He declares that he is like the life-giving manna during Israel's life in the wilderness. He is the bread from heaven that people might share him and have life.

*As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on me will live because of me (John 6:57).*

He also describes the bread as his flesh, which he will give for the life of the world, indicating that life will become possible for men and women through his own sacrifice.

Of the many statements which show that he would die for humankind's sake, perhaps none is more clear than when he compares himself to the shepherd who cares for his sheep.

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep... Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again (John 10:11, 17).*

Beyond his death he could see a new life. Death on the cross and burial in the tomb was not to be the end; he would be raised from death by the power of the Father. He claimed to be "*the resurrection and the life*", and at the tomb of Lazarus he showed what he meant by the 'resurrection' by restoring to life a man who had been buried for four days. But Jesus himself was both 'resurrection' and 'life' because when God raised him from death, He gave him endless life, and power to raise the dead and give them everlasting life.

## **That Sacrifice Memorialised**

Jesus made it very clear that he had a special mission which would culminate in his sacrifice. Unsurprisingly, the four gospels devote much space to the events that surrounded his trial and death.

The evening before his death he shared with his closest followers the Jewish Passover meal, by which the Jews celebrated the liberation from Egypt under Moses. At this supper he declared that part of the meal, the

bread and wine, would now have a new significance for them. They would share the bread and wine henceforth as a means of keeping him in memory.



Throughout the centuries since then, Christian believers have carried this out to remember Jesus' work. But why should he set up this rite? No one else has ever done such a thing. The reason is found in his explanation:

*He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Likewise he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19-20).*

That was the reason for his death: to provide the means whereby sins may be forgiven.

## **Purpose Under Trial**

This awareness of his high purpose was a driving force throughout Jesus' mortal life. It serves also to explain the extraordinary self-possession and fortitude he showed throughout his trials. These were a disgrace to both Jewish and Roman law, in that every rule to

safeguard a fair trial was ignored. False witness, hatred, intimidation; all played a part with one or other of his judges, while the man accused met the ordeal with a resilience and courage which dismayed his opponents and showed his determination to endure it all.

Jesus' reply to Pontius Pilate shows his confidence that his death was not the end.

*Pilate therefore said to him, "Are you a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:37).*

They are calm words, spoken in such circumstances, which show an invincible faith that his work would go on. His voice was not to be silenced by death and it has been heard through the ages. He was raised on the third day and after forty days ascended to heaven. Soon he will return, to set up the Kingdom of God, and to grant immortality to those who have believed in him.

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