

God Did Not Spare His Son: Romans 8:31-32

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We've read from John 19, the account of Jesus' death. I'm going to spend some time now talking about the theological significance of that historical event. Jesus died on the cross. What was the purpose of His death? What was the design in His death? What does His death mean for us today?

I'm going to read some verses from Romans 8, and then I want to look at two things briefly. First, God's role in the death of His Son. And secondly, God's design in the death of His Son.

God's Role in the Death of His Son

Look at the phrase "gave him up" in verse 32. This is an astonishing statement, that God the Father gave up His own beloved Son. He did not spare Him. He did not rescue Him out of the calamity. He did not provide a way of escape so that His Son could avoid torture and crucifixion. But, instead, He gave Him up to that destruction.

When we ask the question, "Who delivered Jesus over to death?" there are several correct answers. Judas Iscariot was the traitor among the disciples. He betrayed Jesus. Mark 3:19, where the names of the disciples are recorded, designates Judas in this way. He was the one who betrayed Jesus (handed Him over, *paradidōmi*).

And that same word, *paradidōmi*, showed up three times in our Scripture readings this evening (John 19). First of all, in verse 11 Jesus said to Pilate, "he who *delivered me over* to you has the greater sin." It was the Jewish leaders, Caiaphas the high priest, who delivered Jesus over to Pilate. They were shouting, "Crucify him, crucify him!" They cried out to Pilate, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend." The Jews delivered Jesus over to death.

Secondly, Pilate then, in his cowardice, gave in to the pressure, and he delivered Jesus over to them to be crucified (v. 16).

Thirdly, in verse 30 of John 19 Jesus said, " 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and *gave up* his spirit." It's the same verb there as in verse 11 and 16. Jesus voluntarily delivered Himself up to this death. He voluntarily gave up His life. Paul

says this in Galatians 2:20, saying that Christ “loved me and gave himself for me.” Again, the same verb.

And the same verb Paul uses in Romans 8:32 (which we’re going to come back to in just a moment).

So Judas delivered Jesus to death. The Jews delivered Jesus to death. Pilate delivered Him over to crucifixion. Jesus, Himself, gave up His life. [John Stott speaks of these points in his book, *The Cross of Christ*, which we’ll be discussing in our Theology Thursdays get-together on April 11th]

And the other very important piece of this picture is to recognize that God the Father delivered up His own Son to this horrific death.

Octavius Winslow, pastor in England in the 1800s: “Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy; - but the Father, for love!” (quoted in Stott, pg. 255) He is speaking there of the ultimate design in Jesus’ death. Yes, these other individuals played a role. But God the Father is the One who ordained this to happen, along with the Son who voluntarily submitted Himself to this.

In John Piper’s little book, *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die* (which we have available for guests, and available for you to take some of these to give to neighbors and friends), the 50th reason he gives is this: Jesus came to die to show that the worst evil is meant by God for good. He quotes Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27-28. And he writes, “The lash on [Jesus’] back, the thorns on his head, the spit on his cheek, the bruises on his face, the nails in his hands, the spear in his side, the scorn of rulers, the betrayal of his friend, the desertion by his disciples—these were all the result of sin, and all designed by God to destroy the power of sin. . . . There is no greater sin than to hate and kill the Son of God. There was no greater suffering nor any greater innocence than the suffering and innocence of Christ. Yet God was in it all.”

God purposed this to happen—the worst evil in the history of the universe. He ordained for it to happen, and He did so in order to magnify His grace and pour out love upon undeserving sinners like us.

Lest we think of this abstractly, or simply as a point of fact—that God gave up His own Son—God has given us a picture of this in the Old Testament in Genesis 22, the account of Abraham delivering up his own son, Isaac, as a sacrifice.

You remember how God tested Abraham by saying *“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”* (Genesis 22:2, ESV) And then at the last moment the angel of the Lord said, *“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”* (Genesis 22:12, ESV) And God provided a ram for the burnt offering instead of Isaac (which gives us a powerful picture of Christ’s substitutionary atonement for us; He stood in our place). And then the angel of the Lord spoke again, saying to Abraham, *“By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you . . .”* (Genesis 22:16, ESV)

God, through His Word there, gives us this tender and tangible glimpse into the Godhead. The love between Abraham and Isaac points to the deep love between God the Father and God the Son. And Abraham’s willingness to offer up his only beloved son points to God the Father who gave His only Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). And after Jesus was baptized God the Father spoke from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

As we read the story of Abraham and Isaac, and as we feel the inner turmoil and agony and broken-heartedness of that event, we should learn something of our great God. He did not spare His own Son. In this case, no one called out at the last moment and called it off. The Father drove that knife into His Son’s heart. God did not spare His own Son, His only Son, His beloved Son. But He gave him up for US! He crushed His beloved Son on that cross. He poured out His wrath against sin upon His very own Son, so that He can spare us from that wrath. Jesus was *not* spared so that we *can* be spared. What a God we serve! Trust in this God. Love this God who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.

Isaiah 53 speaks of the fact that it was God’s will to crush His Son. “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief” (verse 10). The Lord is God the Father, and the One put to grief is the Suffering Servant who is being talked about in this passage of Scripture, who is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. So this verse is saying very clearly that God the Father is the One who ordained the death of Jesus Christ. He crushed Him. He put Him to grief. And He did so because He and the Son had agreed to do

this in order to magnify the grace of God in the salvation of sinners.

This is why we can celebrate the death of Jesus, because it was not a sign of failure, it was not a sign of defeat, it was not the end. It happened exactly according to plan, and through it Jesus accomplished something that is wonderful beyond words. He achieved our eternal salvation.

God's Design in the Death of His Son

God did not spare his own Son but gave him up . . . for whom? This is a significant theological point, and I just want to say a few things about it this evening. The discussion has to do with the extent of the atonement. For what group of people did Christ die? For what group of people did the Father offer up His Son? And for me this isn't just a matter for theological debate, but it's a precious truth of the Gospel, that God offered up His Son with a specific design for the redemption of the elect.

The good news starts in eternity past, when God predestined a people for Himself. *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . ."* (Romans 8:29, ESV) In His sovereign goodness and freedom, God unconditionally chose certain individuals to save. We don't know His mind. We can't grasp the mysteries of His good plans. But we know that He has purposed to glorify His Name and manifest His grace by redeeming totally depraved sinners . . . like me, and like you. And He chooses to save sinners, not because of any inherent goodness in them, because there is none. He chooses unconditionally.

Some people stumble over the word "foreknew" in verse 29. Some false assumptions can be made if we think of this word as simply a mental awareness of something beforehand. And there's the idea out there that this means God looked down through the corridors of time and could see ahead of time who would choose Him. And then based on that foreknowledge, He predestined those individuals.

But when we understand the way the Bible uses the word "know," we see a much fuller sense of God's foreknowledge. It's not just that He had intellectual knowledge of something before it happened. Rather, this is covenantal language. The Old Testament tells of God knowing Abraham and Israel, using the Hebrew word *yadah*. And what is meant is that God choose Abraham. God chose Israel. He didn't just know that they existed, but He made a covenant with them. The LXX translates that with

the Greek word *ginōskō*. And what we have here in Rom 8:29 is *proginōskō*, to know beforehand.

Also notice that it is not facts which God foreknows, but people. It says, “those whom he foreknew.” And He doesn’t foreknow every person. We know that God had a mental awareness of every person and every event even before He created the universe. But this special covenantal foreknowing He does not bestow upon every person. It is certain ones He freely chooses whom He foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies (v. 30).

So God foreknows and predestines (foreordains) certain individuals unto salvation. If you’re scared by the word predestination, you need to see that it is a biblical word. It’s not just a theological word that people throw around. It’s a Bible term. And it’s good news for us, because if God did not determine in His plans to save us, we would not be saved. We certainly cannot save ourselves, and because of our total depravity we would never turn to Him on our own. He must purpose our salvation, and He must accomplish it from start to finish.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a preacher in England last century, writes this: “Do you habitually think of yourself as one of ‘God’s elect’, one of God’s chosen people . . .? Many of our troubles arise from the fact that we do not think of ourselves in this way, that we think of the Christian as one who has ‘decided for Christ.’ The emphasis should be the other way round. The Christian is one who has been ‘elected,’ ‘chosen of God’ and ‘precious’ for that reason; God’s ‘peculiar possession’, ‘His purchased possession’, one of the people whom He has set apart for Himself. If we learn to think of ourselves in these terms, with the dignity and everything else that belongs to the position, it will revolutionize our Christian life and all our thinking.”¹ This is very good news for us. We praise God that He foreknew and predestined us. And we praise Him that He gave up His Son for us.

Some people refer to this point as limited atonement. I prefer the terms “definite atonement,” or “particular redemption.” The word “limited” may come across like there’s some deficiency in the atonement. But the point I hope you’ll be able to see right here in this text is that Christ’s death was specifically designed to bring about the salvation of the elect. Christ did not die in a general sense for all of mankind, merely making it a possibility for individuals to be saved. No, Christ did not die merely to make

¹ Romans, Chapter 8:17-39, pg. 404

something possible, but to definitely accomplish the redemption of those who were predestined.

Look at verses 32-34 and note the word “us.”

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:32–34, ESV)

The “us” is the same group of people in verse 28, who love God and are called according to His purpose, for whom all things work together for good. These are the same individuals whom God foreknew and predestined, called, justified, and glorified. God gave up His own Son for that specific group of people—for the elect.

If you are a believer, this is why we call today *Good Friday*. It is, indeed, very good for those who are saved through the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ. And if you’re not a believer, you may be thinking, “Well, I must not be elect.” No, don’t think that way. There are many, many people who are predestined unto salvation who have not yet come to faith. And it may very well be that you are one of them. In God’s providence, He has you listening to this message, and experiencing this worship service, and observing the loving fellowship of believers, and my prayer is that He is opening your mind and heart to receive this Good News. Turn from your sinful ways, and cling to this hope that God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. And in your repentance and faith, you will become part of the “us” referred to in that verse. And you will recognize the immense goodness of this Good Friday.

The wonder of Friday, of course, would be nothing if it were not for what happened on Sunday. We have hope in His death, because of the empty tomb. And that’s what we look forward to celebrating together on Easter morning. I hope to see you then.