

THE WORLD'S REJECTION OF GOD'S LOVE

*H*e told us the darkness would reject the light, and it certainly did.

For more than thirty years Jesus walked the planet as the very personification of God and his love. He treated every person he met with respect, healed hundreds if not thousands of people, and invited them into a relationship with his Father. He told them the truth about their broken world and how God wanted to rescue those who were being destroyed by it.

How did that world respond? Certainly there were many who loved him and were drawn to his message. Many others, however, especially those who held power in that culture, regarded his light as a threat that needed to be snuffed out. They saw poor people, notorious sinners, and outcasts drawn to him and did not like it.

God's light came into the world and the world didn't understand it or appreciate it. Instead of running to the light, most ran deeper into the shadows, threatened by what the light revealed. Instead of embracing the truth, they eliminated it.

They plotted to kill him in the most torturous way man had yet contrived. They conspired with one of his own followers to have him arrested and tried. They lied about him, accused him of words never spoken, motives never harbored, and acts never done. In it all he didn't defend himself, but submitted to the cruel acts of those who hated him. They thrust a crown made of thorns into his scalp to mock him and scourged him with a whip until his back was torn asunder. They made him carry his own cross through the city. Finally two thousand years ago on a hill outside Jerusalem, they nailed God's Son to a cross and raised it up to let him die.

Still not content, they taunted him as he endured his torture, telling him that if he truly was God's Son he could come off the cross

himself. I wonder how tempted he might have been to come off that cross and prove them all wrong. But he didn't. To leave the cross would have aborted the very gift that would offer salvation to even those who couldn't yet see it.

What we see in the brutality of the cross is the blindness of sin and how it rejects God's love. He didn't deserve one bit of it, but endured it for a greater joy that would unfold even in the darkness. On that day humanity provoked God in a way it had never done before. If God had been who they thought he was, torturing the object of his affection could have warranted an outpouring of vengeance that would have consumed them in a ball of fire. But that anger never came.

For the moment, it looked like the darkness had overwhelmed the light, but it was not so. Inside of Jesus, light was already overwhelming the darkness. To those who demanded his crucifixion, he offered grace. "Father, forgive them they have no idea what they are doing." He knew they were lost in the darkness, the very darkness he wanted to free them from.

He invited a thief, who was being executed next to him, to join him later that day in paradise. Who could have thought that Jesus would use the darkness as an opportunity to make all things new? Who could have known that his love extended not just to his friends, but even to those who thought him their enemy?

John 1, 18-19; Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23



THE ANTIDOTE FOR SIN


Most people scatter in times of calamity, either unwilling or unable to watch the one they love suffer. Others, who are just as repulsed by suffering they are powerless to stop, cannot bear to let a friend suffer alone. Though most of his friends were in hiding, a few gathered at the foot of his cross, overwhelmed by his agony and broken by their loss.

These were some of his closest friends—John, his beloved disciple, and Mary, his mother. Also beneath his cross, Mary of Magdalene, the woman Jesus rescued from the dregs of human brokenness and bondage, wept openly. She endured each groan of his anguish and his fading gasps for air. Overwhelmed by his agony and broken by their loss, it was as if all their hopes and dreams of what Jesus had promised were dying with him.

What they did not know then was that something even more traumatic was going on inside of Jesus. As physically tortured as he was by the cross, the nails, and the crown of thorns, an even greater battle was being waged in his own soul. Jesus was the linchpin in a plan of redemption that had been determined before the creation of the world. Jesus was not the victim of a tragic death; he was bringing forth a cure for sin by purging it from the human race.








Many have understood the cross as needing to appease the wrath of a Holy God, so offended by our sin that he had to brutalize his only Son to satisfy his need for justice. But Jesus didn't refer to the cross that way. Yes, the human race was perishing in the self-preferring nature of sin. That sin was destroying us from the inside out, causing spiritual death at its inception and culminating in physical death. The sin, and the resulting shame it provoked in us, caused us to run and hide from the very God who wanted to heal us. What Jesus satisfied at the cross was not the demand of God for justice, but the brokenness of the human spirit that made us cower unworthily in the presence of the God who loved us.

This was not an angry God punishing his Son; this was the holy, loving Father reconciling lost humanity back to himself through the work of his Son. While he was on the cross, God made him to be sin itself. He wasn't just made guilty of our sins; he became infected with the disease of sin, so that in his body sin would be finally condemned and consumed. As a sinless man he was the only suitable host for God in which to destroy sin and shame at the very place where it began—in the human soul. The obedience of this one man would provide a cure and make alive those who had been poisoned and made sinners by the disobedience of the first man, Adam.

In him the love and zeal of God confronted the lies and bondage of sin. Finally they could see God's wrath for what it really was—not an angry need for vengeance, but the full weight of a Father's love to cure in the Son what was destroying the people he had made. It was a brutal chemotherapy that provided the antidote to human brokenness. Jesus' body was the battleground for this epic fight where light would prevail over darkness, good over evil.



When he became sin he also entered into the fullness of our shame that blinded him to the reality that his Father was right there with him. This is what he despised most about the cross. For the first time in all eternity Jesus knew what it was to feel alone in the universe and abandoned by God himself.

As real as it seemed to him, it was only his perception. The Father never left him. For God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and the Father stood with him until his power completely consumed the power of sin in the body of the Son. What would have killed us in less than a second, Jesus endured for three hours until sin and its attendant shame finally were overrun by the love and power of the Father. His voice of complete triumph emerged from his exhaustion. "It is finished!"

The cure had been perfected, and now in him not only are our sins forgiven, but they are also cleansed. In doing so our shame was resolved so that in him there is no lingering condemnation. He became our cure. God reconciled us to himself so that we could come before him confidently and find our place of peace in the Father's house. There we can experience the fullness of his love, and by learning to live in that love, let him unravel what sin has twisted in us.

Jesus was not just the victim of another crucifixion outside Jerusalem. He was our substitute for the greatest story of atonement ever conceived. In his devastated body, broken humanity was reconciled back to the heart of a loving Father. The door is open. The invitation has been extended.

All that remains is for us to come and find our life in him.

Romans 5, 2 Corinthians 5, Hebrews 12, Romans 8

