



## Chapter Five

# Why Did Jesus Come?

*“Lord God Almighty, who sent Your Only Begotten Son to endow humankind, imprisoned in slavery to Sin, with the freedom of Your sons and daughters, we pray most humbly for these children, whom You know will experience the allurements of this world, and will fight against the snares of the devil: by the power of the Passion and Resurrection of Your Son deliver them now from the stain of Original Sin, strengthen them with the grace of Christ, and guard them always on their journey through life.”<sup>10</sup>*

*- Baptismal Ritual of the Catholic Church*



## THE GRACE: *Light*



For thus says the Lord:

“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. . . .Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Isaiah 49:25-26



## THEMES

What was Jesus *doing* on the cross?

1. Showing us the love of the Father.
2. Making atonement; becoming Sin.
3. Going to war to rescue us.



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What am I thinking and how am I feeling now?
- How does the story of Jesus as a warrior coming to rescue me change how I see him?
- Does understanding that Jesus didn't only do this for me change how I see and treat others?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



[illegible]

[illegible]





## RESOURCES

*The Greatest Philosopher Who Ever Lived, Peter Kreeft.*

“The first question a child asks about a story is: What is it about? Is it a love story, a war story, an adventure story, a psychological drama, or what? The question presupposes that there is an answer to it and that the author of the story knows the answer, that he is in charge, that he knows what kind of story he is telling...

“In one sense, the story of human history is a love story. But in a fallen world, a love story is always also a war story. In fact, the single fundamental theme of every story since the Fall has always been the war between good and evil. That is the theme of the Bible, especially in the last book, Revelation, which symbolically summarizes and interprets all the little stories in terms of the big story...

“God Himself announces this theme, within the story itself. For this God, unlike the God of deism, reveals Himself to us. In fact, he makes himself a character in the story as well as being the transcendent Author of it...

“Immediately after the Fall, which is the beginning of human history, he announces the theme of his story, of history. It is war: ‘I will put enmity [war] between you [Satan] and the Woman [Eve]...’



“This is the first Gospel, the ‘proto-evangelium.’ Strange as it sounds, the Gospel is a war story. No one can read the four Gospels alertly and intelligently and open-mindedly without seeing that. The ‘liberal’ point that Jesus was simply to teach love is about as accurate as the idea that the purpose of Adolf Hitler was to create world peace. For in a fallen world, the only way that there can be love is for there to be war. Love wars. Love fights. Ask any mother, in any species of mammal, especially homo sapiens.

“Christ versus Antichrist, the City of God versus the City of This World, the Holy Spirit and His angels versus the Devil and his fallen angels, light versus darkness, good versus evil - that is the plot...

“The warfare, of course, is spiritual in its root and in its essence. ‘We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness’ (Eph. 6:12).” <sup>11</sup>

## **Selected Writings of the Early Church Fathers on the Paschal Mystery**

### **St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 50-110)**

There was concealed from the ruler of this world the virginity of Mary and the birth of our Lord, and the three renowned mysteries which were done in the tranquility of God from the star. And here, at the manifestation of the Son, magic began to be destroyed, and all bonds were loosed; and the ancient kingdom and the error

of evil was destroyed. Henceforward all things were moved together, and the destruction of death was devised, and there was the commencement of that which was perfected in God.<sup>12</sup>

---

### **St. Justin Martyr** (c. 100-165)

Christ became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience that proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her; wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, “Be it unto me according to Thy word” (Lk 1:38). And by her has He been born, to Whom we have proved so many Scriptures refer, and by Whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him.<sup>13</sup>

---

### **St. Melito of Sardis** (c. 120-185)

Who is he who contends with Me? Let him stand in opposition to Me. I set the condemned man free; I gave the dead man life; I raised up the one who had been entombed. Who is My opponent? I, He says, am the Christ. I am the One who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trampled Hades under foot, and bound the strong one, and carried off man to the heights of

heaven. I, he says, am the Christ. This is the alpha and the omega. This is the beginning and the end—an indescribable beginning and an incomprehensible end. This is the Christ. This is the King. This is Jesus. This is the General. This is the Lord. This is the One who rose up from the dead. This is the One who sits at the right hand of the Father. <sup>14</sup>

---

### **St. Irenaeus** (c. 130-202)

Let us, then, put the question again: For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven?

Answer: “That He might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man.” By the side of this pregnant saying we will set another, chosen from among many similar passages, which develops the dramatic idea in fuller detail: “Man had been created by God that he might have life. If now, having lost life, and having been harmed by the serpent, he were not to return to life, but were to be wholly abandoned to death, then God would have been defeated, and the malice of the serpent would have overcome God’s will. But since God is both invincible and magnanimous, he showed his magnanimity in correcting man, and in proving all men, as we have said; but through the Second Man he bound the strong one, and spoiled his goods, and annihilated death, bringing life to man who had become subject to death. For Adam had become the devil’s possession, and the devil held him under his power, by having wrongfully practiced deceit upon him, and by the offer of immortality made him subject to death. For by promising that they should be

as gods, which did not lie in his power, he worked death in them. Wherefore he who had taken man captive was himself taken captive by God, and man who had been taken captive was set free from the bondage of condemnation.”

“The Word of God,” he says, “was made flesh in order that He might destroy death and bring man to life; for we were tied and bound in sin, we were born in sin and live under the dominion of death.” <sup>15</sup>

### **St. Gregory of Nyssa** (c. 335-395)

He was about to engage him who had taken human nature prisoner and was about to loosen death’s bonds; by having destroyed the last enemy [cf. 1 Cor. 15:26], he might restore mankind to freedom and peace.

In order to secure that the ransom in our behalf might be easily accepted by him who required it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus, life being introduced into the house of death, and light shining in darkness, that which is diametrically opposed to light and life might vanish; for it is not in the nature of darkness to remain when light is present, or of death to exist when life is active. <sup>16</sup>



### St. Augustine (c.354-430)

The devil jumped for joy when Christ died; and by the very death of Christ the devil was overcome: he took, as it were, the bait in the mousetrap. He rejoiced at the death, thinking himself death's commander. But that which caused his joy dangled the bait before him. The Lord's cross was the devil's mousetrap: the bait which caught him was the death of the Lord.

The next verse explains something of the reason why so much honor should be paid to him, and why all nations should serve him: He has delivered the needy from the tyrant, that poor person who had no other champion. This needy and poor person is the people that believes in him, and within this people are kings who worship him. They are not too proud to be needy and poor, which means humbly acknowledging that they are sinners and in need of the glory of God, so that the true King, the Son of the King, may free them from the powerful foe. Powerful indeed he is who has been called the accuser. Yet it was not his own strength that brought men and women into subjection to this powerful tyrant, and kept them there in captivity, but human sins. The powerful tyrant is also called in scripture "the strong man," but Christ, who humiliated the accuser, also broke into the strong man's domain to bind him and seize his possessions. Christ is the one who has delivered the needy from the tyrant, that poor person who had no other champion, for no one else had the strength to accomplish that—no righteous person nor even any angel. There was no champion at all, therefore; but Christ came and saved them.

Having despoiled the devil, Christ distributes his gifts to beautify the Church. The psalm proceeds: It is the Beloved's part also to divide the spoils for the beauty of the house. The word Beloved is repeated for emphasis. But in fact it is not all the codices that have this repetition, and the more exact among them prefix a star to it. Such signs are called asterisks, and they inform us that the passages so marked are present in the Hebrew, but not in the interpretation by the Septuagint. But whether we think Beloved was repeated, or was written once only, I think we must take the words that follow it, to divide the spoils for the beauty of the house, in the sense, it is the Beloved's part also to divide the spoils for the beauty of the house; that is, he was chosen also for the division of the spoils. Undoubtedly the Church which Christ has created is a beautiful house, and he has adorned it by distributing his spoils to it, as a body is made beautiful by the due distribution of its limbs. Now the word "spoils" is used of goods seized from vanquished enemies, and the gospel throws light on this passage by saying, No one can get into a strong man's house and carry off his implements, unless he has tied up the strong man first (Mt. 12:29). Christ tied up the devil with spiritual chains by overcoming death and ascending from the underworld to heaven; he bound the devil by the sacrament of his incarnation, because although the devil found nothing in Christ that deserved death, he was nonetheless allowed to kill him. The consequence was that Christ tied up the devil and took away his belongings as booty. These were the unbelievers through whom the devil worked his will. But the Lord cleansed these tools by forgiving their sins; he left the enemy felled and chained, and sancti-

fied the spoils he had seized. He then assigned them to their due places for the adornment of his own house, appointing some to be apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

We are thy servants, we are thy creatures: Thou hast made us, thou hast redeemed us. Anyone can buy his servant, create him he cannot; but the Lord hath both created and redeemed his servants; created them, that they might be; redeemed them, that they might not be captives ever. For we fell into the hands of the prince of this world, who seduced Adam, and made him his servant, and began to possess us as his slaves. But the Redeemer came, and the seducer was overcome. And what did our Redeemer to him who held us captive? For our ransom he held out his cross as a trap; he placed in it as a bait his blood. He indeed had power to shed his blood, he did not attain to drink it. And in that he shed the blood of him who was no debtor, he was commanded to render up the debtors; he shed the blood of the Innocent, he was commanded to withdraw from the guilty. He verily shed his blood to this end, that he might wipe out our sins. That then whereby he held us fast was effaced by the Redeemer's blood. For he only held us fast by the bonds of our own sins. They were the captive's chains. He came, he bound the strong one with the bonds of his passion; He entered into his house, into the hearts, that is, of those where he did dwell, and took away his vessels. We are his vessels. He had filled them with his own bitterness. This bitterness too he pledged to our Redeemer in the gall. He had filled us then as his



vessels; but our Lord spoiling his vessels, and making them his own, poured out the bitterness, filled them with sweetness.<sup>17</sup>

---

### **St. Ephrem** (c. 306-373)

Death trampled our Lord underfoot, but he in his turn treated death as a highroad for his own feet. He submitted to it, enduring it willingly, because by this means he would be able to destroy death in spite of itself.

Death had its own way when our Lord went out from Jerusalem carrying his cross; but when by a loud cry from that cross he summoned the dead from the underworld, death was powerless to prevent it.

Death slew him by means of the body which he had assumed, but that same body proved to be the weapon with which he conquered death. Concealed beneath the cloak of his manhood, his godhead engaged death in combat; but in slaying our Lord, death itself was slain. It was able to kill natural human life, but was itself killed by the life that is above the nature of man.

Death could not devour our Lord unless he possessed a body, neither could hell swallow him up unless he bore our flesh; and so he came in search of a chariot in which to ride to the underworld. This chariot was the body which he received from the Virgin; in it he invaded death's fortress, broke open its strong-room and scattered all its treasure.<sup>18</sup>

---

### St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

Whosoever is pious and loves God, let him enjoy this good and cheerful festival. Whosoever is a grateful servant, let him rejoice and enter into the joy of the Lord. Whosoever is weary of fasting, let him now receive his earnings. Whosoever has laboured from the first hour, let him today accept his just reward. Whosoever has come after the third hour, let him with thanksgiving take part in the celebration. Whosoever has arrived after the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings, for he too shall suffer no loss. Whosoever has delayed until the ninth hour, let him approach without hesitation. Whosoever has arrived only at the eleventh hour, let him not fear the delay, for the Master is gracious: He receives the last even as the first; He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, as well as to him that has laboured from the first; and to him that delayed he gives mercy, and the first he restores to health; to the one he gives, to the other he bestows.

And he accepts the works, and embraces the contemplation; the deed he honours, and the intention he commends.

Therefore let everyone enter into the joy of the Lord. The first and the last, receive your wages. Rich and poor, dance with each other. The temperate and the slothful, honour this day. Ye who have fasted and ye who have not, rejoice this day. The table is fully laden; all of you delight in it. The calf is plenteous, let no one depart hungry. Let everyone enjoy this banquet of faith. Let everyone take pleasure in the wealth of goodness. Let no

one lament his poverty, for the universal kingdom has appeared. Let no one bewail for his transgressions, for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Saviours death has set us free. He who was held by death, eradicated death. He plundered Hades when He descended into Hades. He embittered it, when it tasted of his flesh, and this being foretold by Isaiah when he cried: Hades said it was embittered, when it encountered Thee below. Embittered, for it was abolished. Embittered, for it was ridiculed. Embittered, for it was put to death. Embittered, for it was dethroned. Embittered, for it was made captive.

It received a body and by chance came face to face with God. It received earth and encountered heaven. It received that which it could see, and was overthrown by him whom he could not see. Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory? Christ is risen, and thou art cast down. Christ is risen, and the demons have fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life is liberated. Christ is risen, and no one remains dead in a tomb. For Christ having risen from the dead, has become the first-fruits of those that have fallen asleep. To him be glory and power, for ever and ever.

Amen. <sup>19</sup>

---

### **St. Leo the Great** (c. 400-461)

When, therefore, the merciful and almighty Saviour so arranged the commencement of His human course as to hide the power of his Godhead which was insepara-

ble from his manhood under the veil of our weakness, the crafty foe was taken off his guard and he thought that the nativity of the child, who was born for the salvation of mankind, was as much subject to himself as all others are at their birth. For he saw him crying and weeping, he saw him wrapped in swaddling clothes, subjected to circumcision, offering the sacrifice which the law required. And then he perceived in him the usual growth of boyhood, and could have had no doubt of His reaching man's estate by natural steps.

Meanwhile, he inflicted insults, multiplied injuries, made use of curses, affronts, blasphemies, abuse, in a word, poured upon him all the force of his fury and exhausted all the varieties of trial: and knowing how he had poisoned man's nature, had no conception that he had no share in the first transgression whose mortality he had ascertained by so many proofs. The unscrupulous thief and greedy robber persisted in assaulting Him Who had nothing of his own, and in carrying out the general sentence on original sin, went beyond the bond on which he rested, and required the punishment of iniquity from him in whom he found no fault. And thus the malevolent terms of the deadly compact are annulled, and through the injustice of an overcharge the whole debt is cancelled. The strong one is bound by his own chains, and every device of the evil one recoils on his own head. When the prince of the world is bound, all that he held in captivity is released. Our nature cleansed from its old contagion regains its honourable estate, death is destroyed by death, nativity is restored by nativity: since at one and the same time redemption does away with

slavery, regeneration changes our origin, and faith justifies the sinner.<sup>20</sup>

---

### **The Council of Chalcedon (451)**

His birth in time in no way subtracts from or adds to that divine and eternal birth of his: but its whole purpose is to restore humanity, who had been deceived, so that it might defeat death and, by its power, destroy the devil who held the power of death. Overcoming the originator of sin and death would be beyond us, had not he whom sin could not defile, nor could death hold down, taken up our nature and made it his own. He was conceived from the Holy Spirit inside the womb of the virgin mother. Her virginity was as untouched in giving him birth as it was in conceiving him.<sup>21</sup>

---

### **St. Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636)**

The devil was deluded by the death of the Lord... for through the visible mortality of his flesh, Christ—whom the devil was trying to kill—concealed his divinity, like a snare in which he might entangle him like an unwise bird by a clever trick...The devil, although he attacked the flesh of the humanity in Christ that was evident, was captured as if by the fishhook of his divinity that was lying hidden. For there is in Christ the fishhook of divinity; the food, however, is the flesh; the fishing line is the genealogy that is recited by the Gospel. Holding this fishing line truly is God the Father.<sup>22</sup>

---

### **St. Maximus the Confessor** (c. 580-662)

His flesh was set before that voracious, gaping dragon as bait to provoke him: flesh that would be deadly for the dragon, for it would utterly destroy him by the power of the Godhead hidden within it. For human nature, however, his flesh was to be a remedy since the power of the Godhead in it would restore human nature to its original grace.

Just as the devil had poisoned the tree of knowledge and spoiled our nature by its taste, so too, in presuming to devour the Lord's flesh he himself is corrupted and is completely destroyed by the power of the Godhead hidden in it. <sup>23</sup>

---

### **St. Bernard** (c. 1090-1153)

He comes as an Infant, and without speech, for the voice of the wailing infant arouses compassion, not terror. If He is terrible to any, yet not to thee. He is become a Little One, his Virgin Mother swathes His tender limbs with bands, and dost thou still tremble with fear? By this weakness thou mayest know that He comes not to destroy, but to save; not to bind, but to unbind. If He shall take up the sword, it will be against thine enemies, and, as the Power and the Wisdom of God, He will trample on the necks of the proud and the mighty. We have two enemies, sin and death—that is, the death of the soul and the death of the body. Jesus comes to conquer both, and to save us from both. Already he has vanquished sin in his own person by assuming a human nature free from the corruption of sin. For great violence was offered to

sin, and it knew itself to be indeed subdued, when that nature which it gloried to have wholly infected and possessed was found in Christ perfectly free from its dominion. Henceforth Christ will pursue our enemies, and will seize them, and will not desist until they are overcome in us. His whole mortal life was a war against sin. He fought against it by word and example. But it was in his passion that he came upon the strong man armed, and bound him, and bore away his spoils.

Jesus Christ also conquers our second enemy, death. He overcomes it first in himself, when he rises from the dead, the first-fruits of them that sleep, and the first-born from the dead. Afterwards he will, in like manner, vanquish death in all of us when He shall raise our mortal bodies from the dust, and destroy this our last enemy. Thus, when he rose from the dead, Jesus was clothed in beauty, not wrapped in swaddling-clothes as at his birth. He that previously overflowed with mercy, “judging no man,” girded himself in His resurrection with the girdle of justice, and in so doing seemed in some degree to restrain His superabundant mercy in order to be thenceforth prepared for the judgment which is to follow our future resurrection.<sup>24</sup>

---

### **St. Bonaventure** (c. 1221-1274)

Now that the combat of the passion was over, and the bloody dragon and raging lion thought that he had secured a victory by killing the Lamb, the power of the divinity began to shine forth in his soul as it descended into hell. By this power our strong Lion of the tribe of



Judah (Apoc. 5:5), rising against the strong man who was fully armed (Luke 11:21), tore the prey away from him, broke down the gates of hell and bound the serpent. Disarming the Principalities and Powers, he led them away boldly, displaying them openly in triumph in himself (Col. 2:15). Then the Leviathan was led about with a hook (Job 40:25), his jaw pierced by Christ so that he who had no right over the Head which he had attacked, also lost what he had seemed to have over the body. Then the true Samson, as he died, laid prostrate an army of the enemy (cf. Judges 16:30). Then the Lamb without stain by the blood of his Testament led forth the prisoners from the pit in which there was no water (Zach. 9:11).

Then the long-awaited brightness of a new light shone upon those that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death (Isa. 9:2).<sup>25</sup>

## QUESTION:

### *Did the devil know who Jesus was?*

This often causes confusion, as it appears as though he does. Comments in the Gospels like, “We know who you are, the holy one of God,” or “If you are the Son of God,” seem to indicate that the devil and or the demons knew him. But this is not true. For one thing, love and humility are literally beyond hell’s way of thinking, and God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus is the utmost in love and humility. Too, expressions like “holy one of God” or “Son of God” were common ways among the Jewish people of referring to the Messiah, who was not at all expected to be a divine person but rather a man.

Frank Sheed, in his book *To Know Christ Jesus*, puts it this way: “I think it was of the first urgency to find out what ‘son of God’ meant. It had been used in the Old Testament as a name for the Messiah (Ps. 2:7).

But did he know what it *meant*? ‘Son of God’ had been variously used in the Old Testament—of the chosen people, for instance (Ex 4:22), and, in the plural, of the Jewish judges (Ps 81:6). Satan knew his Old Testament, but the book of Job he must have scrutinized for special closeness, for so much of it was about a certain Satan and the high carnival he had at Job’s expense. In that book (1:6, 2:1, 38:7) ‘sons of God’ meant the unfallen angels. Satan may well have weighed the possibility that the Messiah might be an angel, entering in some unforeseeable way into humanity for “the crushing of his head.”<sup>26</sup>



- 
10. *Baptismal Ritual of the Catholic Church*, 158.
  11. Kreeft, *The Greatest Philosopher Who Ever Lived*, 247-248.
  12. St. Ignatius of Antioch, "The Second Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," 102.
  13. St. Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," 100.
  14. St. Melito of Sardis, "Sermon on The Passover."
  15. St. Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.
  16. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, ch. XXIV.
  17. St. Augustine, "Expositions of the Psalms 51-72," 464-465.
  18. St. Ephrem, "A Sermon on the Cross of Christ."
  19. St. John Chrysostom, "The Easter Sermon of John Chrysostom."
  20. St. Leo the Great, "Sermon 22."
  21. The Council of Chalcedon. "The Letter of Pope Leo to Flavian."
  22. Knoebel quoting Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae*, 61.
  23. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Mystery of the Divine Incarnation*.
  24. St. Bernard, "The Fountains of the Savior," *Sermons on Advent & Christmas*, 103-104.
  25. St. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey to God*, 159.
  26. Sheed, *To Know Christ Jesus*, 118.