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Why did Jesus die? In its simplest form, the answer is “because he was human.” Human beings die. We are dust, and to dust we shall return. When our Lord deigned to become human, emptying himself, he also took on the ultimate fate of us human beings – death. Death is a reality for all born of woman. If our Lord is to be the Incarnate Word, then he must at some point die. Our salvation comes about because of his incarnation. By becoming flesh, our Lord makes a connection between the human and divine that is unique, non-repeatable, and salvific. By bridging the gap between God and humanity, the Lord Christ makes a way for us mere creatures to be part of the Creator.

There is not just one aspect of Jesus' incarnation that is salvific. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension are all components of God's plan to draw all of creation into God's self. Some atonement theories place an emphasis on the sacrificial nature of the Crucifixion. In trying to reconcile Temple cultic activity of sacrifice with the experience of Jesus Christ, there are Biblical passages that can be read as substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus must make a blood sacrifice of himself in order to propitiate God's favor despite God's just wrath at his creatures. It is a way of looking at atonement, but not always the most useful way.

The Incarnation of the Word of God was salvific in and of itself. No more was required than that. Jesus could have quietly lived out his life and died peacefully in his sleep surrounded by his family, and it would have been just as good as what did happen. But God is not one to waste such an opportunity. If God was going to be Incarnate as a human being, God was going to use the event to its fullest extent. In the person of Jesus Christ, we experience God as fully as is possible for mere human beings. We experience God as a loving, compassionate, forgiving, giving, open, passionate, kind, and generous being. No more is God the unassailable, unapproachable king enthroned beyond human reach or understanding. He is the person who takes on the sins of the world for the sake of the world.

The paradox is that God is still that Being beyond knowing, but God has made himself known. St. Augustine struggled to put this concept in to words in his *Confessions*. “Since, then, thou dost fill the heaven and earth, do they contain thee? Or, dost thou fill and overflow them, because they cannot contain thee? And where dost thou pour out what remains of thee after heaven and earth are full? ... But when thou dost fill all things, dost thou fill them with thy whole being? Or, since not even all things together could contain thee altogether, does any one thing contain a single part, and do all things contain that same part at the same time? Do singulars contain thee singly? Do greater things contain more of thee, and smaller things less? Or, is it not rather that thou art wholly present everywhere, yet in such a way that nothing contains thee wholly?”

Our Lord Jesus Christ spent his life ministering to others in the name of God. When he fed the hungry, it was for God's glory. When he healed the sick, the lame, the blind, and the deaf, it was for

God's glory. When he raised the dead to new life, it was to glorify God. And when he gave himself up to death on the cross, it was for our sake and to God's glory. We would have been just as saved if Jesus of Nazareth had died peacefully in his sleep, but it would not have been as powerful a statement of God's overwhelming love for us. Our free salvation was paid for at great cost by God himself. He suffered not only death, but an unjust death meted out by a corrupt system for the selfish needs of a small minority.

And in doing that. Our Lord stands in solidarity with all those who suffer unjustly. All those who cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" With all those who are cast aside, ground underfoot, exploited, reviled, ridiculed, denied, betrayed, forgotten, hated. Our Lord died for them. For those who did not know what they are doing, our Lord died. For those who orchestrated his death, he died. For those yet born and those long dead, he died. For those who would never understand the perfect love of God, he died. For you and for me, he died.

Our Lord died because he chose to be human. He chose to be human because of his immeasurable love for us. He died a painful and humiliating death so that he could show his triumph over even that. God can redeem anything. All of our suffering and selfishness; all of our pain and punishment; all of our trials and treatment of others; God can redeem it all. God can transform it into victory. There is nothing outside the power of God to redeem and call back into perfect communion with him.

Did Jesus have to die on the cross for us? No. He chose to. He chose to because that was the fullest way to show his love for us. By willingly suffering the worst that we humans can do to each other, our Lord showed his great love for us. And in response, we remember the words from our reading from Hebrews. "Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through [his flesh], and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together ... but encouraging one another." In the name of the father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*