

# Jesus: Why?

Part V of V

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”

John 17:1

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"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Matthew 5:17

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:10

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

John 10:10

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# We need a Why

WHY? WHY ME? WHY THIS? WHY NOW? The “why” question gets at the heart of what it means to be human. It is the question that gets at our purpose, our reason for existing. Everyone asks it at one time or another. Even Jesus asked it, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Many stop asking it once they feel they have not received a good answer.

In this vein, I came across a quote this week from of all people Friedrich Nietzsche. “He whose life has a ‘why’ can bear almost any ‘how.’” I wanted to know the context, so I began searching. It is actually a proverbial statement that he writes as one of many in a series he called “Maxims and Arrows.”<sup>1</sup> Because of this, it is hard to find a larger context. But I found someone who attempted it.

First, perhaps you may recall another maxim of his: “God is dead. ~ Nietzsche.” Unfortunately, because most people are acquainted with the statement only from bathroom stalls where someone then cleverly vandalizes in permanent marker or with a knife blade, “‘Nietzsche is dead.’ ~

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<sup>1</sup> I found it in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Arcadia Ebook): Maxim and Arrows: 12.

God,” they are under the impression that Nietzsche actually thought we killed God.

Nietzsche was an atheist. But what he meant by the phrase was that modern man no longer sees a reason to believe in God. The “killing” is cultural rather than literal. We sort of “grew up” I guess he would say. But, since God is the bedrock upon which 2,000 plus years Western Civilization has been building, it must all come toppling to the ground. He admitted this. In other words, he wrote this as a [lamentation](#).

He thought that as a culture everything would turn nihilistic, meaningless, relativistic, and immoral, and he didn't like that thought of where that might lead. Nietzsche hoped that the philosophers and other “[free spirits illuminated by a new dawn](#)” would help the poor pathetic ignorant and superstitious masses reinvent the foundation of a new civilization, in the words of one Nietzsche blogger, “[upon and affirmation of life](#)”<sup>2</sup> (because, apparently, Christianity does not affirm life).

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<sup>2</sup> [Scotty Hendricks](#), “God is Dead’: What Nietzsche Really Meant,” *Big Think* (Aug 12, 2016), <https://bigthink.com/scotty-hendricks/what-nietzsche-really-meant-by-god-is-dead>. The quote comes from the video linked on the page.

In fact, his prophecy was dead on. We are living today in [the rubble of the philosophical bombs left](#) by the great thought explosions of the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries “isms” (Rationalism, Existentialism, Communism, Utilitarianism, Naturalism, Nihilism, etc.) and the bloodiest century in all of human history (the 20<sup>th</sup>) that came in their wake. Make no mistake, Nietzsche was no friend of Christianity. In fact, he attacked it relentlessly. Thus, commenting on the first quote someone writes,

Nietzsche’s assault on Christianity was on a religion of pity that glorifies weakness [Nietzsche is famous for having popularized yet another word: *Übermensch* or *Superman*]. I first encountered Nietzsche’s ideas in 1958 while reading Victor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl several times cites Nietzsche as saying that “*he who has a why to life can bear almost any how.*” I thought that was a strong apology for Christianity and I did not realize until reading Nietzsche that it is his point of attack. Nietzsche accuses Christianity of glorifying suffering by giving it a meaning. The priest class encourages weakness and suffering; the poor are kept in place by the

promises of a reward hereafter for sufferings patiently borne.<sup>3</sup>

This is very revealing. It turns out that Nietzsche did not like Christianity's "why" answer. I believe Paul speaks directly to him 1800 years earlier when he called our answer "the foolishness of God" (1Co 1:25), "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (23).

With this said, let's address in this final sermon on the "Ws" of Jesus the ultimate existential and practical question. Why? Why did he come here? Why did he do the things that he did? Why would he suffer when he was blameless? Why would he put up with you and I and the rest of this rebellious world?

I'm going to answer the question by looking at three related things. First, the "why" concerning his Father. Second, Jesus' own personal "why." Third, the "why" that pertain to you and me. This is my attempt at a Trinitarian answer to the question, because all things—especially the coming of Jesus—originate in them. My prayer is that after hearing

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<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Moran, *Fashioning a People Today: The Educational Insights of Maria Harris* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007)131.

these things, you will know and understand the only answer God gives you that can satisfy your deepest longings, solve your most difficult questions, and give you hope in a civilization filled with increasing external evil and chaos. People may not like it, people who are full of pride and their own intelligence and self-importance, but as history always shows and is doing so in ways that are beyond the worst nightmares anyone living 100 years ago could have predicted, it remains as true now as it ever has been.

## Why: Jesus and His Father

When Jesus was about to die, he began to offer up his longest recorded prayer with these words, “*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you*” (John 17:1). This will be our key verse this morning. *The glory of God* becomes *the great reason* that Jesus would die on the cross. The Father sent the Son for this purpose. For his part, the Son did this, he says, so that he might bring glory to the Father. It is a perfect desire to glorify Another. It is *the ultimate act of Love*.

You see, everything Jesus did, he did as a faithful Son for his loving heavenly Father. “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (4), he goes on to pray. And indeed, Jesus tells us at the beginning of his ministry that this is exactly why he came saying, “Do not think that I have come to [this is the why question, why did you come Jesus?] abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17). This was his work. *Fulfilling the Law and Prophets* means accomplishing the work the Father sent him to do. Our Lord said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38).

Here you need to understand the **active and passive obedience** of Christ. It is tempting to think that the active obedience refers to Christ’s life while his passive obedience refers to his death on the cross. In fact, the terms refer to his entire ministry from beginning to end. All of his work is both active and passive simultaneously.

**The active obedience** means that Christ met and fulfilled the demands of the law positively (he obeyed), including dying as a sacrifice. **The passive obedience** means that he un-

dertook all so that he might take the curse and condemnation due for your sin (he met the penal requirements of God's law when it is broken), and this means he had to come as a human born under law.<sup>4</sup>

You also need to think here about things like **types and prophecies**. Many things were predicted of the Messiah and each time something new was fulfilled, it glorified the Father who knows all things and predestines all things according to the purpose of his will. Sometimes those were carried out passively by Jesus (such as his place of birth or going down to Egypt). Other times they were carried out actively by him, such as his willingly going to the cross. At all times, it was through the love of the Father and the overshadowing of the Spirit. All was done to glorify God.

This is in my estimation the first reason why Jesus did all that he did. That is what he himself seems to tell us. It is the First Commandment after all—to have no other God before Yahweh. Thus, he would not give any glory to anyone else

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<sup>4</sup> A good short study on this is **Justin Taylor**, “What Is the Difference between the ‘Active’ and the ‘Passive’ Obedience of Christ?” *The Gospel Coalition* (June 19, 2012), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/what-is-the-difference-between-the-active-and-the-passive-obedience-of-christ/>. In it, he gives some great quotes from the likes of **John Murray** and **Louis Berkhof**.

first. He would glorify his God—his Father in heaven. It is why he did what he did.

This is central and foundational, because it means that if Jesus carried out all of his “hows” through this “why,” then should not this be the reason you do all things too? What changes would occur in the church, in families, in schools, in governments if everyone began doing all that they did because they knew from the Scripture that this is what pleased God? Virtually no one even thinks of this reason these days, because we don’t teach it, and I wonder how many even know it to believe it. But I promise you, if you did everything you ever did from here on out with only this reason for why you were doing it, all of those things you worry about, fret about, and struggle with would take on a completely different perspective in your heart. As Jesus himself shows you when as he is about to willingly hand himself over to the authorities he prays, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). And off in the strength of the glory of God he went to face his greatest ordeal.

## Why: Jesus and Himself

But “God” includes himself too. In fact, Jesus came to this earth because of something that *he wanted*, and believe me when I tell you that he didn’t want to die. It was something else. Think of the Psalm. “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:8). This is what the Father said to the Son. This presupposes that the Son thought, “Yes, Father, I want that! Give those things to me!”

What is asking for “the ends of the earth to be your own possession” if not a desire for glory? Jesus says in the text we just looked at that he wants to glorify the Father. But he begins by asking, “Father, glorify the Son” (John 17:1). This is Jesus asking the Father for Psalm 2:8 and other passages to be his. He calls it his own glory. “Father, glorify me. Give me all these nations, make them my possession. Exalt me to your right hand. Cause me to be the King of kings. Make all things in heaven and earth subject to me.”

Have you ever thought about it like this? I don’t believe it is common for people to think that Jesus came to this earth because he wanted something for himself, especially not his

own glory. Instead, it is probably much more often the case that we think he did this because of someone else. While we have already seen that this is true (he came because his Father wanted him to), it is important to understand that Jesus came here of his own volition because **there were things that he wanted.**

This means that everything Jesus did, he did not just from a motivation of glorifying his Father, but because he greatly desired to be King of heaven and earth. This was his rightful birthright, if you want to call it that, even though he is the only-begotten eternal Son of God. Imagine if Jesus gave this birthright to another (say, to Satan the “prince of this world”)?

Have you ever heard of Edward VIII? Edward reigned as king of England for less than a year before he abdicated the throne. One site explains,

Edward was the most popular Prince of Wales Britain has ever had. Consequently when he renounced the throne to marry Mrs. Wallis Simpson the country found it almost impossible to believe. The people as a whole knew nothing about Mrs. Simpson until early in December 1936. Mrs.

Simpson was an American, a divorcee and had two husbands still living. This was unacceptable to the Church, as Edward had stated that he wanted her to be crowned with him at the Coronation which was to take place the following May. Edward abdicated in favour of his brother [George VI] and took the title, Duke of Windsor. He went to live abroad.<sup>5</sup>

Though the most popular prince up to that point in history, history does not remember Edward fondly. Abdicating the throne is not good, much less is breaking church law because of your personal whims and fancies. How much more if Jesus had disobeyed his Father or decided he just didn't want the throne that was rightly his?

To receive this throne which would become his glory, Jesus would seek it not by glorifying himself, but by glorifying others. This is the backwards nature of the kingdom of heaven from the kingdoms of men. From celebrities to athletes to politicians (unless they are the wrong party), we honor those in our culture who seek their own glory. It's why narcissism is pandemic. The more you glorify yourself, if you can back it up, the more money you make, the more

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Johnson, "Kings and Queens of England & Britain," *Historic UK*, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/KingsQueensofBritain/>.

popular you become. There are a few who break this trend by doing what they do for the glory of others, but these are looked upon as quaint aberrations. Why would they do that?

Our world knows little of self-sacrifice for the sake of others, in part, because the greatest message of self-sacrifice for others has nearly been silenced first and foremost through self-imposed silence in the pulpits who talk about anything these days but the one message that gives the most profound “why” answer a human can ever hear.

## Why: Jesus and the Spirit

To begin to get at this answer, I want you to think about the means by which Christ’s work comes to you—the Holy Spirit. The Apostle contrasts two ministries: the ministry of the law through Moses and the ministry of reconciliation through the Holy Spirit. “Will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?” he asks (2Co 3:8). He concludes, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (3:18).

There is a glory that belongs to the Holy Spirit, and it is the Glory of God to glorify the Spirit. This happens, we are told, when God gives his Holy Spirit to anyone who is justified by faith in Christ. “Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37).

The Spirit will glorify the Son, by taking what is Christ’s and declaring it to you (John 16:14). Then, incredibly, the Spirit will glorify us with Christ as we partake in his sufferings, suffering for his Name (Rom 8:14-18). In this way, the Spirit is glorified as God rests upon you (1Pe 4:14). But this happens all because Jesus says when, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” (John 14:16), “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my Name” (26). And “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me” (15:26). This is Jesus’ work as it concerns the Spirit and he does it for you. Thus, the ultimate question we need to ask is why would he do this?

## Why: Jesus and You and I

There is a serious problem that you and I have. We have “all fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). This is the exact opposite of Jesus Christ. I mentioned a moment ago that this world knows little of self-sacrifice. The Apostle Paul knew the same truth and said, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die” (Rom 5:7). But he immediately goes on to say in a verse we looked at under the “when” question, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (8).

For the rest of our time, I want to focus in on the event Jesus prayed about in our key verse: His Death. “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” That hour was the hour of his death, an event he had been predicting for three years in various ways, which no one seemed to understand.

It is truly remarkable that God tells you in his word that you have fallen short, yet still, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” (John 3:16). This tells you first and foremost about God, not yourself. But, when understood in

light of yourself, it shines that much more light upon God. Why would God do this? In many ways, the answer to that lies in his heart alone. Nevertheless, it is true, and it is a truth to be shouted from the rooftops. “The God I have forsaken loves me? Yes, the God I have forsaken loves me!”

Let’s look at the context of this most famous of verses. **John 3:16** is preceded by **14-15**. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” This refers to his death. But so that you see that it is the death of Jesus where the love of God in sending his Son is most evidently seen, note the parallel:

- <sup>14a</sup> **As** Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
- <sup>14b</sup> so must **the Son** of Man be lifted up,
- <sup>15</sup> that **whoever** believes in him may have eternal life.
- <sup>16a</sup> **For** God so loved the world,
- <sup>16b</sup> that he gave **his only Son**,
- <sup>16c</sup> that **whoever** believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

You see, **John 3:16** refers directly to the death of Jesus on the cross where he is “lifted up.” So what is the death of Jesus about? Why did he die? Here I want to take a look at several

theories of the atonement that have been proposed in theology throughout church history.<sup>6</sup> Each shines a unique light through a different prism upon the same glory of God.

### *Moral Influence Theory*

I just brought up **Romans 5:8**. Again it says, “**God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” Here, we want to look at the first part. “**God shows his love for us.**” Based on this and other passages, some have concluded that Christ’s death is a kind of *moral influence* upon sinners and Christians.

Lewis and Demarest explain that the focus is on, “**The change of attitude Christ’s death produces in sinners.**”<sup>7</sup> This may or may not be true, depending upon the work of the Holy Spirit in a person through the Gospel. To put it an-

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<sup>6</sup> This is not exhaustive. I will not deal with the **Recapitulation Theory** (Justin, Irenaeus), the **Necessary-Satisfaction Theory** (Anselm), the **Optimal-Satisfaction Theory** (Aquinas), the **Mystical Theory** (Schleiermacher), nor will I will not split up the **Moral-Example theory** (Pelagius) into it and the **Moral-Influence Theory** (Abelard). On short slides for each of these see the presentation on Normal Geisler at <https://www.slideshare.net/robintgreene/chapters-59-60>.

<sup>7</sup> **Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest**, *Integrative Theology: Our Primary Need: Christ’s Atoning Provisions*, vol. 2, Integrative Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 373.

other way, most advocates of this theory are modern liberals. The originator of the idea was Pelagius. Most “propo-  
nents claim that there were no obstacles in God that needed  
to be overcome in order to restore sinners to fellowship with  
their Creator.” All people need is to see the example of Jesus  
and then lift themselves up by their own bootstraps.

This, of course, is deeply flawed. The problem comes  
(frankly in many of these views), when they deny that other  
aspects of the atonement are necessary (usually this involves  
a denial of penal substitution). Does it mean that the kernel  
they have latched onto is therefore wrong? Put another way,  
must this be an either/or?

Consider Peter. “For to this you have been called, be-  
cause Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,  
so that you might follow in his steps” (1Pe 2:21). In the past  
I have been critical of an old book that has gone through  
various stages of popularity called *In His Steps*. I’ve done this  
because the focus of that book is on the example of Jesus, as  
if he and his work are *only* an example and everything falls  
upon you to follow it. But does it follow that because major  
theology is missing that Christ’s death is *not* an example?  
Only if you want to throw Peter out of the Bible!

Clearly, Jesus' death is an example and a demonstration of God's love. And clearly this love is given, according to Scripture, that it might be an example for you to follow. The Spirit may use this as the Gospel is preached to reach the heart of a Christian who needs to be spurred on to good works their sanctification. "How can I sin like this when Jesus did this for me?" Thus, the work of Christ especially in his death is the great moral example. It is *part* of why he came.

## *Governmental Theory*

A second view of the atonement is called the **Governmental Theory**. The idea is that "Christ's sufferings ... uphold law and serve the interests of moral government."<sup>8</sup> In other words, it affirms that God is the Ruler who preserves moral government. A key verse here is **Isaiah 42:21**, "The Lord was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious" (admittedly, this verse isn't about Christ's death, but it was a key text used). Christ's death is

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis and Demarest, 376.

thus a viewed as an offering to God that displays divine justice. “It communicates God’s hatred of sin and strikes fear into the hearts of persons so that they will forsake evil and seek personal reformation.”<sup>9</sup> In this aspect, it is not unlike the Moral Influence Theory.

It is like it in another way in that it is usually held by people far to the left theologically. For example, the guy who brought it to prominence (Hugo Grotius) became the darling of later Arminians when “he insisted that Christ did not bear the full penalty of human sin, nor did he propitiate God’s wrath.”<sup>10</sup> Sometimes guys bring wrath upon their own heads when they are pig-headed like this. I get frustrated when professors and pastors, past or present, teach these things as either/or, because in creating the false dichotomy we lose something not only important, but biblical, by forcing us to choose against friends. This can also cause us to not listen to God’s word or to hear others who disagree with

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. I like my old profs’ book because it does a better job than most of doing the both/and of atonement theories.

us as we ought (even when they are themselves being obstinate, hard-headed, and downright hostile in the way they present a thing).<sup>11</sup>

This view has ramifications for an individual's life, the church's mission, and the way the world is to operate under God's law as his "sword" on earth. As we are seeing in our day, when nations lose total sight of Jesus' death, look at what happens in society. It totally disintegrates. Perhaps a better passage that gets these points across is, "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Php 1:29-30).

## *Satisfaction Theory*

None of this moral reformation of a person or the church or society would be possible, however, if the atonement didn't also have certain other components. This is

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<sup>11</sup> When you start to study this you quickly discover that almost everyone puts these into either/ors. For example, Matt Slick writes, "The correct position is the Substitutionary Atonement position." Why is there only *one* correct position? Why is it that we seem to think Jesus only did one thing at the cross? The Bible doesn't!

where things get much more interesting. The remaining three views that we will look at get at the more objective work of Christ and answer more deeply the “why” he came question for you. The first we will look at is called the [Satisfaction Theory](#).

This was the view of the great medieval theologian [Anselm](#). “Anselm claims that sin is the failure to render God his due, namely, entire subjection and obedience. When a person disobeys God and sins, he offends God’s honor and violates the divinely ordained order of the universe. God’s nature is such that he requires either satisfaction or punishment for sin.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, justice is at stake. Jesus said of his death, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!” ([Luke 12:49](#) NAS). [Hendriksen](#) comments, “The *fire* of which Jesus speaks in all probability refers to the judgment of God upon the sins of his people. That judgment would be rendered at Calvary. It is Jesus himself who will satisfy God’s justice and bear the punishment.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis and Demarest, , 375.

<sup>13</sup> [William Hendriksen](#) and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 681.

What this theory adds to the multi-faceted death of Christ is that **he satisfied the demands of justice**. “By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:14). The legal punishment for sin is death (Gen 2:17; Rom 3:2). Which sin? Whose sin? There is no distinction here. All sin and all sinners. Jesus’ death covers the legal debt for these. What did Christ do on the cross? He died. His death satisfies God’s *justice* for sin. Nothing else needs to be or can be done to make things right. His death is perfectly sufficient for everyone.

### *Christus Victor*

But Christ did yet more, and thank God. For it is if just a satisfaction, all would be left in their sins because there would be no power to break its bondage. The earliest and most well-known view in the first 1,000 years of church history is what is called **Christus Victor**. Essentially, this is Christ’s “**cosmic victory over sin, death, and Satan**.”<sup>14</sup> The classic text used for it in the Fathers is probably **Mark 10:45**,

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis and Demarest, 372.

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Many today poo-poo the idea that Christ would or could pay a ransom to Satan. I mean, God is the King. God is the one offended. What is Satan? Yet, people forget or do not know about divine council theology anymore, like they did in the early church. They forget that Satan offered to Jesus “all the kingdoms of the earth.” They don’t seem to remember he is called “the prince of the world.” They don’t understand that we are by nature children of wrath, slaves of the power of the prince of the air and darkness.

It isn’t that Satan had an *inherent* legal hold on humans. He isn’t God. Rather, it is that God gave humanity over to Satan at Babel, as Moses tells us in Deuteronomy and as Paul explains to the Athenians when he alludes to these passages ([Acts 17:26ff.](#)). Think of it like a covenant that men made with the devil at Babel—the first Faustian bargain.<sup>15</sup> As such, because men broke covenant with God and ran off to marry another, Satan has a legal hold on the nations (all except the nation of Israel, whom Yahweh took for his own

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<sup>15</sup> Faustian Bargain: “From the medieval legend of Faust, who made a contract with the devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures.

possession). Jesus' death, as an offering for the world, defeated that legal hold Satan had, thereby allowing Christ to legally save anyone he wanted without them having to become national Jews (they still have to become spiritual Jews). This is why he can “no longer deceive the nations” (Rev 20:8) and why “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given to the church (Matt 28:18), and the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18).

Two other Scriptures are important here. “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col 2:15). This refers to the heavenly powers and principalities we find so often mentioned in the NT. Second, “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). Similarly, directly answering the why question, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1Jn 3:8). This is Christus Victor! As the old song teaches:

Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes  
He arose a Victor from the dark domain ...

## *Substitutionary Atonement*

That song's next line says, “**And he lives forever with his saints to reign.**” This takes us to the last and perhaps most important aspect of the atonement, at least as far as you are personally concerned. We call Christ's death a **Substitutionary Atonement** for sinners. This is foreshadowed in the near death of Isaac on Mt. Moriah as a sacrifice. He was to be a sacrifice, but instead God graciously provided a ram that became a burnt offering “**in the place of his son**” (**Gen 22:13**). There could be only One human sacrifice for sins!

**Isaiah 53:4-5** tells us that, “**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted ... pierced for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” This is the heart and soul of substitutionary atonement. Christ dies in the place of sinners,**

bearing their punishment so that you could be saved! “He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2Co 5:21).

It is this substitutionary death—him for me—that becomes the basis for Jesus teaching, “It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:50). You see, all ancient peoples knew that God had set up a system whereby an innocent could appease the gods’ wrath. With the pagans, it became human sacrifice. God would have none of that, for only one man could die for others—it had to be a perfect man. But he did install animal sacrifices that would foreshadow this, while simultaneously showing the need for people to both be atoned and be atoned by something that is “perfect” or “unblemished.” This was all God’s grace.

So why? Here is where the rubber meets the road. “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He did not merely make it possible for men to be saved, should they believe upon him. He came to accomplish it through his entire life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, giving of the Spirit, and Second Coming. “This is the

will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (John 6:39). This is where the Holy Spirit becomes so important, for God does this by the Spirit who effectually calls all God’s elect as they hear the gospel that Jesus has done all things necessary for you to be forgiven of anything that you have done. It is the atoning death that makes this all possible.

As you think about these various aspects of Christ’s death, think about the offices of Christ that we spoke about under the “who” question. **As Prophet**, Jesus’ death encourages you to obey him and live for him (Moral Theory). It shows the entire world that he takes the law seriously in that he has upheld the law, even as societies and churches and individuals are also to do (Governmental Theory). **As Priest**, he mediates between man and God, offering himself as a sacrifice that uphold God’s holiness and justice (Satisfaction) and atones for your sins (Substitution). **As King**, he rules over this world (Governmental theory), having conquered the one who has the power over death (Christus Victor).

## Back to Nietzsche?

These are the things that Nietzsche and so many others cannot accept. Even many Christians do not want to have them all! There is foolishness here, foolishness to the way we would have done it. For we are glory seekers for glories sake. Nietzsche created a parody of Christianity in his mind, as all unbelievers do, and blew his strawman down like the big bad wolf in the Three Little Pigs. Why? Because he could not stomach **who** Christ was, he felt it weak **what** he had come to do, he ignored **where** he came to do it, **when** he did those things was wholly irrelevant. But most of all, he had created his own “**why**” to satisfy the “how” of his choosing.

People are always asking pastors the more practical questions like “**How do I \_\_\_\_\_,**” or “**where should I \_\_\_\_\_,**” or “**What do I do with \_\_\_\_\_.**” They want to know how to live. Rightly so. But as Nietzsche did get right, **you need the why** in order to root the rest. Indeed, he who has a why can bear with almost any how.

It was probably **Victor Frankl** who more than even Nietzsche made that quote famous. Frankl was a Jewish holocaust survivor who wrote down his experiences in a best seller called *Man's Search for Meaning*. In the first half he deals almost entirely with surviving the concentration camps (Wikipedia says he was in Auschwitz where his mother and brother were murdered, and two camps affiliated with Dachau). Someone writes, “He doesn’t go into detail about the ovens and gas chambers, instead he explores the mundane stuff of torture and why he didn’t “run into the wire” (electrocuting oneself on the fence was the preferred means of suicide). He became interested in why some people have resilience, even in the most difficult suffering.”<sup>16</sup> The author goes on to state a fascinating point. “Though it goes against all of our commonly held beliefs, the people who survived the concentration camps were not the toughest and sturdiest ... they were the ones who were sensitive and had developed an interior life upon which they could draw and into which they could withdraw.”

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<sup>16</sup> **Carol Howard Merritt**, “The Pastor’s Search for Meaning,” *Christian Century* (Aug 29, 2015), <https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-08/pastors-search-meaning>.

Frankl says this in as many words in his book. Immediately after quoting Nietzsche's, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*," he writes:

In the Nazi concentration camps, one could have witnessed that those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfill were most apt to survive ... As for myself, when I was taken to the concentration camp of Auschwitz, a manuscript of mine ready for publication was confiscated. Certainly, my deep desire to write this manuscript anew helps me to survive the rigors of the camps I was in. For instance, when in a camp in Bavaria I fell ill with typhus fever, I jotted down on little scraps of paper many notes intended to enable me to rewrite the manuscript, should I live to the day of liberation. I am sure that this reconstruction of my lost manuscript in the dark barracks of a Bavarian concentration camp assisted me in overcoming the danger of cardiovascular collapse.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, he had found his "why." He found the purpose for making it through the "how" of the death camps.

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<sup>17</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, 1992), 109-110.

Thing is, **Frankl was not a Christian** and this is hardly an eternal sort of satisfactory “why.” What? Just so you can write a book and hopefully make a name for yourself should you be rescued? Furthermore, perhaps even showing how fragile these man-made “why” answers can be, Frankl was not without serious controversy in the years after publication. Several scholars actually called into question just how grim his time in those camps actually was. It appears that he was hardly the bottom rung of the Jewish prisoner ladder—starved and worked nearly to death only to find himself gassed in an oven at the end. He was there, but were these experiences his own, or more just those he was observing?

My point is, when your “why” isn’t rooted upon the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ, his work and forgiveness and salvation on your own behalf, and the glory of God, then at the end of the day, if something gets in your way to fulfilling your own “how” through you own smuggled in “why” answer, very little will stop you from getting it. For it has become your reason for existing. Ethics, truth, goodness is all expendable. Just ask **Christine Blasey Ford** and **Brett Kavanaugh** as the latest high-profile case in point. Someone lied. And the cost is may very well be Western Civilization,

for at stake is one of the most foundational of all principles—presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Destroying this takes us right back to Salem witch trials and the burning of Christians for simply translating the Bible. No one is safe.

Beloved, know and be fully satisfied and personally invested in the “why” of Christ. That “why” roots and grounds for you, in your deepest heart, the who, what, where, and when of all that he has done. Why did Jesus come? “I came that you might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This in turn is the only thing that, by God’s grace, through the means of grace, and the Holy Spirit will enable you to go out here and carry out the “how” of your own salvation to the glory of God. For these questions encompass the totality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the power of God unto salvation.

Jesus said, “I have come into the world-- to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). Have you heard his voice calling you to repent of your sin and come to the Living God that you may have forgiveness of sins and life more abundant than you could ever dream or imagine? He is a magnificent perfect

Savior, God in the flesh, who accomplished all this and more, in the pages of Scripture in the land of Israel, long ago in real history, for you. The Spirit is calling you now. Do not be hardened in your heart, but turn to the living God and he will give you show you how the only “why” that matters can change your life.