

Do you want to go to heaven badly enough to die on a cross?

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➤ Intro:

- How badly do you want to go to heaven?

- some may say:

- I want to go to heaven so bad, I'd do anything for God!

- I want to go to heaven so bad, I don't care if my family disowns me!

- perhaps the most severe analogy is that of the cross

- Do you want to go to heaven so bad, you'll die on a cross?

➤ Apostles and writers of the Bible were literally crucified (examples, apostles, Neronian persecution – taken from Fox's Book of Martyrs – secular history)

- **pic: Nero, Neronian persecution**, plaster bust of Nero, Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

- **Philip** (apostle) suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A.D. 54.

- **Andrew** (apostle) brother of Peter, taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross. – **crucified upside down**

- **Peter** was condemned to death, and crucified. Jerome said that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, because he thought he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as the Lord. – **crucified upside down**

- **Jude** the brother of James, crucified in A.D. 72.

- **Bartholomew** was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by impatient idolaters.

- **Simon surnamed Zelotes**, was crucified in A.D. 74.

- others were put to death for their faith

- **Stephen**: stoned to death

- **James the son of Zebedde**: beheaded

- **Matthew**: slain with a halberd (a two-handed pole weapon with a sharp implement on one end)

- **James the Less**: beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club

- **Matthias**: stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded

- **Mark**: dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria

- **Paul**: beheaded

- **Thomas**: thrust through with a spear

- **Luke**, the evangelist, hanged on an olive tree by idolatrous priests of Greece

- Are you committed as were the apostles, to faithfully follow Jesus, even through tortuous crucifixion?

- all the apostles suffered violent deaths by the hands of sinful men, except for John

➤ **Later, Christians were severely persecuted – some died on the cross!** (Fox's)

- **Persecution Under Trajan (A.D. 108)**

- **pic: Trajan**, bust of Trajan, Glyptothek, Munich.

- In Mount Ararat many were crucified, crowned with thorns, and spears run into their sides, in imitation of Christ's passion.

- Eustachius (**martyred for not sacrificing to idols**), a brave and successful Roman commander, was by the emperor ordered to join in an idolatrous sacrifice to celebrate some of his own victories; but his faith (being a Christian in his heart) was so much greater than his vanity, that he nobly refused it. Enraged at the denial, the ungrateful emperor forgot the service of this skilful commander, and ordered him and his whole family to be martyred.

➤ - **Persecution Under Diocletian (A.D. 303)**

- **pic: Diocletian**

- Timothy (**crucified with wife for refusing to burn Scriptures**), a deacon of Mauritania, and Maura his wife, had not been united together by the bands of wedlock about three weeks, when they were separated from each other by the persecution. Timothy, being apprehended, as a Christian, was carried before Arrianus, the governor of Thebais, who, knowing that he had the keeping of the Holy Scriptures, commanded him to deliver the Scriptures up to be burnt; to which he answered, "Had I children, I would sooner deliver them up to be sacrificed, than part with the Word of God." The governor being much incensed at this reply, ordered his eyes to be put out, with red-hot irons, saying, "The books shall at least be useless to you, for you shall not see to read them." His patience under the operation was so great that the governor grew more exasperated; he, therefore, in order, if possible, to overcome his fortitude, ordered him to be hung up by the feet, with a weight tied about his neck, and a gag in his mouth. In this state, Maura his wife, tenderly urged him for her sake to recant; but, when the gag was taken out of his mouth, instead of consenting to his wife's entreaties, he greatly blamed her mistaken love, and declared his resolution of dying for the faith. The consequence was, that Maura resolved to imitate his courage and fidelity. The governor, after trying in vain to alter her resolution, ordered her to be tortured, which was executed with great severity. After this, Timothy and Maura were crucified near each other, A.D. 304.

➤ - **Persecution Under Julian the Apostate** – 4th century

- **pic: Julian the Apostate**, the last polytheist Roman Emperor

- **Many persecutions:** The persecution raged dreadfully about the latter end of the year 363; but, as many of the particulars have not been handed down to us, it is necessary to remark in general, that in Palestine many were burnt alive, others were dragged by their feet through the streets naked until they expired; some were scalded to death, many stoned, and great numbers had their brains beaten out with clubs. In Alexandria, innumerable were the martyrs who suffered by the sword, burning, crucifixion and stoning. In Arethusa, several were ripped open, and corn being put into their bellies, swine were brought to feed therein, which, in devouring the grain, likewise devoured the entrails of the martyrs. . . .

- **If we were overtaken by a persecuting government today, would you be like them, and chosen to die a cruel death rather than deny Christ? – ask again, emphasize**

- **Each of us must die on a cross to go to heaven!** - speaking figuratively, but what if it was literal ☺
 - crucified with Christ
 - **Rom. 6:3, 6, 7** when we're **baptized** into Christ, **crucified, died to sin**
- - **Col. 2:12-13** **buried** with Jesus in baptism, **raised up** with Him through faith in the working of God, **made alive** together with Him, God having **forgiven** us all our transgressions
- - **Gal. 2:20** "I have been **crucified with Christ**; and it is **no longer I who live**, but **Christ lives in me**. . . ."
- - **crucify our passions and desires – die daily**
 - **Gal. 5:24** **crucified passions and desires** - sinful
 - **Gal. 5:10-21a** **sinful behaviors crucified**
 - **Gal. 5:22-23a** way now live, fruit of the Spirit
- - **Gal. 6:14** **world crucified to me, and I to the world**
 - **1 Cor. 15:31** **die daily** – crucify the world, fleshly passions and desires, daily
- - **Matt. 16:24-26** **deny self, take up cross, follow Jesus** - faithfully enduring physical crucifixion
- **illus.: An Account of the Persecutions in the Valleys of Piedmont, in the Seventeenth Century** (Fox's)
 - not know their exact religion - shows the length some men will go to persecute anyone who disagrees with them
- - **sacrificially serve the Lord** – Jesus' sacrifice was crucifixion
 - **Rom. 12:1** **sacrificial service** - metaphorically to take up our cross and serve
 - **illus.: Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 5:7-8** **Jesus came to sacrificially serve**
- - **Rom. 12:2** **Paul's explanation, "how to" do it – Col. 3:10**
 - **today, our commitment is usually not seen** by the violent persecution we endure, **but by our service to God**
 - **our commitment to the assembly and worship** - jointly
 - **our commitment to our individual work** (personal work) outside the assembly
- **Are you as committed as 2nd century Christians?**
 - **We have life so much easier. Are we making the best use of our blessings to the benefit of God's kingdom?**
 - **commendation of congregation: baptism of Will Smith**
 - **Will Smith**, young man who grew up with our girls in Thomasville, neighbor
 - **visited with us here**, at church two Sundays ago
 - **was at our house when young people got together**, did personal work, sang, personal fellowship
 - **was so fired up** when they left Sunday, wanted to move to Tampa
 - **wrote Annie** and asked where a church was in Valdosta, she gave him info, N. Valdosta congregation
 - **he went the Sunday** after visiting here
 - **received warmly**, he said, like every church of Christ he's ever been to
 - **went to lunch** with a member that day
 - **studied 3 hours** with another member that day
 - **was baptized Monday**, the next day
 - **What would have happened if** no one came to church (SL) and encouraged Will?
 - been fired up? - asked where to go to church? - been motivated to learn and obey?
 - **What would have happened if** none of the young people came to our house that afternoon, and we didn't do our work, and we didn't sing, and we didn't enjoy personal fellowship?
 - did anyone think they were changing a life that day?
 - did anyone know they were being watched?
 - did anyone know what an impact they were making to save a soul from death?

- **How valuable was the effort of each person here**, that day, to save a soul? – worship, teaching, love

➤ **Summary / Inv.**

- **Jesus suffered crucifixion** so you could go to heaven! – **Heb. 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Pet. 2:21, 24**

- **Do you want to go to heaven so bad, you'll die on a cross?**

- baptized, crucify passions and desires, sacrificially serve

- **inv.**

An Account of the Persecutions in the Valleys of Piedmont, in the Seventeenth Century (Fox's)
during Crusades – not know their exact religion

shows the length some men will go to persecute anyone who disagrees with them

"This armed multitude being encouraged by the Roman Catholic bishops and monks fell upon the Protestants in a most furious manner. Nothing now was to be seen but the face of horror and despair, blood stained the floors of the houses, dead bodies bestrewed the streets, groans and cries were heard from all parts. Some armed themselves, and skirmished with the troops; and many, with their families, fled to the mountains. In one village they cruelly tormented one hundred and fifty women and children after the men fled, beheading the women, and dashing out the brains of the children. In the towns of Vilario and Bobbio, most of those who refused to go to Mass, who were upwards of fifteen years of age, they crucified with their heads downwards; and the greatest number of those who were under that age were strangled."

Sarah Ratignole des Vignes, a woman of sixty years of age, being seized by some soldiers, they ordered her to say a prayer to some saints, which she refusing, they thrust a sickle into her belly, ripped her up, and then cut off her head.

Esay Garcino, refusing to renounce his religion, was cut into small pieces; the soldiers, in ridicule, saying, they had minced him. A woman, named Armand, had every limb separated from each other, and then the respective parts were hung upon a hedge. Two old women were ripped open, and then left in the fields upon the snow, where they perished; and a very old woman, who was deformed, had her nose and hands cut off, and was left, to bleed to death in that manner.

A great number of men, women, and children, were flung from the rocks, and dashed to pieces. Magdalen Bertino, a Protestant woman of La Torre, was stripped stark naked, her head tied between her legs, and thrown down one of the precipices; and Mary Raymondet, of the same town, had the flesh sliced from her bones until she expired.

- Could this persecution be possible again today?

- There are people in the world who live for the express purpose of bring this vile, extreme persecution upon every Christian alive.
- Are you willing to deny Jesus, take up your cross, and Him, under these conditions?

- Take up your cross and follow Jesus!