

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

What the cross  
has to do with us

Simple.  
Clear.



# WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?

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*What the Cross Has to Do with Us*

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

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*But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died* **FOR  
US.**

Romans 5:8

This little book pursues a single question: Why should the death of a man two thousand years ago help me today? It is written for readers who have little to do with church. Step by step, in simple words.

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## 1 A Simple Question

Two thousand years ago a man was executed. Outside the city, before the city walls. On a wooden beam, a wooden cross. In front of curious onlookers who were used to violence. Many died that way back then. The Romans killed thousands, crucified many. Senseless deaths.

About this one man, Christians to this day say a strange sentence. He died for us, they say. What does that mean: for us? What is supposed to be different about this one death?

There were and there are people who die for others. When that is the only way they can save others from death. You cannot do anything greater than give yourself up for others. So that they can live.

In the past, before there were vaccines, children suffocated from diphtheria. A tough coating grew over their throats and closed them. Sometimes only one thing helped. The doctor inserted a small tube and sucked the coating out with his own mouth. The child could breathe again. But now the doctor had the disease in himself. Some of them died of it.

The doctor did not just help. He took into himself what was killing the child. The disease went out of the child and into the doctor.

This is exactly where the question begins. If Jesus died for us: What did he save us from? What and where was the disease, if we carry this picture over?

Most people do not feel any disease at all. They live, they work, they love, they do their best. A disease? Where? And even if there is one, why should the death of a man two thousand years ago heal it? A man died in Jerusalem. I live here.

What does his cross have to do with me? That is not a naive question. It is the most important question you can ask Christianity. In this little book I want to do nothing other than try to answer this one question. Step by step. First: What are we suffering from? Then: Who is the one who takes it away from us? Then: What happens to him? And finally: How does it reach me?

One of the first Christians once put the sentence more precisely. He wrote that Jesus bore our guilt in his own body, there on the wood, the cross. And by

his wounds we have been healed.<sup>1</sup>

Remember three words from this sentence:

Bore. Body. Healed.

They will occupy us for a while.

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1. 1 Peter 2:24

## 2 What Is Wrong with Us

I am not starting with God.

It is about us.

None of us could choose who fathered us and where we were born. What circumstances life threw us into was not our decision. Even where we stand today was mostly not determined by us.

Now it is no longer about a physical disease, as with the child in chapter 1. It is about an intangible disease and how it is felt: emptiness, meaninglessness, a sense of guilt, brokenness, hopelessness, bondage, despair. Nobody wants to feel any of that. Whoever honestly stops for a moment might notice such feelings and similar ones.

Often they come in a quiet moment. At night, when you cannot sleep. At a grave. Or when someone no longer speaks to you. Then there is something you cannot push away.

Every person has something he can no longer make right. A word that was spoken. A door that was slammed. A person who died before you were reconciled. A fraud that nobody noticed, but that you yourself never forget.

You can do a lot. You can recognize it. You can apologize. You can make good the damage where possible. You can resolve never to do it again.

The recognition comes too late. The apology no longer reaches the other person. The damage cannot be made good, because there is no money for it. Or because it is simply not possible. And the resolution lasts only until the next time.

And even if everything succeeded, something would remain. The thing has happened. It stands in the world. No compensation makes it undone.

Up to this point we have looked only at us humans. What if God is our Creator? We did not create the world. Nor the laws of nature. Nor the principles or conditions for how we can deal with guilt or how we really get rid of it. It is God's world into which we were born. Even if we think so: we do not set the rules.

Everything I mentioned above can be compared to a deadly disease. The Bible has a short word for it: sin.

The word sin is worn out. Many hear in it only moralizing and a wagging finger. What is meant is something very close to life. The word the Bible uses literally means: to miss the mark. Like an arrow that goes wide.

So sin means: I am not the person I should be. And I have done what should not be. Both belong together. It means the deeds. They can be counted. And it means a part of our being from which these deeds come. That cannot be counted. But everyone knows it. You make up your mind to do something, and then you do the other thing. As if it were a power that drives us. From within and also from outside.

Now comes a sentence that is hard to hear. It applies to everyone. Including me.

The Bible puts it this way: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.<sup>2</sup> That means: No one is or becomes what God originally made him for.

I am not accusing anyone, not charging anyone. In the end every person stands face to face with himself. Running away from yourself ends at some point. Better to stop and be honest: Is there bondage, emptiness, meaninglessness, guilt, loneliness, brokenness, violence, wrongdoing? They are like the fever. But the fever is not the disease. It shows that a disease is there, that something is wrong.

Behind it lies the disease. It is not loud. It works quietly. And there is no level at which you escape it. For the guilt does not lie only with others or outside of me. It sits in me. In my life, in my history, in what I am.

A philosopher once called our conscience a courtroom. In it there are three voices: a prosecutor, a defender, and a judge. All three speak within us. The prosecutor lists what we have done. The defender looks for excuses. And the judge pronounces a verdict we cannot evade. Nobody needs to explain this courtroom to us. We carry it around with us.

That is why a mere word is not enough. When someone says to me: Forget about it, that is kind. But it does not make me a different person. And it does not make what happened undone. No doctor heals a child by saying: It's not so bad.

So we need two things. That we are forgiven. And that what sits within us comes out and comes to an end. The one without the other does not help.

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2. Romans 3:23

### 3 What God Is Really Like

We do not get out of this situation without God. Our existence is unthinkable without God. Whether we believe that or not.

First, a misunderstanding.

Almost everyone has a picture of God in their head. Even those who do not believe. Often it is the picture of a strict supervisor. One who sees everything and forgets nothing. Some learned it that way as children: Dear God sees everything. That did not sound like comfort. It sounded like: watch out.

If you carry that over to the cross of Jesus, it sounds like this: God wants punishment. Jesus threw himself in between so that the punishment would strike him and not us. The Son appeased the angry Father.

Many have heard it that way, in churches too. Some left because of it. Who would want to trust a God who first has to see blood before he becomes friendly?

Something in it is true. God sees what we do. And he does not simply wipe anything away. But the rest is not right. Whoever starts with this picture will in the end understand everything wrongly. This picture is a caricature. At the very least a truncation.

What if God is completely different? Let us look at who takes the first step in the Bible. It is never the human being. It is always God. He looks for Adam in the garden after Adam has hidden. He calls Abraham. He brings his people out of slavery in Egypt before he gives them even a single commandment. And finally he sends his Son.

One of the best-known sentences of the Bible puts it this way: God loved the world so much that he gave his Son.<sup>3</sup>

It was not the Son who wrung love out of the Father. The Father gave the Son because he loved. Just as the doctor in chapter 1 came because he wanted to help. Not because someone had talked him into it.

How then does God deal with what we have done to others, and thereby to him? Let us start with ourselves again. Imagine someone has hurt you. Badly. You have two options. You can pay him back. Or you can forgive.

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3. John 3:16

What does forgiving mean? It does not mean that the injury is gone. It means that you bear the damage yourself instead of handing it back to the other person. Whoever forgives pays. Always. That is the price of forgiveness. And it is not the guilty one who pays it, but the one who forgives.

That is the experience among people. And with God? In the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible, he says to his people:

*You have burdened me with your sins. I, I am the one who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake.*<sup>4</sup>

Both stand side by side. Sin burdens God. He bears it. And he blots it out. Not because we deserved it. But because that is how he is. Not the judge who lies in wait for a mistake. But the one who is already bearing the burden long before we notice that we have loaded it onto him.

But that is only one half. God does not act as if nothing had happened. A God who overlooked everything would not be a good God. He would be indifferent. When a child is wronged, we expect someone to take it seriously. God takes it seriously. All of it. The wrong I have done as seriously as the wrong that was done to me.

The point is whether God is just in bearing and enduring sin, impartial and consistent. Will he set everything right, past, present, and future? That would concern each and every one. Can the damage caused by our failure—by our sin—ever be made good? An unimaginable thing, which can probably happen only through an unimaginable miracle.<sup>5</sup>

All of this together leads us to the cross. A God who was only strict would need no cross. He could simply punish and repay. A God who was only mild would not need one either. He could look away. That would be just as tragic. But God is both. He takes guilt seriously. And he loves the guilty one completely. Such a God takes a path on which both remain true. In doing so he is not torn back and forth. He is love, and what he does is love. It is a love that is just and holy.

The cross is this path. And it is his path. Not ours.

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4. Isaiah 43:24-25

5. Romans 3:25-26

## 4 Why Blood?

The cross was a bloody affair. And we cannot get around the blood. Even if it sounds strange. At least in our part of the world.

In everyday life we rarely encounter blood. With an injury. At the doctor's, when blood is drawn. Or when donating blood. There we learn something we otherwise easily forget: blood can save lives. The blood of one keeps another alive.

Someone who visits a worship service for the first time may hear a song about the blood of Jesus. And be puzzled. Or disgusted. Why can Christianity not do without blood? Why is a word of forgiveness not enough?

Let us start with ourselves again. A little boy draws with felt-tip pens on his mother's white tablecloth. She comes in and sees it. And she forgives him. Immediately, without reproach. But the tablecloth is still colorful. Forgiveness does not make it clean. Someone has to wash it. And the one who washes it is not the boy.

That is the difference between forgiveness and cleansing. Forgiveness says: I will not hold it against you. Cleansing says: It is gone. We need both. In chapter 2 we saw that sin sits within us, like a disease. That is why we do not only need someone who says: Forget about it. We need someone who heals.

And with God? He taught this to his people Israel long before Jesus. In a language that is foreign to us. Back then everyone understood it. It is the language of sacrifice.

An Israelite who had incurred guilt brought an animal to the sanctuary, the place where God dwelt. He laid his hand on the animal's head. That meant: This animal now stands for me. Then it was slaughtered. The priest took the blood and brought it to the altar. The blood was the main thing. Not the killing. The blood.

Why? Because in the Bible blood stands for life. In the law of Moses God says:

*The life is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar so that it covers you.*<sup>6</sup>

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6. Leviticus 17:11

There is a lot in this sentence. God gives the blood. He does not demand it the way a creditor demands his money. He gives it the way a doctor gives a medicine. And what the blood does is called: covering. It lies over the guilt. And at the same time it takes it away.

What does this foreign language say? Three things:

Guilt is serious.

It costs a life.

And God gives this life.

But the animals were only a picture. A sheep does not know what it is dying for. It cannot take anything upon itself, because it understands nothing. The Bible itself says that the blood of animals cannot take away guilt.<sup>7</sup> It was a kind of instruction. With it God announced what he would one day really do.

And then he did it. Not with an animal. With a human being who knew what he was doing. Who wanted it. He who was God's own Son. Here God did not take someone else's blood. He gave his own.

That is why blood. Not because God wants to see blood. But because guilt costs a life. And because God decided that it should be his own. Father and Son are perfectly one in this act.

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7. Hebrews 10:4

## 5 What Jesus Himself Said

And Jesus himself? Did he know what was coming to him?

When a person dies young, those left behind often ask: Did he sense it? Did he say something that we only understand now? Sometimes a letter is found. Or you remember a sentence you passed over at the time.

With Jesus another suspicion suggests itself: that meaning was given to his death only afterward. A preacher went too far. The powerful got him out of the way. And afterward his friends looked for a meaning in the senseless death. That kind of thing happens. People do that when they grieve.

The accounts say something different. Jesus spoke about his death before it came. Several times. And he himself gave it precisely its redeeming meaning.

Three times he told his friends that he would go to Jerusalem and would have to die there. Have to. They did not want to hear it. Peter, one of them, contradicted him vehemently. Jesus held to it.

Once he called himself a doctor. He was criticized for sitting at the table with the hated tax collectors and other people with a bad reputation. He answered:

*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.*<sup>8</sup>

He knew to whom he had come. And he also said what for:

*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*<sup>9</sup>

Son of Man—that is what Jesus called himself. A ransom is the money that buys a prisoner free. Out of captivity, out of slavery. Out of a life in debt. Jesus says: My life is the price. And you are the ones who go free.

On the last evening he ate the Passover meal with his friends. At this feast Israel remembers to this day the liberation from Egypt. He took bread, broke it, and said: This is my body, for you. He took the cup of wine and said: This is my blood, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Mark 2:17

9. Mark 10:45

10. Luke 22:19; Matthew 26:28

They did not understand it. Only later. But he said it before it happened. He knew that he would die. He knew for whom. And he knew what for.

Then came the night in the garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives. There we see what it cost him. He took three of his friends with him. He told them he was sorrowful to the point of death. Then he fell to the ground and prayed:

*Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*<sup>11</sup>

The cup is an old picture. With the prophets of Israel the cup is what God gives a person to drink. His portion. His lot. Sometimes it is blessing. Sometimes it is the heaviest thing that can be allotted to a human being. Jesus saw what was in his cup. He asked that it might pass him by. And then he drank it.

So he did not stumble into his death. He saw what was coming. He asked to be spared. And he went anyway. We will come back to this in chapter 7.

On the cross, shortly before his death, he spoke one more word. In Greek it is a single word. In German it takes three (Es ist vollbracht), and in English as well: It is finished.<sup>12</sup> That does not mean: It is over. But: It is done. The task is fulfilled.

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11. Mark 14:34-36

12. John 19:30

## 6 Three Hard Sentences

Now it gets difficult.

Three sentences that you need to read slowly.

You know sentences that you have to read twice. A test result from the doctor. A letter from a government office. You read it, put it aside, and read it again. Because a lot depends on it.

There are such sentences about the death of Jesus too. The first Christians summed it up in a few sentences. Three of them are especially hard. Hard because they carry a lot. And hard because they are easily misunderstood.

**The first sentence: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**<sup>13</sup>

This is the oldest sentence about the cross that we have. Paul writes it around the year 55 to the Christians in Corinth. And he adds that he himself had received it from those who were Christians before him. So the sentence comes from the first years after the cross. No one invented it generations later.

*For our sins.* Not: because of his enemies. Not: as an example for us. But: *for our sins.* His death has to do with what was said in chapter 2. With the disease that sits within us. With what we can no longer make right.

*According to the Scriptures.* That means: This is how it already stood beforehand in Israel's Bible. The first Christians did not invent the cross anew. They rediscovered it there. Most clearly in a song that was already centuries old. It speaks of a servant of God who is despised, who suffers, who dies. And it says:

*He has borne our sickness. He was wounded for our transgressions. The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*<sup>14</sup>

The word that stands here really does mean sickness. It is the "sickness of sin." The prophet sees someone who takes into himself what the others are sick with. Like the doctor at the child's bedside.

The liberation stories of Israel's Bible point ahead to the cross. What happened there to one people happens here for all people.

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13. 1 Corinthians 15:3

14. Isaiah 53:4-6

**The second sentence: God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**<sup>15</sup>

This is the hardest of the three. You have to read it piece by piece.

*Who knew no sin:* Jesus had no guilt of his own and never made common cause with wrong. *Made to be sin:* God put him in the place where sin belongs. He made him one with what we are. Not: He made him a sinner. But: He handed our case over to him, completely. And then the goal: *so that we might become the righteousness of God.* In him.

Righteousness here does not mean: being flawless. It means: being right with God. Belonging again.

This is an exchange. He gets what is ours. We get what is his. But it is not an exchange like at the market, where two strangers push something back and forth. It is an exchange in him. We are taken into it. Into his death on the cross. And into his resurrection life.

Paul once writes a short letter to a friend. A slave has run away from this friend. His name is Onesimus. Perhaps he took something with him. Paul has come to know him and is sending him back. And he writes: If he owes you anything, charge it to my account. I will pay.<sup>16</sup> Nobody here is thinking of punishment. One person stands in for another. That is also how the Bible speaks of Jesus.

**The third sentence: He bore our sins in his body on the tree.**<sup>17</sup>

You already know this sentence from chapter 1. It names the place. In his body. On the tree, the cross. Not in thought, not somewhere in heaven. On a particular day, on a particular beam, in a body that could bleed.

And it names the action: bore. There is another picture from the language of sacrifice that belongs to it. Once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, the priest laid both hands on the head of a live goat. He confessed all the guilt of the people over it. Then the goat was driven into the wilderness. It carried the guilt away. To a place from which it did not come back.<sup>18</sup>

This very word also stands in the third sentence: bore. Carried away. Jesus is like the goat that carries the guilt out. And at the same time he is the sacrifice whose blood cleanses. Both in one person.

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15. 2 Corinthians 5:21

16. Philemon 18-19

17. 1 Peter 2:24

18. Leviticus 16:21-22

The sentence goes on: so that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness. It does not say: so that we feel better. It says: so that we live differently. The death of Jesus is not only something that happened for us. Through it something is also meant to happen with us and in us.

And then comes the sentence we already know: By his wounds you have been healed. His death is our life.

## 7 How His Death Saves Us

Now comes an answer. Or at any rate the attempt at an answer.

Whoever has lost someone asks: Why? Why him? Why like this? Mostly you get no answer. Death remains senseless.

With Jesus we ask differently. Not only: Why did he die? But: What happened in his death? That is the third question from chapter 1. I will attempt an approach in five steps.

### **First: He took it upon himself.**

Jesus did not get caught in an accident. He went into it. He knew what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. And he went there. In the night before his death he prayed that it might pass him by. Then he said: Not what I will, but what you will.<sup>19</sup>

What came next, human beings did. Betrayal by a friend. A verdict that was settled from the start. Beatings, mockery, the execution. No lightning from heaven. Human hands. And yet the Bible says: Precisely this was God's way. God gave up his Son.<sup>20</sup> Both are true. People did it. God let it happen because he willed it so. Because in this way the unimaginable miracle that chapter 3 spoke of was to happen.

What Jesus suffered there is what happens when a world without God runs its course. The seed sprouts. Lies, injustice, violence, death. That is the harvest of guilt and sin. He brought it in, in his own body. Not his harvest. Ours.

### **Second: He could bear it because it was not his.**

Here the picture of the doctor from chapter 1 helps. Why could he take the disease from the child? Because he did not have it himself. He came healthy, from outside. A doctor who is suffocating himself cannot get air for any child.

So it is here too. Jesus had no guilt of his own. No word he had to take back. No door he had slammed. That is why he could bear ours. The righteous for the unrighteous.<sup>21</sup> He bears. He takes over our guilt. He places himself entirely

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19. Mark 14:36

20. Romans 8:32; Acts 2:23

21. 1 Peter 3:18

on the side of sinners. That happens on the cross. What did that do to him in those hours?

**Third: He took it into his death.**

Why did it have to be a death?

Remember chapter 2. Sin does not lie only with others or outside of me. It sits in me. In my life. Sin, this deadly disease that sits in a life, finds its end only when that life ends. That is why it cannot simply be waived like a bill. A bill can be torn up. A life cannot.

Jesus took our sin into his life. Like the doctor took the child's disease. And he gave this life into death. The guilt and our disease went with it to where they belong. Just as the goat carried the sins into the wilderness, into the land of death. There it has remained.

The Bible says it with this hard sentence:

*God condemned (and judged) sin in the flesh of his Son.*<sup>22</sup>

Not the Son. Sin. It received its verdict at the place to which he had carried it. That is the answer to the question from chapter 3. God does not look away. He judges sin. And he saves the sinner. In this way his dying for us becomes the door to life.

And the blood? In the Bible blood stands for life that is given up. Not for cruelty. It says: I lay down my life for you.

The wages and the consequence of sin is death. The author of life dies in our place to save us from lasting, eternal death.

**Fourth: Death could not hold him.**

Here the picture of the doctor ends. The doctor died of the disease, and that was that. With Jesus that was not the end. He himself was perfectly good and righteous. A death in which the sin of others comes to an end has no right and no reason to hold him fast. Three days later the tomb was empty. Without that, everything else would be a fine example. With it, it is a rescue. The next chapter is about that.

**Fifth: His death counts as ours.**

Now the step that makes it my own concern. The Bible does not only say: He died for us. It says: We died with him.<sup>23</sup> That is not a pious figure of speech. It means: What came to an end in his death was my sick, sinful nature. The

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22. Romans 8:3

23. Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:14

person I was died there on the cross and was laid in the grave with him. And what came out of his tomb is the beginning of what I am to become. The old has gone, the new has come.<sup>24</sup>

That is why a small word belongs to this death that must not be skipped: with. Not only for us. With him. Whoever holds on to him is taken along. Into his death, where guilt and sin remain. And out into his life, where it no longer is.

How this connection can happen, in an event 2,000 years ago, I cannot say. Here, too, the same holds: that is God's way and solution.

**What this means.**

Think of what you can no longer make right. I am not reminding you of it so that you feel bad. It has not been undone. Nobody claims that. But it has been carried away. By one who was able to carry it. To a place from which it never comes back.

And you?

You are no longer the one in whom it sits. You have gone through death with him. That is not a feeling. It is a fact that God has established. You may take your stand on this truth of God.

Does a remainder stay that I cannot explain? Yes. How one life can take other lives along with it, through death, remains a mystery. So does what it meant for Jesus in his innermost being. But it is a mystery with a date, a place, and an empty tomb.

At this point I can only say: Thank you, Jesus, thank you!

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24. 2 Corinthians 5:17

## 8 Why Easter Belongs to It

On Friday he died.

On Sunday the tomb was empty.

Anyone who has stood at a grave knows the feeling. Something has come to an end here. For good. You can bring flowers and light candles. But death has the last word. At least that is how it seems.

Imagine the story of Jesus had ended on Friday. A good man, executed. His friends in hiding, afraid of being the next. His tomb sealed with a heavy stone and guarded.

Then we would have a moving example. Someone who died for his convictions. Someone who even on the cross prayed for his executioners. You could admire him. You could try to imitate him. But no one would be saved. He would be like the doctor in chapter 1: He took the disease into himself, and it killed him.

Paul says it bluntly:

*If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.*<sup>25</sup>

Still in your sins. The grave would then not be the place where the guilt remained. It would only be the place where he remained too. Then everything in this book would be void.

The first Christians claim something unheard of. He did not stay dead, they say. On the third day the tomb was empty. Women found it so, early in the morning. And he met his friends. Not as a ghost. As someone who eats with them and whose wounds can be touched.

What if that is true? Then for our question it means at least three things.

**First:** God has said yes. Yes to what happened on Friday. If God raises him, then his death was not a misfortune that God repaired afterward. Then the whole thing was the way, and God confirmed it. An old sentence says both in one breath: He was delivered over because of our trespasses and raised so that we stand righteous before God.<sup>26</sup> Death takes guilt away. The resurrection says: This is valid for all time.

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25. 1 Corinthians 15:17

26. Romans 4:25

**Second:** The guilt remained in the grave. He did not. That is the sign that it no longer exists. If anything were still outstanding, death would have been allowed to keep him.

A brief clarification: “The guilt remained in the grave” is a picture. It means: It is dealt with, put away, no longer there.

**Third:** He lives. The one who died for us is not a thing of the past. He is here. Today. Forever. He has gone to God, with a human, immortal resurrection body. From there he will come again.

The story of diphtheria, by the way, went on. At the end of the 19th century a cure was found. It was obtained from the blood of horses. They had been given the poison of the disease, a little at first, then more. They had overcome it. And now there was in their blood what saved the children. Thousands of children survived this way.

Every picture limps, this one too. But it shows something. Whoever has gone through the disease and overcome it—that person’s life can heal others. Jesus took the disease of the world into himself and overcame death. His life now is for us. The Bible says:

*We shall be saved through his life.*<sup>27</sup>

Evil is still here. The disease too, and death. But the cure has been found. Their end is certain.

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27. Romans 5:10

## 9 The Good News

And me?

What do I get out of it?

You have read this book this far. Perhaps with curiosity. Perhaps with doubt. Perhaps with both. That is the last question from chapter 1: How does it reach me? A man died and rose again two thousand years ago. What do I have to do with that?

Nothing, as long as I only look on. Everything, as soon as I entrust myself to him.

Imagine a man who is seriously ill and at the same time stands accused in court. He lacks two things: acquittal and health. You can acquit him, and he remains ill. You can heal him, and he remains accused. He needs both.

That is our situation. We saw that in chapter 2. We need forgiveness. And we need an end to the disease that sits within us. The cross—or better: the Crucified One—gives both. But not like a vending machine into which you drop a coin. He gives it like a doctor who comes to the bedside. It takes an encounter.

What does the sick person have to do? Think of the child in chapter 1. It could do nothing except keep still and let the doctor do his work. It did not have to understand what the doctor was doing. It only had to let him.

The Bible has a word for this: believe. The word is worn out. Many hear in it: holding something to be true that cannot be proven. Something else is meant. Believing means: relying on him. Entrusting yourself to someone who can help. You do not have to understand everything. Only and first of all this: He is the one who forgives, heals, and saves. You have to let him come near you. Open yourself to him and let him in.

And what happens then? One sentence puts it this way:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.*<sup>28</sup>

Justified—declared righteous—that is the acquittal. And peace. Not a ceasefire in which each side waits to see whether the other starts again. Peace.

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28. Romans 5:1

The matter is settled. Not because I settled it. But because he bore it in his body on the tree.

Three things belong to it. This is not pressure. It is an invitation.

**Turning around.** That does not mean: first become good, then come. It means: changing direction. Stopping trying to heal yourself. Admitting that it doesn't work. Turning around is what is called, in old-fashioned words, repentance.

**Being baptized.** Baptism is a sign that happens with the whole body. You are immersed and come up again. The Bible says: We were buried with him.<sup>29</sup> The person I was is laid where the guilt remained. And the one who comes out belongs to the one who lives. With baptism you confess allegiance to a new Lord, to King Jesus.

**Belonging.** No one walks this path alone. Whoever belongs to Jesus belongs to a community with many others. You need the others. And the others need you.

And now the end. It is not an end; it is a beginning. The sentence with which everything began was: He died for us. Now you know what Christians mean by it. He took our guilt into himself, because it was not his. He carried it in his body into his death. He took us in with him and brought us out with him. And he lives.

There are things you can no longer make right. That remains true. But there is one who has carried them. That is the good news. The Bible calls it the gospel. I believe: It is true. And it is meant for you.

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29. Romans 6:4



**A man is executed, two thousand years ago. His friends later say: That was for us.**

What is that supposed to mean? Can someone die for others? And what does that have to do with me?

This book pursues the question to the end. It says what is wrong with us, what God is really like, and why a death can change something.

**The cross is more than a symbol. It is the way out into eternal life.**

**For all who really want to know.**