

## I. Intro

A. From time to time I have stumbled across articles about logos – often about how important they are, and what makes a good logo. Inevitably, these articles have pictures of the best logos out there. **SLIDE ONE**

B. I would like to suggest that they all miss the most obvious – the most universally recognized, the most iconic logo of all time. It is simple and symbolic – **SLIDE TWO** - it is the cross.

C. You may not have thought about the cross as a logo. I'm pretty sure there was never a branding meeting in which the disciples looked at suggestions from marketing and then picked their favourite.

D. There were other nominees – such as the fish (**SLIDE Three**). If you take the first letters of Jesus Christ God, Son, Saviour – in Greek it is IXTHUS, which is the Greek word for fish. So a simple fish was in the logo contest for a while.

E. But the cross won. Have you ever noticed how popular it is? You can usually quickly spot one – someone around you has cross earrings, a cross necklace or a cross tattoo.

F. The cross is so common that you may not have thought about how odd it is that this symbol of torture is so popular. The cross was a first century version of the electric chair – which you do not see many people wearing. “That is a lovely little gold-plated electric chair necklace that you are wearing. Is that a family heirloom?”

G. The truth is, a cross was far worse than an electric chair. The Romans had lots of ways to kill people – they decapitated many, fed some to wild animals, burned others alive. The cross was the worst – it was the *servile supplicum*, or “the slaves death.” In fact, it was such a slow, painful and public way to die that it was used to keep slaves in line.<sup>1</sup>

1. In a society that depended upon slave labor – and lived in fear of a slave revolt – the horrors of crucifixion were used to keep slaves in check. Which is why, when the Spartacus slave revolt of 71BC was put down, the Romans not only crucified 6,000 slaves, they left their bodies up for a while to keep making the point.

2. A Roman citizen could not be crucified. In fact, crucifixion was understood to be so cruel that Roman writers – such as Cicero – argued that Romans should never mention it and Roman writers never write about it.<sup>2</sup>

H. And the Jews agreed. Because Deuteronomy 21:22 tells them that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed by God, they saw the cross as the most irrereligious symbol possible.<sup>3</sup>

I. So it's a bit odd that it became a symbol of Christianity – the logo. But it holds this distinction because Jesus died on a cross, and the death of Christ stands at the center of the Christian faith. Of course this is also odd.

1. Most people who are remembered, are remembered for what they did, not for how they died, even if they died in a tragic or sacrificial way – like Lincoln, Kennedy or Martin Luther King.

2. And most people who die dishonourable deaths try to hide it. It's not what their fans celebrate. You would think that the biblical writers would gloss over it. Would race to Easter. But the Biblical writers do the opposite. The entire Bible builds up to the Cross (and resurrection). Everything before it is pointing ahead to it, and everything after it is pointing back to it.

J. I have argued that Jesus was the most influential person to ever live – and he is best remembered for his death. Why? Why all the focus on the death of Jesus? How is it different from any other death? How is it different from the countless others who were crucified? What did Christ's death accomplish? What is its significance?

K. And if you think you know, and are ready to say, “Jesus died on the cross for my sins.” Why do you think the public execution of a man condemned like a slave 2,000 years ago has anything to do with you?

II. Review:

A. This is the ninth message in this series. We are looking at the most important topics. The foundational truths. A few weeks ago, we asked: Who is Jesus? Last week the question was: What did he teach? Today we ask: Why did he die?

III. Before we jump in, let me note:

A. When we come to God with questions, it's important to do so from a posture of humility. We can pour out our heart to God – and that might include lots of questions (such as we find in the Psalms). But when we have intellectual questions, we need to be careful about thinking that we have a better way. His ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts – indeed, Isaiah 55:8 – his thoughts are higher than ours. So, I want to affirm asking questions, it is how we learn. But to do so from a posture of humility. (We lose thee strut and gain a limp).

B. Note that my focus is on what Christ's death accomplishes. If you Google, Why did Christ die?, some say:

1. Christ died because he unsettled the wrong people. He got sideways with the Jewish leaders by claiming to be God, and he rattled the Romans – in particular Pilate – by being a destabilizing figure.

2. Or others write: Christ died because he was crucified. And that was not something you survive. A 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman historian named Eusebius gave us enough detail that Mel Gibson could make his movie – which makes it pretty clear you did not survive crucifixion. (By the way, typically, you suffocated).

C. Our focus is on why this was the plan, which is what is discussed under the phrase, atonement – which is the term introduced by William Tyndale back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. When he was translating the Bible into English he needed a word for the Latin term *reconciliatio*. Some translations today use the word reconciliation – referring to the reconciling of God and humankind.

1. But Tyndale – and others – have felt like that doesn't get at the all that is going on. For starters, it doesn't suggest why reconciliation is needed. And it doesn't explain how it happens.

2. As it turns out, when we look at the New Testament, there are a variety of ideas in play. Some imply we think about reconciliation in terms of a judge and a prisoner in court; others frame it as someone paying a ransom so a slave can go free. In other cases, it looks like what Christ does is accomplish a military victory.<sup>4</sup> So, we end up with various theories of the atonement, and terms like Christus Victor, Moral Influence and Penal Substitution.

3. You can start a fight if you walk into a room of theologians and say something like, “It's not just that Augustine is right in advocating the centrality of sacrifice in the atonement. But Gustaf Aulen is wrong.

4. My take is that a whole lot is going on and layered and mysterious – that the Bible talks about Christ's death so often and it uses so many different metaphors, that I think his death does all kinds of things.<sup>5</sup> Scot McKnight argues that we should think of the atonement like a golf bag where we can take out whatever club we need. NT Wright thinks it's so big and layered that we can hardly talk about it.

#### IV. So, what are the reasons we find in the Bible?

A. One reason Christ died was to defeat evil. In Colossians 2:15 we are told that Christ died “to disarm the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Christ died to defeat evil.

B. A second reason Christ died was to defeat death. In Hebrews 2:14 we read that Christ died to break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and (v 15) to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. And of course we see Christ's victory over death in the Gospels. Jesus dies and rises again. Death doesn't have the final word. There is a resurrection. And then, in I Cor. 15, Paul tells us that Jesus is the first born from dead – but we will follow.

C. The third reason – and the one that gets most of the ink in the New Testament – is that Christ died in order to pay our debt. It is often referred to as the Penal Substitutionary View – i.e., He pays our debt, by dying in our place.

V. The Penal Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement.

A. It is not without some controversy recently. Some say it's horrible because it makes God the Father all full of wrath and Jesus the nice one. That is not a valid understanding of the claim:

1. For starters, in 2 Cor. 5:19 we are told that God is in Christ – our justification is a joint projection within the godhead;

2. Given the choice between being killed by my father or having to kill one of my sons, I'd take the being killed any day.

3. And there is so much more going on.

B. I would argue that it is not horrible, but it is amazing and layered and deep – and that, in many ways, it is the literary crescendo of the Bible. For a thousand pages, the Old Testament has been reinforcing the idea that:

1. God is holy – and cannot embrace sin and remain holy. The connection we get invited into is not one that would allow him to remain clean. If you are going to give a hug to a wet, muddy and rambunctious puppy, you will get muddy.

2. That sin is worse than we can imagine – it breaks us in ways we cannot really comprehend. We are too broken to get it. We are closer to Hitler than to Jesus.

3. A third idea the Old Testament also repeats over and over and over that guilty people can go free if an innocent third party dies for them. Sheds it's blood for them.

a) It has to be an innocent third party, because otherwise their death is required for their own sins.

b) This is the basis for the trail of blood that runs through the Old Testament – one that starts in Genesis, picks up speed with the Passover and then is the center of Jewish life with the Temple and sacrifices.

(1) Faithful Jews took pigeons, goats, bulls and other animals to the temple in order to sacrifice them on the altar as a payment for their sin. They did this so that the blood of the animals could be poured out on the altar as payment (the Bible uses the term propitiation) for their sins.<sup>6</sup>

4. You also see that there is a lamb motif going on.

- C. Then, when we jump to the New Testament, we learn that:
1. That the blood of animals cannot take away the sins of mankind (Heb. 10:4).
  2. That Jesus is the real Passover lamb. This is what John said when he saw Christ approaching him at the Jordan River: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”<sup>7</sup>
  3. In fact, what we see is that the Passover was not looking back to Moses leading the Jews out of slavery to the Egyptians, but Jesus leading his people out of exile from God because of slavery to sin.
- D. And then we later come to see that:
1. Because God is just – he must require a payment for sin
  2. Because God is loving, He chooses to pay our debt himself.
  3. So – 2 Cor. 5 – the father made him who knew no sin to become sin and to pay the penalty. To die for us.
  4. If we accept the offer, we are forgiven. It all pivots around the death of Christ.
- E. This is why the death of Christ takes up so much of the New Testament. The principal reason Christ died was to pay our moral debt. That is, Christ’s primary purpose in going to the cross was to bear the wrath of God against sin that would otherwise be directed at us.<sup>8</sup> We see this view supported by almost every New Testament writer:
1. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus says: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
  2. In Hebrews 9:27-28 the writer proclaims: Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people;
  3. In I Peter 2:24 we read: He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.
  4. And in I Corinthians 15:3 the Apostle Paul announces: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
- F. Men and women, Christ’s death changes everything. Christ’s death is sufficient to cover the sin of fallen mankind and restore us to spiritual life.
- G. In other words, Jesus died in our place in order to satisfy the judicial requirements of the law. As our representative he atoned for our sins, allowing God to impute Christ’s righteousness to our account and declare us justified.

H. Everything hinges on the death of Christ. This is why the cross is the de facto logo of the Christian faith. This is why one-third of the Synoptic Gospels and one-half of John's Gospel is focused on the events immediately surrounding his death. This is why the Christians changed the Passover memorial into a celebration of the Lord's Supper – where we “proclaim the Lord's death until he returns.”

I. Now, there is one more thing that needs to be said. Another reason Christ died. He died because He loves you.

1. There are several other aspects of Christ death that need to be mentioned. For instance, in Ephesians 2 Paul explains that Christ's death on the cross was necessary to remove the barrier of enmity between Jew and Gentile.

2. In other places we get a sense that Christ died to model how we should place the needs of others ahead of our own. Let me put this in theological terms, that we should live a cruciform life.

3. I think we are wise to think of our salvation – the forgiveness of our sins – as the means to a greater end. That Christ's death is going to redeem and restore everything – not just us - and that it will all be restored back to God for His glory.

4. But in Romans 5 we learn that his death occurred to reveal God's love for us.

5. I John 15:13 notes that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for someone else.

VI. Why did Jesus die? Because he loves you.

VII. We should note, when Jesus gave us something to remind us of his death – he did not give us a theory, he gave us a meal. It is a meal that represents the new covenant that was made possible by his broken body and shed blood.

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, a third-century historian, gives us enough detail that Mel Gibson could graphically portray it. He talks about the flogging and the nails and the crown of thorns. It is horrible. His physical suffering was unthinkable. What we know is that when Jesus reached the site of crucifixion he was again stripped naked. He was laid on the cross and six-inch nails were driven into his forearms just above the wrists. His knees were then twisted sideways so that the ankles could be nailed between the tibia and the Achilles tendon. He was lifted up on the cross, which was then dropped into a socket in the ground. There he was left to hang in intense heat and unbearable thirst, exposed to the ridicule of the crowd. He hung there, in unthinkable pain, for six hours while his life slowly drained away. It was the height of pain and depth of shame.'

<sup>2</sup> Cicero wrote: Crucifixion should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things, or the endurance of them, but liability to them, the expectation, indeed the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man. <https://tlumc.org/church-blog/473-why-did-jesus-die-the-scandal-of-the-cross>.

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<sup>3</sup> If a Jew was crucified, they wanted to get the body off the cross as quickly as possible, fearing it would curse the land.

<sup>4</sup> One of the theories that has been largely dismissed, is the one advocated by Origen and Gregory the Great, who suggested that Christ's death was a ransom paid to the devil. Anselm of Canterbury – writing *Cur Deus Homo* in the 11<sup>th</sup> century – rejected the idea that God deceived the devil through the cross, suggesting instead that Christ's death satisfied a moral debt.

<sup>5</sup> Scot McKnight suggests that we think of the atonement as a golf bag from which we pull various clubs a depending upon what we need.

<sup>6</sup> Note: Because the Bible speaks frequently about blood it is important to understand its significance. According to Leviticus 17, “the life of the flesh is in the blood.” In other words, life and blood are essentially one and the same because blood represents the essence of life and the shedding of blood represents the shedding of life, i.e. death. In light of this you might think of blood like a medium of currency (e.g., paper money). The money itself does not have value in itself – but it represents real value. Blood represents life.

<sup>7</sup> John 1:29

<sup>8</sup> Historically there have been three main theories of the atonement: one emphasizes the example of Christ; a second focuses on his victory and subsequent kingship – this is generally referred to as the *Christus Victor* model; and a third focuses on his death as a ransom for our sin - the substitutionary view. At this particular moment there is a rather heated debate between NT Wright (an Anglican bishop) and John Piper (a Baptist pastor) over which theory is correct. (This is occurring in part because unlike other issues – the deity of Christ, the nature of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity – the church did not resolve this issue at an early church council.) I am not well versed in the arguments being made by Wright or Piper, but it appears from a distance that Wright wants all three views to be valued and Piper wants the focus to be on the Penal Substitutionary view. A study of Scripture suggests that something would be lost if we did not honor the different ways the New Testament writers communicate the story of Christ's death and our salvation. And, likewise, something would also be lost if we did not emphasize – as evangelicals historically have – that the vicarious, substitutionary view is the primary one.