

CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT HANGETH ON A TREE

INTRODUCTION: With Easter Sunday being next week, we are going to take a short break from our series, “Be Ye Holy, For I Am Holy.” I actually prefer to call it **Resurrection Sunday** instead of Easter because we are celebrating the **resurrection of Christ** from death and the grave! Before the **resurrection**, though, there was the **crucifixion**. To cover both the crucifixion and resurrection in **one sermon** is pretty much impossible—for me anyway 😊—so we are going to focus on the **crucifixion today**—and the **resurrection next Sunday**.

Take your Bibles and turn to John 19; please follow along as I read verses 28-37. There is obviously a lot in this one paragraph. We have **two** of Christ’s **seven** sayings on the cross: “I thirst” in vs 28; “It is finished” in vs 30. The three words “It is finished” could certainly be a sermon in itself as we Biblically answered questions like: “**What** is finished” ... and “**Who** finished it” ...and “**How** and **why** it is finished.”

What I want to draw your attention to, though, is one phrase from verse 31 “...that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day...”

How **important** was it that the bodies **not remain on the cross**? Important enough for the soldiers to **literally break the legs** of the two men that were crucified with Jesus so they would die more quickly! In vs 33, we see that Jesus was dead already, so they did not break His legs.

Back to our question. **Why was** it so important that the bodies “not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day?” Because “cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree...”

Take your Bibles and turn to Deuteronomy 21, beginning with vs 22. We aren’t going to stay here long, but it is important background as to **why the bodies** of Jesus and the other two men could “not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day...”

1. The curse of being hung on a tree

A. Committing a sin worthy of death

Deut 21:22 “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death...”

So what is a sin that is **worthy of death**? Under the law of Moses, there were a lot of them! David—who we talked about last week—committed two of them: adultery and murder!

--Exodus 21:15 & 17 says that if you hit your parents—or curse them—you shall surely be put to death.

--Lev 20:13 says that homosexuality is punishable by death

--Lev 24:16 says “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death...”

There’s one here **in this chapter** that should cause **all the children to sit up straight and listen**—being a **stubborn and rebellious child** was punishable by death!

--Notice verses 20-21. Pretty safe to say that the child is older because he is not only stubborn and rebellious—he is **also a drunkard**! Thankfully we are not under the law of Moses!

B. The curse of hanging on a tree

Back to verse 22: “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and **thou hang him on a tree:**” I know this is **not a pleasant picture** to envision or think about, but it is important that we understand the context of what we will be looking at a little later.

--We see here that the person is **not killed by hanging**—they are **killed first**—then hung on a tree! Why were some people hung on a tree? It was to show others that that person **had broken the law** and were cursed because they broke the law. **MacArthur** puts it like this: “It isn’t that being hanged on a tree curses you; it is that **having been cursed**, in Israel’s history you would wind up on a tree.”

It would remind people throughout that whole day that this person had broken the law and was punished for it. But there was a rule to follow if someone was hung on a tree.

We see that in vs 23: “His body shall **not remain all night upon the tree**, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

The rule was that the body had to come **down before dark** and the person had to be buried the same day. He committed the crime, he paid the penalty, he was made a public spectacle to remind and warn others, but then he was buried.

And because of this commandment, Jesus and the other two men needed to be dead—and buried—the same day they died! We in the U.S. operate currently under what is called **Roman time—midnight to midnight**. The Jews, however, measured their day **from sunset to sunset**—meaning a new day begins at roughly 6:00pm instead of one minute after midnight. That meant Jesus and the other two men needed to be off the cross and buried before 6:00pm.

It is sad—and ironic—that the Jews were so insistent on obeying the law about the bodies. They had a mock trial—and condemned Jesus to death under false charges—and yet they wanted to “follow the rules” when it came to getting the bodies off the cross. No wonder Jesus once said to them, “You strain at gnats—but swallow camels!”

One more curse we need to look at in the way of background

2. The curse of not continuing in all that was written

Please turn to Deuteronomy 27; vs 9-10. What were they to do? **Obey** God’s commandments and statutes.

--To emphasize the importance of obeying God’s Word, Moses told them that when they got into the Promised Land, that half the tribes would stand on mount Gerizim (vs 12) and the other half would stand upon mount Ebal (vs 13).

--Now vs 14. The Levites would read these “curses”—found in vs 15-26—and the people would indicate their agreement with God and desire to obey by saying, “what?” **Amen!**

--Now vs 26. In other words, if you fail to confirm these words—**and do them**—ye are cursed.

3. Did Jesus die on a cross—or on a tree?

The answer.... Yes!

A. Literally, Jesus died on a cross

No need to prove this point because it is well understood that Jesus died on a cross!

--We know that Jesus **carried His cross** for a while, then Simon of Cyrene carried it.

--We know that Jesus was **mocked while on the cross**.

Mt 27:40 “...Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, **save thyself**. If thou be the Son of God, **come down from the cross**.”

Mt 27:42 “He saved others; **Himself He cannot save**. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now **come down from the cross**, and we will believe Him.”

--We also know from numerous passages that Jesus died **by crucifixion**—and that crucifixion took place **on a cross**. But although Jesus died **literally**, on a cross...

B. Symbolically, Jesus died on a tree

Why do I say that? Because God used Peter to say that very thing—3 different times!

Acts 5:30 “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and **hanged on a tree**.”

Acts 10:39 “And we are witnesses of all things which He [Jesus] did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and **hanged on a tree**.”

I Peter 2:24 “Who His [Jesus] own self bare **our sins** in His own body **on the tree**...”

So why would Peter—3 times—say that Jesus was “**on a tree**” when He died **on a cross**? The easy—and correct answer—is because **God wanted him to!** Another reason, though, is to emphasize the fact that God **wants us to see the connection** that He inspired Paul to make between the two curses we looked at in Deuteronomy—and what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We find that connection in Galatians 3 so let’s turn there next.

I mentioned in my introduction that we were stepping away from our series on being holy for a couple of weeks. I probably should have only said **one week** because what Paul wrote to the Galatians was very much about living a holy life for God. They were confused about how to do that, though, so Paul addresses that in this book. Notice Gal 3:1-3. Paul is asking them who had **bewitched them**—meaning deceived them.

In vs 2, we see they were trying to ***mix the works of the law*** with the hearing of faith. In vs 3, he reminds them that their spiritual life began with a ***spiritual birth***—they began in the Spirit. He then asks, ‘If ye ***began*** in the Spirit, why do you think you can ***become perfect***—meaning mature and complete—by the works of the flesh?’

And then he begins his argument as to ***why works don’t work***. We’re going to skip the first argument—the example of Abraham found in verses 5-9—and jump ahead to verse 10: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” If you are thinking that ***sounds a lot like*** Deut 27:26 “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them,” you are absolutely right!

So ***why*** can’t we be ***saved by works...or stay saved*** by works...or ***make ourselves holy*** by works? Because... ***4. Cursed are the lawbreakers—and we are all lawbreakers!***

Let’s consider first... ***A. The demand of the law***

What does the law demand? 100% obedience to 100% of God’s commandments 100% of the time! How do we know the law demands that? Because God spells out the demands—then declares we are cursed—meaning guilty and condemned—for failing to meet those demands! Notice again the middle of vs 10.

i. All people. “Cursed is every one” means every one is ***included***—and ***no one*** is ***excluded***.

There are no exceptions, exemptions, or restrictions. If you put yourself under the law, you are under a curse!

ii. All times. “Cursed is every one that ***continueth not***.” You can’t just ***start*** keeping the law—you have to ***keep on*** doing it. If you stop ***once***, you continued not. If you ***continued not, you failed***—and are under the curse!

iii. All things. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in ***all things***.” What things? It is not obedience to the ***laws the land***—and it is not obedience to the ***laws we make for ourselves***. It is obedience to ***what God says***: “all things which are written in the ***book of the law*** to do them.”

You ***can’t pick and choose***; you can’t ***do one part*** and ***skip other parts***. “All means all and that is all, all means!” In fact, God says if you keep ***all*** of them—and ***break just one***—it is the same as ***breaking them all!*** ***James 2:10*** “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

What does the law demand? Here it is again: ***100% obedience to 100% of God’s commandments 100% of the time!***

That’s the demand of the law. Let’s consider next...

B. The declaration about the law

Law-keeping—doing good works—doesn’t work. How do we know? Because we can’t keep the law—and because God ***says*** works don’t work!

Vs 11 “But that no man is ***justified by the law*** in the sight of God, it is evident:”

We see that same thought—three times—In Gal 2:16:

--“knowing that a man is ***not justified by the works*** of the law...”

--mid of vs “and ***not by the works*** of the law...”

--end “for by the ***works of the law*** shall ***no flesh*** be justified.”

To recap, the law can’t save you—or keep you saved—because none of us can keep 100% of the law 100% of the time! In fact, vs 24 shows us the ***purpose*** of the law: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster”—our teacher—“to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified” by _____ what...? ***Faith—not law-keeping!***

Lastly, let’s consider... ***5. Christ cursed as a law-breaker—to redeem us, the real law breakers!***

Notice again vs 13: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, ***being made a curse for us***: for it is written, Cursed is every one that ***hangeth on a tree***.” Let’s break it down into smaller pieces.

A. Christ redeemed us

Redeem means to “free someone from bondage by paying a ransom.” In this context, what we are freed from is the curse of the law. We’ll talk about what the curse is in a minute but notice the emphasis on ***Christ***. Christ “hath redeemed”—past tense—meaning Christ ***already did something*** to free us from the curse of the law. It is ***not us redeeming ourselves***; it is Christ redeeming us.

B. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law

What is the **curse** of the law? In a nutshell, it is the **penalty that awaits** us after our **body dies**.

--The evidence is in, and we have been proven guilty—**everyone of us** has failed to be 100% obedient to 100% of God's commandments 100% of the time!

--The penalty for failure to keep the law? **Death! Romans 6:23** "For the wages"—the payment; the penalty—"of sin is death...."

--But it is not just the **physical death** of our bodies. We have a soul—an invisible part of us—that continues to exist **after we** die. And Jesus Himself pronounces the judgment upon those who fail to keep 100% of God's commandments 100% of the time in **Mt 25:41** "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire**, prepared for the devil and his angels:"

--In other words, the **curse of the law is hell!** Do you believe in hell? Jesus did—and talked about **everlasting judgment** more than He talked about **everlasting life!**

--In Mark 9:43,44,45, and 48, Jesus calls it a place of fire "that is not quenched."

--In Mark 9:44,46, and 48, Jesus calls it a place "where their worm dieth not."

--And in Mt 25:30, Jesus calls it a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We should believe in hell because Jesus warned us about it—and we should believe in hell because of what Jesus paid to redeem us from it!

C. Christ was made a curse for us

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us"

Here, in my opinion is one of the best descriptions of what happened at the cross—Christ was **made a curse for us!**

I mentioned last week when we were looking at David's cry for mercy that it is as if we were standing on holy ground, listening to a man pour out his heart to God.

If David's confession...and Moses at the burning bush...and Isaiah seeing the Lord "high and lifted up" was holy ground, how much more was the cross—where Jesus was **made a curse for us!**

It is nearly impossible to describe in human words what took place at the cross. Let's think through it a little.

--It involved the greatest display of **humility**—God became man!

Gal 4:4 "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" – God left heaven and came to earth in the form of a man.

He became one of us—and yet remained God.

Gal 4:4 also says that He was "made under the law." That means He came at time when the Mosaic Law was in place—and He submitted Himself to it and "tried" to do what the law said. Only He didn't **just try—He succeeded!** Jesus obeyed 100% of God's commandments 100% of the time—He never failed once!

Why did Jesus perfectly keep the law? Did He do it to just be **our example**; to show us it could be done? No; Jesus lived a perfect life so He could **take the punishment that God required**—and that **we deserved**.

So not only was the cross the greatest display of **humility** that the world has ever seen, it was also the greatest **display of injustice** the world has ever seen. Why do I say that? Because God's Son—the perfect One—was made a curse for us! God's wrath—against us and our sin—was poured out on Jesus!

I Peter 3:18 "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God..."

The songwriter put it like this in a song we sung last week:

"Till on the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, For every sin on Him was laid; Here in the death of Christ I live."

What else do we see at the cross? It is not just the greatest display of **humility** and **injustice** that the world has ever seen; it is also the greatest **display of love**.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."

Rom 5:8 "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We sing about that, too, don't we?

"Amazing love; how can it be? That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

Christ was made a curse for us—He died to free us from the penalty of our sin. But you need to come to Him in faith and received Him for yourself. Have you done that?

So, what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. If you have never trusted Jesus—and Jesus only—as your Savior, that is the first thing you need to do. It is not Jesus **plus works** because works don't work! You need to come to the cross—like we will sing about in a moment—and receive Him by faith!
2. For those of us who have trusted Christ, we need to come to the cross, too! We need to see the wonder of Jesus being made a curse for us—and then love Him and serve Him with all of our heart.