

## Chapter 1

# **DID JESUS COMMIT SUICIDE? ISN'T THAT A SIN?**

*Original question: If suicide is a sin, didn't Jesus commit suicide on the cross?<sup>1</sup>*

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Since the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus voluntarily chose to die, the obvious question arises, did Jesus commit the sin of suicide or not? While natural death can be the result of an accident, an illness, a crime, or old age, suicide is different. A person who dies in an accident does not choose to die; death surprises them. A person who passes away from an illness or old age usually does not desire death. Those that die

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<sup>1</sup>Imagine, you're sitting in front of over 500 youth that you've encouraged to write down and submit any question that's keeping them from completely trusting Jesus Christ. MANY have taken you up on the offer and you have an approximately two-inch tall stack of index cards containing the questions they've written down sitting in front of you. You DON'T work your way through them, picking and choosing which you feel the most comfortable addressing; you just have to take each one as it comes up next in the stack. Things have gone well for about twenty minutes, and then you pull out the following question. (Yes, this happened to me!) CK

as a result of a crime did *not* choose to die that day. Unlike the other forms of death, where the person did not choose to die, suicide is a deliberate choice to end one's life.

How one responds to the question above, therefore, has the potential to unearth serious theological inconsistencies. If Jesus' death is considered a suicide, it can no longer be said that Jesus was sinless ... and it's all downhill from there. Therefore, this question merits *serious* consideration. The short answer to the question is that the death of Jesus on the cross was **not** death by suicide, thus Jesus did not sin, but that response needs to be clarified.

### WHAT IS THE SIN OF SUICIDE?

Clearly defining our terms is of utmost importance if one is to judge whether the death of Jesus qualifies as suicide or not. Although it seems obvious that suicide means killing oneself on purpose, it is important to consider a more formal definition. The CDC defines suicide as "death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die."<sup>2</sup> It is also important to note that most of the time, people who commit suicide do so because they are under tremendous stress.<sup>3</sup> There is a connection between desiring to end one's own life and feelings of desperation, depression, hopelessness, etc. Are these feelings sinful?

While the emotions that lead to suicide are not necessarily sinful, the Bible makes it clear that taking one's own life is a grave sin. The sixth commandment states, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13, NKJV). It seems rather obvious that it implies not murdering ourselves either. Paul makes the connection even clearer when he relates this and the other mandates with Jesus' teachings, concluding that they are "...all summed up in this saying..., 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Romans 13:9, NKJV). The assumption is that one does not engage in harmful behavior against oneself and consequently should treat their neighbor likewise. The gravity of the sin of suicide is because man is an image bearer of God, thus murder (including self-murder) is

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<sup>2</sup>"Suicide Prevention: Facts About Suicide," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

<sup>3</sup>Nancy Schimelpfening, "Why Do People Commit Suicide?" Verywell Mind. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.verywellmind.com/why-do-people-commit-suicide-1067515>

the taking of a life made in the image of God (Genesis 9:5-6). So, did Jesus commit the grave sin of suicide?

### **WAS HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS A SUICIDE?**

No. Jesus did not “injure himself with the intent to die” as defined above. This is clear for at least three reasons.

- First, the injuries He suffered were not self-inflicted. The Romans were the ones who beat and crucified Him.
- Second, Jesus did not desire to die; a fact made obvious by His request, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39, NKJV).
- Third, Jesus was not depressed and hopeless, but quite the contrary. Humanity was hopeless and Jesus was giving us a reason for hope.

The question then arises, didn’t Jesus say that He laid down His own life and that no one took it from Him?

The passage in question is from John 10 where He states that “I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself...” (John 10:17-18, NKJV). It is important to remember that verses must always be taken *in context*. Always. This entire chapter has Jesus referring to Himself as a shepherd. He speaks of Himself as the *true* shepherd in the first paragraph and then as the *good* shepherd in the immediate context of the verses in question. Most importantly, He is making a contrast between “the good shepherd” (Himself) and “the hireling.” Notice the contrast.

I am the good shepherd. *The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.* But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep (John 10:11-13, NKJV, emphasis added).

What Jesus is emphasizing in verse 11 and again in verse 15 is that “*I lay down My life for the sheep.*” His death was not a suicide but a sacrifice. Jesus’ death was analogous to that of a soldier in combat

who heroically gives his life to save the lives of other soldiers. Christ demonstrated the greatest love of all by being willing to die to save the lives of His sheep. Just a few chapters later, He says, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13, NKJV). And yet, an even more important question arises from this one.

### **WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE IN THE FIRST PLACE?**

Jesus did not *have to* die. The Bible is clear that Jesus voluntarily *chose* to die. Jesus could have chosen not to die, in which case humanity would be lost in sin and separated from God forever. Jesus chose to die because we had accrued a debt to God that we were unable to pay. God’s

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perfect justice demands that all transgressions receive just punishment. The punishment for man’s transgression—his sinful aggression against God—is death. Jesus chose to die on our behalf because He loves us and does not want anyone to have to pay the ultimate price of death for their sins (Romans 3:23; 6:23). By choosing to die on our behalf, Jesus chose to pay the debt for our transgressions in full (Colossians 2:14, NKJV). But some may ask, “Couldn’t God have saved man without Jesus having to die such a horrible death?”

### **COULDN’T IT HAVE BEEN DONE ANOTHER WAY?**

It is foolish, from our limited perspective, to question the wisdom of God’s plan for redemption. Furthermore, it seems rather arrogant for man to believe he can come up with a “better plan” or a “better alternative” to God’s plan. In His omniscience (the state or quality of knowing all things), God will always choose the best possible course of action in any given circumstance to accomplish His perfect will. Had there been a better way—a way that would have kept Christ off the cross—we can be sure God would have chosen it.

A quick survey of the two most common alternatives that have been proposed highlights the sharp contrast between man’s foolishness and God’s wisdom.

1. Some have argued that God could have created man without the option to sin, rendering Jesus' death unnecessary. While this sounds good, careful consideration reveals the folly. God created man perfect. Part of what makes us perfect is that God created us as free beings; we are not robots. Had God created us without freedom, that would not have been good; it would have been evil. While our freedom makes sin possible, it doesn't make it necessary. We choose to exploit our freedom when we sin. Nevertheless, God's plan accounted for our abuse of freedom and included a plan for redeeming man from his fallen state.
2. Others propose that God could have chosen to forgive everyone. This way Jesus didn't have to die on the cross, and everyone would go to Heaven. Once again, that sounds great, but upon closer consideration, it doesn't work either.
  - First, when man freely chooses to disobey God and is unrepentant, forgiveness and restoration is not possible (2 Corinthians 7:9,10).
  - Second, the idea seems to suggest that God is unwilling to forgive some people. This is not true! God's salvation and forgiveness are available to ALL who repent and believe (John 3:16-17, NKJV), but no one is forced to believe or accept it.
  - Furthermore, everyone going to Heaven would be a violation of man's free will—for there are many who do not want to go to Heaven. For those who freely choose to reject God, and who affirm that they want nothing to do with Him, being forced to spend an eternity with Him would be worse than Hell.

C.S. Lewis said it well in his book, *The Great Divorce*:  
 “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those

who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”

### CONCLUSION

*In His wisdom,  
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One of the things that sets Christianity apart from all other religions is God’s perfect justice juxtaposed with God’s perfect mercy! God’s justice is perfect: every transgression—no matter how small—must be paid for. God does not turn a blind eye on any sin—regardless of who commits it. That is perfect justice! However, God’s mercy is also perfect! God loves all of humanity with perfect love and does not desire that anyone should perish. In His wisdom, God devised a plan by which HE pays the debt demanded by His justice and makes righteousness available through Jesus Christ to all who believe. That is perfect mercy! That is why Jesus chose not to commit suicide, but to die a *sacrificial* death; it could not have been done any other way. There is no greater plan for redemption!