The Importance of The Crucifixion

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**Foundational Scripture:** 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:3

**Intro**:

* It is a great understatement to say that the bible falls apart without the reality of a Messianic death and in particular, a death by crucifixion. The OT paints a typological picture of a suffering servant who would redeem the nations from their biggest problem which is sin. The detailed pattern of OT animal sacrifices on days like the Day of Atonement serve to illustrate that God cannot deal with sin and thus there must be some form of atonement/reconciliation to allow for an intimate relationship between Him and man. This picture is prevalent throughout the entire OT yet it is not the ultimate reconciliatory act God has in mind to take care of the problem of sin once and for all.
* Passages like Isaiah 52-53, The Servant Song, clearly point to a time where the nations await a servant/prophet/Messiah figure that can and will execute that which no animal could ever do. This act of reconciliation is prophesied in the OT to occur on a tree with excruciating suffering to follow (cf. Num. 21:9; Deut. 21:23; Psa. 22:16; Zech. 12:10) intimating a Messianic death by crucifixion which the NT confirms, supports and teaches (Matt. 27:33-54; Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32; 19:16-37; Acts 4:10; Gal. 3:1, 10-13). There is something clearly significant about the crucifixion and what it means to Christianity but why the crucifixion and does the evidence show the Messiah did in fact die on a cross?
1. **The Biblical Narrative hinges on the Crucifixion**
	1. Before investigating the events surrounding Jesus’ apparent death, one needs to understand why a Messianic death by crucifixion is important to the biblical narrative. As we have already mentioned, the bible itself falls apart unless the crucifixion is true.
	2. This is true for several reasons:
		1. God Himself stated that the Messiah would die on a cross
		2. The curse of the OT Law is said to be solved by the crucifixion
		3. The act of the crucifixion is said to fulfill the OT
		4. Through the crucifixion, the problem of sin is solved
		5. The NT teaches that the crucifixion is a prerequisite for eternal life
		6. All the NT authors/saints believe and teach in the crucifixion
	3. Without the reality of these aspects, Christianity becomes nothing more than a glorified lie and a farce that preaches and teaches people to believe and follow something it itself cannot follow through nor hold together.
	4. This is, of course, not what Christians profess to have faith in but it must be stated that without the crucifixion and the reality of a Messianic death, all the above would have to be at the very least considered be somewhat true if not the absolute truth. So, with this in mind we turn to what may perhaps be one of the greatest questions in human history.
2. **Did Jesus really die by crucifixion?**
	1. All four NT gospels detail in length, the crucifixion of Jesus who they all claimed to be the Christ by providing supporting evidence throughout their stories including aspects such as miracles, teachings and eyewitness testimony.
	2. Crucifixion was probably developed by the Persians around the 5th-4th century B.C. It later became infamous as a Roman practice of execution to non-Roman citizens that served to dissuade criminals from committing the heinous crimes their compatriots (turned victims) did.
	3. The crucifixion was considered to be an especially demeaning and humiliating death perfected by the Romans to execute 100% of the criminals they determined worthy of such a death via maximum anguish and slow asphyxiation.
	4. With this in mind, the crucifixion of Jesus in the bible is usually seen in a controversial light because:
		1. The NT authors/followers claim that Jesus was innocent and free from sin (He wasn’t the usual heinous villain)
		2. Why would someone claiming to be God allow this to happen?
		3. If there is any truth to Jesus’ appearances after His supposed death, something was off about His crucifixion process
	5. These aspects are typically brought up by skeptics, atheists and unbelievers in general as objections to the truth about a Messianic death by crucifixion. The doctrine of the Resurrection is so mind blowing and faith altering that a common practice to explain why Jesus was alive after the crucifixion is to find flaws in the apparent brutal death.
	6. Evidence does in fact indicate that because the crucifixion wasn’t tailored to execute immediately, survival was a possibility. This is true and even seen today by those who seek to crucify themselves non-lethally to pay homage to Christ’s death.
	7. But from a biblical, Roman-historical standpoint, there is no evidence that would indicate that Romans failed to execute their criminals or those given over to them for executions. Romans were professionals in this particular aspect and if the goal was to kill someone after maximum pain and torture, they succeeded.
	8. The Roman historian, Tacitus himself confirms that Jesus did in fact die by crucifixion calling it the *“extreme penalty”* he suffered at the hands of Pontius Pilate (*Annals*, 15.44). Tacitus’ testimony confirms a Messianic death by crucifixion without incident.
	9. The Jewish historian, Josephus also supports Jesus dying by crucifixion since he himself talked to eyewitness and lived in Jerusalem where all these events climaxed. Josephus not only confirms the crucifixion but also that it happened exactly as the NT authors state (*Antiquities*, 18.3.3).
	10. It’s clear that these non-Christian sources have no bias but not even the gospel writers themselves reported the events without proper investigative techniques. Luke for example in writing to Theophilus explains his process of compiling the gospel story in Luke 1:1-4.
	11. By and large the evidence does in fact point to Jesus dying by crucifixion on the cross. Non-Christian and Christian sources agree on this and there is usually only a problem with the crucifixion account because of the doctrine of the Resurrection.

**Sources:**

McDowell, J. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999.