

## Crucified, Dead, Buried

[Luke 23:44-56](#)

The Apostle's Creed

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"Crucified, dead, buried:" those three words have a ring of finality about them. They are like a hammer pounding nails in the lid of a coffin, and that is intentional. The framers of The Apostles' Creed intended to leave no doubt in our minds about THE CERTAINTY OF JESUS' DEATH.

And the reason they are so insistent is that after Easter, when the disciples began to win scores, then hundreds, then thousands of converts, the authorities put out the rumor that Jesus had not really died on the cross. He had fallen into a coma; so went the rumor. He then revived, emerged from the tomb, and lived on for several weeks before finally succumbing to his wounds.

A few years ago Hugh Schonfield dredged up that rumor and published a book entitled "The Passover Plot." He claimed that the rumor was true and that the Easter story was false. The resurrection, he writes, was a hoax, and the wool has been pulled over our eyes ever since by well-meaning but deluded Christians.

That is why the Creed tolls these words with such finality. Jesus was undeniably crucified by a squad of Roman soldiers. Jesus was really dead when they took him off the cross. Jesus was truly buried in a borrowed tomb. He was crucified, dead, and buried.

The eyewitnesses offer plenty of supportive evidence. They tell us how the body was partially embalmed with ointment and spices, wrapped tightly in a shroud, and laid in a tomb. They tell how a massive stone was rolled against the door of the tomb. I have seen one of those stones at an excavation just outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was fully six feet across and about six inches thick, hardly the kind of barrier a weakened victim of crucifixion could move after losing so much blood, after experiencing such excruciating pain, after sustaining a wound in his side, and after some forty hours inside a tomb. No, the eye-witnesses got it right. They testify to the certainty of his death: Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried.

More importantly, the New Testament goes on to shed light on THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS DEATH. In one of the church's earliest creeds, quoted by Paul in First Corinthians 15:3, the significance is clearly stated: "Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures." In accordance, for example, with the scripture in Isaiah 53: "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

To the New Testament writers, this wounded, crushed person, this person who pours himself out to death, this person who makes intercession for transgressors, is none other than Jesus. Peter clearly echoes Isaiah 53 in his description of Jesus' work: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." (That's 1 Peter 2:24-25) And listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Also to Hebrews 7:25: "He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." And finally to Jesus himself: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark recorded that in chapter 10, verse 45.

Precisely how the death of Christ is a ransom for sin, the New Testament doesn't say. Elsewhere the work of Christ is described as the payment of a debt, as the satisfaction of a legal penalty, as the transfer of guilt to a sacrificial lamb, and as an exodus from bondage to sin. That Jesus died for our sins has always and everywhere belonged to the essence of the Christian faith. Why this had to be, and what the precise connection is between cross and forgiveness, the New Testament does not state in so many words. Evidently the truth of the atonement is too great to be encapsulated in a single formula, except to say with confidence and thanksgiving, "Christ died for our sins."

Henry Roberts tells of a conversation in a World War I trench full of wounded men. Knowing he is dying, a French soldier turns to a friend: "Dominique, you've led a bad life. But there are no convictions against me. So, take my name. Take my life. Straight off you will have no more record against you. Take my wallet and give me yours so I can carry all your crimes away with me."

At an infinitely higher level, Jesus is saying to you, "Take my life, it's yours. And hand over your life to me, so I can carry all your sins away." You may wonder if you deserve such a gracious and costly exchange. But there it is in Holy Scripture, like a great banner painted indelibly and stretched permanently across the horizon of history: "Christ died for our sins." If we cannot fully comprehend the scope of that sacrifice, let us nevertheless celebrate the depth of God's love in Christ. And let us come to the Table without fear and without reservation. For the bread and the cup show forth Christ, crucified, dead, and buried; Christ, who died for our sins.