

What Jesus said about why He would die on a cross

by Mike Haddorff

There are many explanations for why Jesus died on the Cross. The church has wrestled with this question for centuries, offering different theories, some more helpful than others. But before starting with theological models, there is a simpler place to begin: What does Jesus himself say about why he is going to die?

When we listen closely to Jesus' own words in the Gospels, three consistent themes emerge.

First, Jesus says his death is necessary. Repeatedly he tells his disciples that "the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, and rise again." The Cross is not an accident or a tragic miscalculation. Jesus presents it as something that must happen, but he never explains that necessity in terms of God needing payment or punishment.

Second, Jesus interprets his coming death using covenant language. At the Last Supper he says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for many." Covenant, for Jesus' first-century Jewish listeners, was not abstract theology. It named belonging, relationship, and God's faithfulness to his people. To speak of a new covenant was to say that the relationship between God and humanity was being re-established, not renegotiated through stricter rules, but renewed through divine initiation.

Third, Jesus consistently describes his mission as restorative. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Jesus never says, in so many words, "I am going to die so God can finally forgive you." That absence matters. Instead, he frames his life and death around rescue, restoration, and return.

Taken together, these themes point us toward covenant, not as a technical doctrine, but as the relational framework that gives meaning to everything else. In Jesus, God does not fix the covenant problem from a distance. God enters the broken relationship from within human failure and remains consistent all the way through rejection, violence, and death.

When covenant is restored in this way, three outcomes naturally follow, outcomes Jesus already embodies and announces.

Healing: "By his wounds you have been healed." What is broken is restored within relationship.

Freedom: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Bondage loses its authority.

Unity: "That they may all be one." Dividing walls are dismantled.

Healing tells us something is being restored. Freedom tells us something is being released. Unity tells us something is being re-knit. And Covenant is like the container which holds these three, expressing the over-arching truth that God never walks away.

Seen this way, the Cross is not a transaction to be explained, but a relationship re-explained through the person of Jesus, faithfully, irrevocably, and from within.