

Whom does the cross of Christ save?

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Introduction

- ❖ During Holy Week we focus on the cross
- ❖ Raises questions over who does the cross of Christ save? What about:
 - Family members who do not profess to be Christians?
 - People who are devout followers of other faiths, like Mohammed?
 - Devout Christians with unorthodox beliefs, like Michael?
- ❖ Tonight we explore the question of “Whom does the cross of Christ save?”
- ❖ But first we must ask “For whom did Christ die?”
- ❖ In theological terms, the extent of salvation and the extent of atonement, respectively.
- ❖ While we do that, think about those for whose salvation you are concerned.

A prayer for them.

Heavenly Father, we bring to you all whom we love,
Knowing that your love for them is so much greater than ours,
And that your will for them is all that is for their good.
So, guard them in your keeping, O Lord,
And give them now and always your richest blessing,
For Jesus Christ’s sake. **Amen**

Holy Spirit of God, invisible like the wind,
We do not see you moving among us, but your effect we see;
Come to the hearts of those whom we love,
That they may be renewed and reborn.
Open their minds that they may see your kingdom;
Lift up their eyes to where the cross of Christ stands for their healing;
That they might believe,
And in believing not die but have eternal life;
Through your Son who in your love for us
You sent into the world, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

O Lord, we cry to you from the depths of our being:
Let your ears be open as we plead for mercy.
If you kept a record of our sins none of us could stand before you;
But you alone can forgive us, therefore we come to you in awe.
Lord, we wait on you and in your promise we put our hope;
Through our saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Extent of Atonement

- ❖ Atonement = at-one-ment.
- ❖ The work of Christ, particularly through the cross, to reconcile people to God
- ❖ Two main views on the question, “For whom did Christ die?”
- ❖ **Particular Atonement.** Christ died only for the elect, for those whom God has chosen to be saved.
- ❖ Linked with the doctrine of predestination, that some are predestined/elected to be saved, while others are not.
- ❖ Idea is that God first determined who to elect and who to not elect, and then put into action Christ’s saving work. (Supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism) Why would God waste Christ’s blood on people God had already decided not to save? Thus also called ‘limited atonement’.
John 10. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, and I lay down my life for the sheep. You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.
- ❖ From this passage, it seems that Christ did not die for all sheep, but only for his own sheep.
- ❖ **Universal Atonement.** Christ died for all people, for the whole of humanity whom God desires to save.
- ❖ If Christ died only for the elect, it seems insincere to offer salvation to all people, when we know that some may not be covered at all by Christ’s atoning work.
- ❖ Eg
Isaiah 49:6. It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. (Also Is 53)
John 12:32. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.
1 John 2:1-2. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.
1 Timothy 4:10. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.
- ❖ **Conclusions.** The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is for unlimited or universal atonement – Christ died for everyone.
- ❖ This means that the possibility exists for the reconciliation of every person with God – no one falls outside of Christ’s saving work.
- ❖ This is the evidence of God’s great love for humanity and radical grace.
- ❖ God is not so stingy to atone for only a small group of ‘elect’. Rather God is generous and hopeful, dying for everyone with the hope that everyone will respond to Christ’s saving work.
- ❖ The God of universal atonement is thus much larger than the God of limited atonement.

Let us give thanks for God's enormous act of love.

Almighty God and gracious heavenly Father, we are overwhelmed that you love the world so much that you did not spare your only Son, but gave him for us all. We rejoice that he came, revealing your ceaseless love and your mercy. We praise you that, though he is the eternal Lord, he took our human flesh and lived among us as perfect man. To see him and to understand him is our greatest joy and fulfillment.

We thank you for his coming, his teaching, and his life. And praise you that he went through death, bearing all our sins; that we might be forgiven and brought back to eternal life, and that we might live in the warmth of your inexhaustible love. As we give you thanks, we give our lives to you afresh this day. Breathe new life and power into us, confirm our faith and establish us in your service, that Jesus' loving and giving may be seen in us, for your glory. We pray in Christ's name, **Amen**

Heavenly Father, we come before you with thanksgiving for all your mercy and your grace:

For the beauty of the world around us,
We bring you our love **and give you our thanks and praise.**

For our parents, our spouses, our children and our families,
We bring you our love **and give you our thanks and praise.**

For work and play, for food and clothes,
We bring you our love **and give you our thanks and praise.**

For the joy of friends, and for the happiness we share,
We bring you our love **and give you our thanks and praise.**

But most of all, for your Son Jesus Christ, for his wonderful birth, for the example of his life, for his death on the cross to save us, for raising him from the dead to be our Living Lord, and for sending upon us your Holy Spirit,
We bring you our love **and give you our thanks and praise.**

Help us to serve you gladly and faithfully all our days
Until you call us to worship you in heaven,
We bring you our love **and give you our thanks and praise. Amen**

Extent of Salvation

- ❖ So, who will in the end be saved?
- ❖ Does universal atonement lead us to universal salvation, that all will be saved in the end?
- ❖ **Ourselves.** Start with ourselves – we who love Christ and accept his Lordship over our lives
- ❖ We are most certainly saved.
- ❖ Who has sinned this week? All hands up! Still, you are saved, because Christ’s atoning work covers those sins.
- ❖ Who sometimes have doubts, questions and uncertainties about the Christian faith? All hands up! Still, you are saved, because our salvation is located in our relationship with Christ not in the correctness of our beliefs.
1 Cor 12:13 (AV). For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
New Living Translation. Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.
- ❖ **And the Rest?** Those who have heard the gospel message, but rejected it; those who have not heard; those who devoutly follow other faiths – are they lost?
- ❖ The Bible does not appear to support the idea of universal salvation – that everyone will eventually be saved – though we should not discard this possibility. The Bible does speak of people perishing.
Matthew 13:49-50. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
(6 times Matthew says “weeping & gnashing of teeth”)
- ❖ However, let us reflect on what we know about God:
 - God’s love is huge, far greater than we can imagine
John 3:16-17. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.
 - God’s intention is universal salvation
Eph 1:9-10. God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.
 - God’s justice is fair and all-seeing
Luke 16:15. Jesus said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”
 - Christ intercedes on behalf of all humanity
Luke 23:34. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”
- ❖ So, we can trust God, that God will make fair and loving decisions about who is saved and who is not.
- ❖ **Conclusion.** But let us not be complacent. Being a Christian has certain advantages:
 - We have present confidence in our salvation.
 - We have a here&now relationship with the living and loving God
- ❖ And so, with hope and confidence, we can continue to pray for those we love, to witness to those we love, that there is a loving God who desires to be in relationship with all of humanity.

Let us pray for the salvation of the whole world:

Almighty Father

You have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth

And sent your blessed Son to preach peace

To those who are far off and to those who are near:

Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you;

Bring the nations into your fold;

Pour out your Spirit upon all flesh

And hasten the coming of your kingdom;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Let us pray for the salvation of those whom we love.

Lord Jesus Christ, saviour of the world,

we pray for those whom we love and who do not know you.

Soul of Christ, sanctify them.

Body of Christ, save them.

Blood of Christ, refresh them.

Water from the side of Christ, wash them.

Passion of Christ, strengthen them.

O good Jesus, hear us.

Within your wounds hide them.

Let them never be separated from you.

From the malicious enemy defend them.

In the hour of their death, call them and bid them come to you,

That with your saints they may praise you for ever and ever. **Amen**

Let us pray for ourselves:

O God our parent, you love us with an everlasting love.

May that love which you have invested in our lives,

Reveal itself in increasing loyalty to you, in the service of others

And in creating an atmosphere of helpfulness and joy.

May we reflect your own love,

and so influence people to consider Jesus Christ as the hope of the world,

and confess him as their saviour and Lord. **Amen**