

## “The Son of Man must be lifted up.” John 3:14

This was such a constant part of Jesus’ message that at one point the whole crowd were asking “How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” John 12:34

The Son of Man is clearly Jesus:

*Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36 He answered, “And **who is he**, sir, that I may believe in him?” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and **it is he who is speaking to you.**”* John 9:35-37

But what does it mean that “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up?”

*Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. <sup>5</sup>And **the people spoke against God** and against Moses: “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” <sup>6</sup>So **the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people**, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.*

*<sup>7</sup>Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.*

*<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “**Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.**” <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, **if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.***

Numbers 21:4-9

Jesus is saying three things:

i. That He is the source of rescue.

*“**Salvation is found in no one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”* Acts 4:12

ii. That He would have to become a curse.

***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us**, for it is written [in Deuteronomy 21:23]: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”* Galatians 3:13

iii. That because of what He will do, the solution will be simple.

*“**Turn to Me and be saved**, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.”* Is. 45:22

The Israelites were facing three problems:

i. the fiery serpents [which represent the devil cf. Genesis 3]

ii. the wrath of God [“*the LORD sent...*”]

iii. themselves [ie. their constant discouragement, grumbling and resultant angering of God]

And indeed these are the problems that Jesus’ death on the cross has overcome for all who believe.

We’ll tackle the first two in this session on the necessity of the cross, and the third in the next on the necessity of being born again.

## Overcoming the Enemy

*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him...And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and **have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and **over every living thing that moves on the earth.**” Gen 1:27-28*

But that original sin gave our dominion away to the devil:

*“And the devil took him [Jesus, during the wilderness temptation] up and showed him **all the kingdoms of the world** in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give **all this authority and their glory**, for it **has been delivered to me**, and I give it to whom I will.” (Luke 4:5-7)*

*“Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For **only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.** Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.” (Hebrews 2:14-15, NLT)*

But after his death and resurrection, *“Jesus came and said to them, ‘**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** Go **therefore...**’ (Matthew 28:18)*

Now, Jesus’ victory is decisive, yet incomplete. On the one hand, “It is **finished!**” (John 19:30) ; but “The God of peace will **soon** crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20)

## Overcoming the wrath of God

I think it’s helpful to distinguish forgiveness (personal), pardon (legal), and reconciliation (relational).

**Forgiveness** is the intentional and voluntary process [and decision!] by which a victim of injustice undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, lets go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well. Forgiveness is different from condoning (failing to see the action as wrong and in need of forgiveness), excusing (not holding the offender as responsible for the action), pardoning (granted by a representative of society, such as a judge), forgetting (removing awareness of the offense from consciousness), and reconciliation (restoration of a relationship). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgiveness> (10/10/2015)

So in God’s case, His mercy means He has always been immediately forgiving—  
but His justice means He could not legally pardon sin until Jesus died for our sins.

*And the Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, “The LORD, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, but **by no means clearing the guilty**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6-7)*

**Transgression:** Breaking a rule or law.

*“...where there is **no law there is no transgression**”*

Romans 4:15b

**Sin:** Falling short of a standard.

*“for **all have sinned and fall short** of the glory of God”*

Romans 3:23

**Iniquity:** The consequences of sin: including brokenness, guilt, punishment—and more sin!

*“Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity...**”*

Psalms 51:5a

*“We have sinned **with our fathers**, We have **committed iniquity**, We have done wickedly.” Psalm 106:6*

(Hence iniquity is ‘visited upon’ the third and fourth generation. Ex.34:7b)

The question of Jesus' overcoming the wrath of God is a controversial one – some have even described the idea as 'cosmic child abuse'. But there are four clear truths:

i. It was Necessary; ii. It was Agony; iii. It was Voluntary; iv. It's a Mystery.

### It was Necessary

The simple explanation is that the cross was necessary to pay the legal penalty of sin:

For **the wages of sin is death...** Romans 6:23a

Truly **no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of a soul is costly and can never suffice... But God will ransom my soul from the power of the grave, for he will receive me.** Psalm 49:7-8, 15

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and **to give his life as a ransom for many.**" Mark 10:45

For **God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.** By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled...** Romans 8:3-4

We can be tempted to deny the necessity of the cross -- and this is a demonic lie.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man **must** suffer many things... Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But...He rebuked Peter, saying, **"Get behind Me, Satan!"** Mark 8:31-33

The impossibility of salvation being accomplished other than by the cross is established beyond doubt by Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, **if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.** Yet not as I will, but as you will."... He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, **if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.**" Matthew 26:39,42 (cf. Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42)

### It was Agony

We need to account for the extreme spiritual agony evidently experienced by Jesus on the cross:

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** Mark 15:34

We can meditate on the excruciating physical pain of crucifixion, but that alone does not account for Jesus' suffering. Christian martyrs have been crucified and remained joyful in the midst of torture.

Even contemplating the cross in prayer was agonising:

And He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, **take this cup away from Me;** nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And **being in agony** He was praying very fervently; and **His sweat became like drops of blood,** falling down upon the ground. Luke 22:44

So what was 'this cup' that Jesus was referring to?

Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: **"Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them."** Jeremiah 25:15-29

For in the hand of the LORD **there is a cup with foaming wine,** well mixed, and he pours out from it, and **all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.** Psalm 75:8

*He will rain coals on the wicked; **fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.**  
For the Lord is righteous...* Psalm 11:6-7a

(see also Isaiah 51:17,22-23 ; Isaiah 63:3-6 ; Ezekiel 23:31-33 ; Habakkuk 2:16 ; Revelation 14:6-12)

We have to face the difficult subject of divine wrath:

*...what shall we say? **Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?** (I speak in a human way.) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?* Romans 3:5b-6

Note: Jesus spoke about hell more than anyone else (Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 5:21-30; Matt. 18:8-9; Luke 16:19-31).

### It was Voluntary

This is an adequate answer to the accusation of 'cosmic child abuse'. Jesus willingly, knowingly, voluntarily went to the cross to be crucified – for us!

*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but **I lay it down of my own accord.*** John 10:17-18a

*"My Father, if possible, may this cup be taken from me. **Yet not as I will, but as you will.**"* Matt.26:39

*Jesus told Peter " Sheathe your sword! **Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?**"* Jn. 18:11

*... Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross,**  
despising the shame...* Hebrews 12:2a

### It's a Mystery

Lest over-simplistic theology makes us harsh and judgemental, we also need to remember that "**Even angels long to look into these things**" 1 Peter 1:12

The problem with 'Punitive Substitution' is that, at least humanly speaking, Justice does not allow someone to be actively punished for another's crime. This is the difference between criminal law and civil law: one can pay another's penalty ('Penal Satisfaction'), but not suffer their punishment.

Part of the problem is that human analogies can only go so far to explain supernatural realities.

Jesus didn't just die to pay the penalty for our sin, he 'became sin':

**God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us..** 2 Corinthians 5:21

And if we're honest with ourselves, we don't fully know what this means! Even Paul didn't.

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ,** and to make all see what is the fellowship of **the mystery,** which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now **the manifold [πολυποικίλος (polypoikilos) – 'many-coloured', 'multi-faceted'] wisdom of God** might be made known... Ephesians 3:8-10*

Fortunately, we don't have to fully understand it –

we just have to believe it, experience it, and testify to it.

*But we preach Christ crucified, a **stumbling block** to Jews and **folly** to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God....* 1 Corinthians 1:23

May I never lose the wonder, the wonder of the cross  
May I see it like the first time, standing as a sinner lost  
Undone by mercy and left speechless, watching wide eyed at the cost  
May I never lose the wonder, the wonder of the cross