

# Did Jesus Pray to Make Salvation Possible to Everyone at the Cross?

*Ezekiel 34:11-16; John 17:1-26(text); Canons of Dort II: 3-7*

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Beloved congregation of Christ: Last week, we looked at the Second Head of Doctrine of the Canons of Dort, where we find the doctrine of the atonement by Christ. What is the atonement? How was Christ the only Person qualified to offer the sacrifice for the sins of God's people? I also introduced the extent of the atonement—for whom did Christ die?

In his final prayer before the cross, Jesus summarizes his earthly mission to the Father who sent him. His prayer can be divided into three parts: He first prays for himself (vv. 1–5), then for his disciples (vv. 6–19), and finally for later believers (vv. 20–26).

In verses 3–4, he prays for himself and the work that he had accomplished for his Father on behalf of his people: *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”* In verses 6 and 9, he prays for his 11 disciples, *“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word... I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.”* In verses 20–21, he prays for those who will later believe, *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

Here, we see Jesus praying only for his people, not for the world.

This tells us that Christ's redeeming work was intended to save *the elect only*, and *actually secured salvation* for them. His substitutionary death was the penalty for sin in the place of a definite group of sinners. Christ's work also secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is irresistibly applied by the Holy Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore insuring their salvation.

On the other hand, majority of evangelicals believe and teach that Christ died for all mankind. Since some people are not saved, it follows that Christ's atonement was not effective for them. Therefore, according to them, Christ's death did not accomplish the redemption of His people. His death just *made it possible* for all people to be saved. Even though Christ died for all people, they still need to believe. Those who don't believe are lost.

On this Lord's Day, our theme is, **“Did Jesus Pray to Make Salvation Possible for Everyone at the Cross?”** We will meditate upon this theme under three parts: **(1) Glorifying His Father for Accomplishing the Work Given to Him; (2) Praying Not for the World, But for Those the Father Has Given Him; and (3) Praying Not Only for His Disciples, for All Who Will Believe.**

## GLORIFYING HIS FATHER FOR ACCOMPLISHING THE WORK GIVEN TO HIM

Jesus first prays to the Father to glorify him. Therefore, he is God, because only God has glory and God will not give his glory to another (Isa 42:8; 48:11). The reason for God giving him glory is that he has accomplished the work that the Father gave to him: dying on the cross as a sacrifice for **all the sins of all his people**.

This is why on the cross, he would exclaim, *"It is finished!"* He was born to save his people from sin. He came to fulfill the law. He came down from heaven to be the bread of life. He came to give his life as a ransom for many. He had a mission, and he accomplished his mission throughout his life and on the cross.

Nothing was left unfinished. He did not leave anything hanging on the condition that his people would believe of their own "free will." If he did, no one would be saved, because *"no one seeks after God, no one understands, not even one"* (Rom 3:10-11). All sinners who don't have the Holy Spirit are blinded by Satan, and they are unable and unwilling to believe (1 Cor 2:14).

Jesus had to finish his work, otherwise he would not be able to glorify his Father. He had declared his glorious work to his disciples and to the people who followed him. He had performed signs and wonders so that people glorified his Father. On the cross, it seemed that his mission was a failure. Who would glorify God the Father with his Son dying a shameful and accursed death on the cross?

But after he rose from the dead, innumerable people have believed, and all of them glorify God. Every Lord's Day like this, we sing, pray, read and listen to the glory of God. Every day of our lives, we are to glorify God, whether in plenty or in want, in comfort or in suffering; when we get up in the morning, or before we go to bed at night; when we daily teach our children to pray, sing and read the Bible to the glory of God.

The three Persons of the Trinity are glorified in the accomplished work of Christ. Before the creation of the world, they were in harmonious love for each other in this work. The Father elected his people out of the whole world. His Son willingly came down from heaven to die for all the sins of the elect. And in the due time, the Spirit applies this work to the hearts of all the elect. And all of the elect praise God and give thanks to Christ for their salvation. They were all given to Christ by his Father, so he prays for them in the garden on the night of his arrest.

## PRAYING NOT FOR THE WORLD, BUT FOR THOSE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN HIM

Jesus first prays for his disciples who were given to him by his Father. They are those who had truly believed out of the thousands who followed him because of the divine signs and wonders he had performed before their very eyes.

Did he pray and die **for all the sins of all human beings**? Certainly not! If he did, then all human beings will be saved. Not one person would be found in hell, just as some pastors teach. Also, if this is the case, then Christ's work on the cross would be wasted, since there will be people in hell for whom he died! Double jeopardy!

Did he pray and die **for some of the sins of all people**? Certainly not! If this were so, no one would be saved. If Christ's death paid only for *some* of the sins of everyone, then in order for man to save himself, he must add some of his own good works. The Bible teaches that salvation is totally the work of God; man has no contribution to his salvation (Rom 3:27; Eph 2:8-10; 2 Tim 1:9). One sin against God merits eternal hell (Jas 2:10; Gal 3:10).

Did he pray and die **for all the sins of some people**? Certainly! The work of Christ **has accomplished** the salvation of *some* people. They are **definitely** saved, because Christ paid for **all** of their sins. This is the doctrine of *definite, particular, or limited atonement*, the redemption of a *particular* number of people.

He prayed and died for those that the Father **had given him**, the elect, before the creation of the world. None of them will be lost, all names in the Book of Life will be accounted for. Not one sheep will be lost (John 6:39), because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks his flock, and "*lays down his life for his sheep*" (John 10:10). Christ purchased **the church** with his own blood (Ac 20:28). He is the Glorious Bridegroom who "*gave himself up for her [bride]... without spot or wrinkle.*" He "*loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*" (Eph 5:2). He "*was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*" (Rom 4:25). By His one sacrifice, Christ has perfected **those** who are being sanctified (Heb 10:14).

And what is the fruit of his work on the cross? His people whom he saved will be united as one people, therefore, he prays, "*that they may be one, even as we are one.*" His people's unity would be a reflection of the unity that has existed eternally between the Father and the Son (v. 11). One of the significant meanings of the Lord's Supper is our unity in Christ. As we eat the bread from one loaf, and drink the wine from one cup, we show that we are united in one faith, one hope, one baptism, one Spirit, one God and Father, and one Lord (Eph 4:4-6).

What about those texts that seem to point out that Christ died for **the whole world**? The word "world" in scripture frequently means only some people in the world, not all of mankind. I'll cite only a few selected verses.

Luke 2:1: Did people from the Philippines, Japan, South Africa, etc. fall under Caesar's order that "*all the world should be registered*"?

John 1:10: When John wrote, "*The world did not know him,*" did he mean that no one in the whole world – not even a single person – knew Christ when he wrote his Gospel?

John 3:16-18: Did John mean God loved *every single person in the whole world* that he sent Christ to die for every single person in the whole world? No, this is impossible. But the "world" here refers to God's creation in general, which He loved and will restore to perfection in the end (Rom 8:20-21; Acts 3:20-21). We must not forget verse 18, which says that those who don't believe are excluded from God's love and condemned! If Christ paid for everyone's sins, then why will a great company of people pay for their sins in hell? How much did God love us? He loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son. What sort of people did He love? He loved the "world," or those who, because of their sin and sinfulness, are opposed to God (John

1:10; 15:18; 17:14). This is how John 3:19 defines “world.” The light has come to the sinful “world,” but men loved darkness rather than light.

John 12:19: Did the Jews mean that every individual in the world was following after Jesus?

### **PRAYING NOT ONLY FOR HIS DISCIPLES, BUT FOR ALL WHO WILL BELIEVE**

After praying for his disciples then, Jesus then prayed for everyone else who would believe after his death and resurrection. *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

Again, Jesus’ concern is for his followers’ unity (vv. 21–23) and love for one another (v. 26). He refers to their spiritual union with God, and also, fellowship with God and with his people as the fruit of that union.

And how will they believe? Through the preaching of God's word by his disciples. Today, faithful pastors and churches preach the true gospel, and many are still being saved by believing in the gospel of Christ. God’s chosen people are not saved by the prosperity gospel, gimmicks, concerts and other entertaining shows.

Did Jesus pray and die so that *“they may **all** be one”*? Like the word “world,” “all” doesn't always mean “all without *exception*,” but “all without *distinction*.” This means Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, Filipinos and Americans, etc.

The use of “all” and “everyone” is common usage. For example, someone might ask you, “Who attended the worship service this morning?” You will probably answer, “Everyone was there.” By this answer, do you mean everyone in the whole world attended the service, or only the ones who regularly attended the service? Consider these examples:

Matthew 4:23-24: Do “all” and “every” in these verses mean that Jesus healed all the people of all diseases, so that there are no more sick people in Galilee and Syria?

Mark 1:5: Does “all” in this verse mean every single person in Jerusalem and Judea were baptized by John?

1 Corinthians 15:22: In Adam, “all” (*every single person* who will ever be born) came under the curse of death. But in Christ, “all” (*believers only*) are regenerated and have eternal life.

1 Timothy 2:4-6: There is a difference between God’s desire that all will be saved and His action. In some sense, God does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23), and in some sense He does (Deut. 28:63; 2 Sam. 2:25).

2 Peter 3: 9: Here the apostle is speaking to “you.” Who are these? These are *“those who have obtained a faith . . . by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 1:1). In context, Peter is saying that God is *“not willing that any of you should perish, but that **all of you** should come to repentance.”*

Dear Friends: This doctrine of *Christ's atonement for a particular group of people* is very important. Christ work of atoning for the sins of his people was decreed and planned before the creation of the world by his Father and applied by the Holy Spirit to them so they will believe in Christ. But how is it important to you, to your loved ones, and to the church?

First, it assures us that our salvation is not based on our feelings and our decision to accept Christ. It is grounded in the accomplished work of Christ on the cross. He actually finished his saving work for us. There is nothing else to add to his work. He did not leave us hanging as to whether we will accept him or not, based on our feelings or wisdom or mood. We can confidently declare, "Christ died for **me!**" As a church, we can assuredly say, "Christ died for **us!**"

Second, we can tell our loved ones this gospel of the finished work of Christ. No frustration that they cannot do enough good works, or attend Mass frequently, or offer enough penance for their sins. We can boldly persuade them, "Repent and believe, for Christ died **for sinners.**"

As we come to the Lord's table and partake of the body and blood of our Savior, let us be assured of what Canons of Dort II:8 and 9 affirms: First, that God gives us the gift of justifying faith, and that he brings us with full certainty to salvation. Second, that in the face of all opposition and hindrances to the gospel, your salvation and the salvation of all of God's people, will be accomplished by saving work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.