

A Victimless Crime?

When I'm out for my morning walks, I often pick up and dispose of trash from the side of the road. Today's haul: 2 cups with lids and straws, 2 beer cans, and a plastic bag. I doubt anybody noticed, and I don't expect to be thanked, least of all by the people who made the mess. That's not why I did it. I did it as a small, voluntary service to the neighborhood I care about. Nobody forced me. So although littering is a foul crime, you would not consider me a victim for choosing to clean it up.

Too often, though, people get the wrong idea about Jesus dying on the cross. They see a helpless victim when nothing could be further from the truth. What by human judgement may appear a defeat was actually the greatest victory ever won!

"I am the good shepherd... I lay down my life for the sheep... The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish..." (John 10:14-18, 27-28)

Jesus said these things *before* he was arrested, knowing what would take place. In fact, that's why he came to earth – to save us sheep from condemnation by laying down his own life in our place, as payment for our crimes against God and humanity. This was God's plan for our salvation, and Jesus submitted to it even though it meant going to the cross, even though a large percentage of those he died to save would either ignore or deliberately deny his sacrifice, thereby rejecting the salvation he paid for with his blood. Are you one of them?

Murdering the perfect Son of God was indeed a heinous crime, but Jesus was anything but a helpless victim. As he told Peter, who drew a sword trying to prevent Jesus' arrest, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53) Weak and defeated? No. Consider how much strength it took to resist using his divine power to escape the very real agony of the cross! Jesus conquered death by voluntarily dying in our place and rising again. Why? He did it out of his amazing love for us undeserving sinners. We made a real mess of things, and he came to clean it up.

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