



# **BORN TO DIE**

## *The REAL Christmas Story*

How long have you been making plans for your funeral? As far as your life on this earth is concerned, your birth started the countdown to your death. Yet, if you are like most people with good health, you don't think about the physical end of your life.

Hardly anyone plans his own funeral and then lives each day as though it might be his last. Those who might do so could easily become morbid and devoid of any celebration of life. Focusing on one's own death is not considered a highlight of life.

Since God's ways are not man's ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), it should not be surprising that Jesus Christ purposefully and joyfully lived on this earth with His death in mind.

We can learn more about the purpose of our own lives by examining key passages about Jesus that demonstrate His understanding of His purpose for living—**DYING**. In learning more about Jesus, we can gain a greater appreciation of what He has accomplished for us. Hopefully, each of us will respond to the love of Christ by committing to live each day with joy and purpose ... as though it would be our last day on earth.

There has been only one person who has ever lived on this planet whose purpose for being born was to die. That person is Jesus. When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, God alluded to the death of Jesus when He spoke to the serpent:

**Genesis 3:15**, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the violent death of Jesus, our Messiah, as that of a sacrificial lamb led to slaughter.

**Isaiah 53:5-7**, *But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

Isaiah chapter 53 is filled with the description of the brutal treatment of Christ. It tells of His piercing, His scourging and His silent response. It speaks of His burial in a rich man's tomb. It gives the reason—our transgressions, our iniquities—for His sacrifice.

Psalms 22 also prophetically describes the death of Christ. Verse one says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Verse 14 speaks of "being poured out as water, with my bones out of joint." Verse 18 gives some of the details of the crucifixion scene with the words, "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

The specter of death arrived in the life of Jesus even when He was a small child. King Herod tried to kill all the boy babies less than two years of age around Bethlehem. Satan was at work in the earthly life of the young Jesus in an effort to murder the Messiah.

One can only wonder at what age Jesus realized that He was **born to die**. He confounded the religious leaders with His knowledge of God's Word when He was only 12 years old (Luke 2). He already knew He was the Son of God at that age as we see in His reply to His earthly parents in Luke 2:49, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

What must have the boy Jesus thought when He read Psalm 22 (the description of a crucifixion, something known very well by a Jewish boy of the first century). What must Jesus have thought when, as a young child, He read through Isaiah 53 and learned of the "Suffering Servant"?

Any thoughts we might have on when and how Jesus realized that He was born to die is only conjecture. However, Jesus made enough statements to demonstrate that He knew His purpose for coming to this earth was to die.

On one of these occasions, Peter—in response to an inquiry by Jesus—declared that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus then warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah and told them of His impending death.

**Matthew 16:21-23**, *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders,*

chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Not long after that interaction, Jesus went to the top of a mountain and was radiantly transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John, three of his disciples (Matthew 17:1-8). At that event, God audibly stated, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” On their way down the mountain, Jesus told his “inner three” disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen **until after He was risen from the dead**. In response to Jesus’ comment about rising from the dead, they asked Him in Matthew 17:10, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” Jesus answered their question and brought them back to the reality that He was to be murdered:

*Matthew 17:11-13, He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*

When they arrived in Galilee, Jesus returned to the subject of His own death:

*Matthew 17:22-23, As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.*

The knowledge that Jesus was born to die remained foremost in His thoughts as we see in Jesus’ last trip to Jerusalem prior to being crucified. The Lord took the disciples aside to tell them of the purpose of the trip.

*Matthew 20:17-19, And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

At that point, the disciples changed the subject and began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. This issue had been a point

of disagreement in their discussions for at least six months. In responding to their misplaced focus, Jesus not only taught them about being a servant but also reminded them once again of His impending death.

*Matthew 20:25-28, But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Later, in the middle of the Passover week and right after teaching of the judgment that was to come, Jesus said in Matthew 26:2, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

After this reminder to the disciples of what was soon to come, an incident occurred in the home of Simon the Leper. Jesus knew that this was a visible expression of love that had even more profound meaning when linked to His impending death.

*Matthew 26:6-13, Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”*

It was at that point that Judas went to the priests and arranged to betray Jesus, yet the betrayer was present at the site of the Last Supper, the fore-runner of all communion experiences from then until now. And, in this setting, Jesus referred to his death and resurrection with words that have been repeated for centuries.

*Matthew 26:26-30, Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell*

*you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Jesus kept the fact of His impending death and resurrection before His disciples.

*Matthew 26:31-32, Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."*

On the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced the spiritual agony of the ordeal now before Him. In the following passage, note that we won't see the artist's rendition of Jesus calmly kneeling by a rock in a flowing white robe as the reality of the Cross loomed before Him.

*Matthew 26:36-39, Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*

In His agony of what was just ahead, Jesus fell to the ground and Luke's Gospel (Luke 22:44) records that He "sweat as great drops of blood." This battle in the Garden was won in great anguish, which is in stark contrast to the battle that was lost in a garden by the first man and woman with relative ease.

*Matthew 26:40-46, And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."*

Not many hours later, Jesus Himself expressed the concluding purpose for His coming to earth by

proclaiming from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). He had completed **the task for which He had been born: to die.**

His proclamation of "it is finished" was a cry of victory, accomplishment, and perhaps also, a cry of relief. Jesus could now exchange His thorns for a crown, His nakedness for a robe, His disgrace for celestial glory, and His wounds for worship.

The death of Jesus Christ and his subsequent resurrection revealed the glory of God by His perfect and balanced expression of justice and mercy on our behalf. JUSTICE ... in that God dealt with sin completely by the shed blood of the Perfect Sacrifice and MERCY ... in that God dealt in compassion with us who were dead and entrapped in sin. Unless He responded to our helplessness, we would have been eternally separated from His presence.

Jesus Christ fulfilled His purpose for being born—to die—and accomplished the following for us:

(1) He was our substitute

*1 Peter 3:18, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*

(2) He provided redemption (ransom)

*Matthew 20:28, "even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

(3) He provided reconciliation

*2 Corinthians 5:19, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

(4) He provided His righteousness

*2 Corinthians 5:21, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

With Christ providing these benefits, and many more, what is our purpose in life? Our purpose should parallel that of Jesus Christ, our example. Our purpose is to live each day by dying to self for Christ's sake (*laying aside our self-centered desires in order to live fully for Christ as revealed in the Bible*), recognizing that each day could be our last. Dying to self is not a morbid way of life—there is no more joyful and exciting way to live! Jesus carried a literal cross for us, and He stated life's purpose for His followers:

**Matthew 10:38-39**, “*And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*”

A believer must make a purposeful effort to die to self each day and follow Jesus and, by doing so, will find life as God intended it to be. The urgency to die to self each day is time-oriented in that (1) this could be the last day of your life to live for Christ and (2) Jesus will return and, for a committed believer, that fact motivates one to purify himself.

**1 John 3:1-3**, *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

For followers of Christ, our purpose is simple to understand, but it requires God’s power to fulfill it. Since Jesus fulfilled His purpose while on this earth, our purpose in life begins with believing in Him (John 3:16).

**John 3:16**, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*”

Subsequently, we mature in Christ by looking to Him (Hebrews 12:1-2) and, by following God’s Word, learn to die to self in order to love God and others (Matthew 22:37-39).

**Hebrews 12:1-2**, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**Matthew 22:37-39**, *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

This new way of life is possible because Jesus fulfilled His purpose through His death and resurrection. He was born to die so that we might live ... truly live!