

## ROM 5.6-8: WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT JESUS?

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We live in a world of many faiths – not only is there Christianity, there is also Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Confucianism.

Inevitably people begin to wonder what is special about the Christian faith?

What is so great or so special about Jesus?

What makes Jesus different from any other person who ever lived?

The answer is found in Paul's letter to the Romans: **“For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much he loves us – it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us”** (5.6-8).

### 1. CHRIST DIED FOR US

What's so special about Jesus? **“Christ died for us”** declares Paul!

Jesus, the Christ, God's Messiah, God's appointed agent, indeed God's Son, died for us.

That's what's so special about Jesus.

Islam claims that their founder Mohammed was great prophet, but they never speak of him as their Saviour.

The same is true of Buddhists, who claim their founder Gautama was the enlightened one, but they too never claim him to be the Saviour.

But Christians claim that Jesus is the Saviour – for Jesus died for us.

Yes, the death of Jesus is the key to the life of Jesus. It is his death which was special.

Unlike any other world religion, we celebrate a death. For Jesus died for us.

That's why Christians erect crosses outside their churches – or inside their churches.

That's why people wear small crosses around their necks or in their lapels.

The Cross is what makes Jesus special – the Cross is what makes Jesus great.

In one sense, of course, there was nothing special about the cross of Jesus.

Jesus was not the first man to die on a cross – nor was he the last man.

1000s upon 1000s of people were put to death on crosses by the Romans.

Indeed, there was one occasion, after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, that the Romans ran out of wood for crosses, and what's more, they ran out of space to erect crosses.

What makes Jesus special is not that he died, nor even that he died on a cross.

But that he **“died for us”** – he died for you, he died for me.

Literally: **“he died on our behalf”** (*‘huper’*).

That's an amazing thought, is it not? When Jesus died he died for us all.

Long before we were ever conceived, Jesus died for us.

In a way which defies the human mind, when Jesus died on that Cross, he died for generations yet to come.

The Cross of Jesus does not belong to the pages of history.

Although Jesus died almost 20 centuries ago, his death is highly relevant to you and to me today. For his death can radically affect your life and my life today.

Yes, “**Christ died for us**” – he died for you and for me.  
That’s what makes Jesus so special. That’s what makes Jesus so great.

But what did Paul mean when he said “**Christ died for us**”  
What does it mean for Jesus to die ‘on our behalf’?  
Why did Jesus choose to go to a Cross?  
To understand how special Jesus was we need to look more carefully at Paul had to say about us.

## 2. CHRIST DIED FOR US SINNERS

Paul did not simply say: “**Christ died for us**”, but rather “**It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us**” (5.8).  
To understand the death of Jesus you need to understand the predicament in which we find ourselves. For from God’s point of view we are all sinners.

### *a) sinners are in mortal danger*

To be called a sinner should send a shiver down your spine.  
Sin is no laughing matter. It is terminal  
In spiritual terms the S word is as bad as the C word  
For sin and cancer are both terminal conditions. They both result in death.  
But whereas cancer threatens life just in this world, sin threatens our life in the world to come. And that is a fearsome thought.

Thankfully cancer can be treated today. And so too can sin  
The good news is that sin need not have the last word. Sin can be treated.  
To quote the Apostle Paul: “**Sin pays its wage – death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Rom 6.23).  
Or as Paul says here: “**It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us**”

### *b) sinners cannot help themselves*

“**For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time God chose**” (5.6).

Sinners are helpless in the sense that they are powerless to help themselves.  
The word Paul (*astheneis*) uses here was used by John in his Gospel to describe the man at the Pool of Bethesda, who was so crippled, that he could not walk an inch.  
He just lay there on his mat. He was utterly incapable of helping himself.  
There is nothing which we can do to improve our lot.  
Some people think that if they are kind to others, then that will ease their condition.  
But the fact is that sin is like a cancer which has invaded our very being.  
Our lives have been blighted by sin, and are in danger of being ruined forever by sin.  
But there is nothing that we can do to put matters right.  
But thank God there is someone who can help.  
Christ died for our sins. He came to our rescue.

*c) sinners are rebels*

Indeed, we are more than rebels. In Rom 5.10 Paul speaks of us being God's enemies: **"We were his enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son"**

Sinners are **enemies** in the sense that they defy God by rebelling against him.

As Paul put it in Rom 1:20-21 **"Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made. So those people have no excuse at all! They know God, but they do not give him the honour that belongs to him, nor do they thank him."**

Sinners are people who instead of acknowledging God, seek to live life without God.

Consciously or unconsciously we declare UDI on God.

It is not insignificant that in English the word 'sin' is spelt s-I-n.

Sin is about going my way, and not about going God's way.

When we sin, we rebel against God and his ways.

The result of our rebellion is that God gives us up to the consequences of our own sin...

Hence all the pain and the suffering that are around in our world today

Yet the good news = in spite of our stubborn defiance, in spite of our constant refusal to take any notice of God, **"Christ died for us"**.

As a result of the Cross **God has proclaimed an amnesty** - he is willing to pardon his rebellious subjects - he is willing to forget our past, if we will but give up our pretence to independence and accept the pardon he offers us in Jesus..

*d) sinners are undeserving of God's love*

Listen to the Apostle Paul again: **"When we were still helpless Christ died for the wicked"** (NRSV "the ungodly")

Paul goes on: **"It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone might die for a good person .... It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us"**

Paul here makes a distinction between a **righteous person** and a **good person**

- **A righteous person** can be someone who is morally upright, yet without any human warmth. CH Dodd: *"The Head is a beast, but a just beast"*. You may admire your head teacher, but you probably don't love your head teacher
- **A good person** by contrast is not just morally upright, but actually does good to others.

Paul says: It is just conceivable that a person might give their life for a good person, although not perhaps for a good person who is spiritually frigid. But in fact Christ did not die for people who were 'good and noble', he died for **'ungodly' 'wicked'** people. He died for sinners – for people who in no way deserved his love and attention.

This then is what makes Jesus so special: he died for sinners – for people in mortal danger, for people who could not help themselves, for people who had turned their backs on God, for people who did not deserve his love.

And the Good News is that this remains true still today.

### 3. GOD CONTINUES TO LOVE US SINNERS

**"God has shown us how much he loves us.. Christ died for us"**

#### *a) God is love*

**"GOD has shown his love"**

Do notice that it is God who takes the initiative

Paul doesn't say simply that "**Christ died**", but that "**God has shown his love**"

The impression is sometimes given that Christ by dying on a Cross was seeking to placate an angry God.

Indeed, one little girl once said: *"I love Jesus, but I hate God"*.

But we cannot distinguish between the Father and the Son in that way.

We cannot contrast a gentle & loving Jesus with an angry & vengeful God.

It was God who took the initiative to rescue us from ourselves and from our sin.

John Calvin: *"God first loved us without being provoked to it beforehand by our love"*.

Or as John put it **"This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven"**. (1 Jn 4.10)

We don't have to wait for God to come to our aid - God has already taken the initiative - he has sent his Son to die for you & for me on the Cross

#### *b) God proves his love*

People have had all sorts of warped views of God.

- Some have seen him as an ogre - and have blamed him for all the suffering and evil in the world. Albert Camus: *"The only excuse for God is that he does not exist"*
- Others have seen him as totally indifferent to our plight - if there is a God, then he is simply the primal cause, some unfeeling kind of impersonal force which brought the universe into being. Mark Twain: *"God does not know we are here and would not care if he did"*

How wrong such people are. God is love. We see that in the Cross.

**"God has shown us how much he loves us - it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us"** (Rom 5.8).

It is possible that to talk of 'showing' love = too weak. The underlying Greek word can also mean "to prove". **"God proves his love"** (NRSV)

If there is any doubt that God loves, that doubt is resolved when we look to the Cross

The cross, said Augustine, is "a pulpit" from which Christ preached God's love to the world.

BUT the Cross is more than a sign that God is love - it is more than mere proof that God loves. It is love in action. **"Christ died for us"**

**c) God commends his love to us**

The old AV translated Rom 5.8 as "**God commendeth his love toward us**"

This is the usual meaning of the underlying Gk verb.

It is possible that there is a double-meaning here.

By showing his love for us, God is in fact appealing to us to respond to his love.

Note too that the AV uses the present, and not the past tense. And that is correct.

God did not simply love us in the past – he continues to love us.

Christ died - his death was a one-off act in the past - yet through that act God in his love continues to appeal to you and to me.

The Gospel is not simply that "**Christ died**", but that "**Christ died for us**".

Yet for that death to have any relevance/meaning, we must respond to God's love.

If Jesus is to become special to us, then we need to respond to God's love in Jesus?

In the words of one commentator: "*In the Cross of Christ God says to us [lit. man], 'This is where you ought to be. Jesus, my Son, hangs there in your stead. His tragedy is the tragedy of your life. You are the rebel who should be hanged on the gallows. But, I suffered instead of you, and because of you, because I love you in spite of what you are. My love for you is so great that I meet you there on the Cross. I cannot meet you anywhere else. You must meet me there by identifying yourself with the One on the Cross. It is by this identification that I, God, can meet you in Him, saying to you, as I say to him, 'My Beloved Son'*"

Will you meet him there?

Will you allow Jesus to become your Saviour?

Will you allow Jesus to become truly special?