

Alpha 2

Why Did Jesus Die?

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This morning we continue with our series of messages on the core beliefs of the Christian faith. These messages parallel the topics at our Alpha class which meets on Wednesday evening. Today we will look at the important question: Why did Jesus die?

Romans 3:21-28

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

²⁷Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Every other religion of the world calls you to prepare a righteous record of your own to give to God. The Christian faith claims that God prepares a perfect, righteous record through Jesus Christ and gives it to you. You are saved not by your own performance or goodness. You are saved by faith in what Jesus did for you upon the cross.

Paul says that Christians have faith in the blood of Christ. We have faith that the death of Christ accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation. To understand how the death of Christ saves us, let's unpack three key words that Paul uses in this passage: redemption, sacrifice and demonstration.

Paul says in verse 24: "we are justified freely by his grace through the **redemption** that came by Christ Jesus." The word redemption literally means to "buy back" or "to liberate through a purchase." In the ancient world there was no such thing as bankruptcy. If you owed a debt and could not pay, you were not able to get off the hook by filing a

Chapter 7 or 11. If you could not repay your creditor, you lost your land and your freedom. You forfeited your land and you became a slave to your creditor. You had to work for that person until you paid off your debt. All your wages went to the creditor. You were treated like a slave. The creditor owned you.

Leviticus 25: 25 says: "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold."

When a person fell on hard times and had to sell his land to pay his debts, a kinsman redeemer was come to buy by back the land for them. In the ancient Middle East this "kinsman redeemer" met three qualifications:

- He was the nearest relative, same flesh and blood
- He would perform his responsibility not out of compulsion, but out of love
- He would buy his kinsman's land from the creditor by bearing the debt for relative

Paul claims that all of us need redemption. The implication is that all of us are spiritually bankrupt. From what do we need redemption? We are slaves to guilt and shame. There is a gnawing sense of guilt in all of us that we don't quite measure up. We are never good enough, because we know we are not perfect. Traditional eastern cultures are shame based. They consider guilt a good thing. They use guilt as a motivator to get people to do their job. When we visited Japan several years ago, we were riding one of the bullet trains. The Japanese train engineers take great pride in arriving at their destination precisely on time. On this trip we pulled into the station about 5 minutes late. Before we arrived at the station, the engineer came on the intercom and talked for several minutes. I asked our host what he was saying. He translated for us and told us that he was apologizing to everyone on the train for not doing his job. He did not get us to the station exactly on time. He had failed to perform at the expected level and felt the need to

apologize to all of us. He was motivated by the fear of guilt to get his job done. Apparently the CEO of Toyota could have used a little more guilt recently!

In our culture, shame and guilt are negative things. We are individuals who write our own scripts and don't feel the need to live up to anyone else's standard. You decide what is right and wrong for you. As long as you are only responsible to yourself, you feel no guilt! Even though we avoid saying that we feel guilt or shame, there is an underlying feeling that we are not living up to what we should be. We claim not to have guilt, but we are driven by it anyway. This explains why some people are workaholics; others are obsessed with their appearance; others are riddled with anxiety or depression. All of these are driven by the need to prove ourselves. We want to overcome a feeling of inadequacy. We are not good enough. These are symptoms of something wrong, but we can't identify the source. We prefer to live without shame or guilt because we do not want to be accountable to anyone for our actions. I decide for myself what is right for me. You decide for yourself what is right for you. No one can judge us because we set our own standards. But if there is nothing that transcends us; if there is nothing beyond ourselves to whom we are accountable, then life has no meaning. If there is no absolute standard of right and wrong, then it does not matter how you live. Everything is meaningless. If you live a life with no guilt, you are living a life with no meaning. Deep down we know there is a standard of right and wrong and that we have fallen short. No matter how much we pretend we are "not guilty," we are slaves to guilt and shame.

In order to prove ourselves we attach ourselves to false masters. To overcome our feelings of inadequacy we turn to our careers or academics or sports or pleasure or relationships as a way to prove we are worth something. When we look to these things as a source of meaning, we become their slaves. We become addicted to work, or pursuit of pleasure or sports or something. How do you know if you are a slave? You can't say "no"

to that thing. It owns you. Is there something to which you can't say "no?" Work? Food? Shopping? The Internet? Sex? Pornography? Alcohol? Facebook? Paul makes it clear we are all slaves to something. And we need a redeemer. Jesus comes as our kinsman redeemer to pay the debt for us so that we can be set free. How does he pay the debt? We see the answer in the next word.

Sacrifice—"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement." Sacrifices were performed to turn away or appease the wrath of God. God's wrath is his anger toward injustice, sin and evil in our world. Jesus died to provide justice. God pays the debt to justice himself. God cannot forgive sin without dealing with justice. God cannot just wink at sin and say "Don't worry. I forgive you." Sin destroys life. Sin cuts us off from the source of life. It breaks our relationship with God. Because of our sin, our desire to live as our own God, we have unleashed evil and death upon ourselves and the world. God has to deal with the evil and injustice in order to redeem us and set us free. His anger burns against evil. Many people don't like to think about an angry God. We like to think of God as a benevolent grandfather who is loving, gentle and good—but not angry. We cannot pit anger against love. It is God's love that makes him angry. Love requires getting angry at injustice.

A parent who watches a child being destroyed by drug abuse feels angry. Why? Because of love! They are angry at the drug culture that destroys lives and families. They are angry at their child for the choices they have made to allow this self-destruction. Why? Because they love and can't stand to see someone they love destroyed. Real love stands against anything that destroys life. Anger and love are inseparably bound. Anger is not the opposite of love. Indifference is the opposite of love. If you can watch someone destroy their lives and not become angry, then you don't love them. You are indifferent to them. You don't care.

The reason God is so angry at injustice and evil destroying his children and his world is because he is so filled with love. The more you are filled with love, the more angry you become at the things that destroy the people you love.

God deals with his anger by paying the debt of injustice himself. When someone wrongs you, there are two choices. Both involve suffering. You can find a way to hurt the person back; make them pay; make them suffer. You make them pay back the debt. When you do that, evil wins. You become harder and crueler. You perpetuate a vicious cycle. The perpetrator rarely says after you have made them suffer: "I deserved that. Now we are even. Let's be friends." Normally they think you did too much. Now they have to get even and the cycle continues. The other way to deal with the hurt is to forgive the person who has wronged you. This means that you suffer rather than making the other person suffer. Evil does not win when we forgive. Our hearts become softer. We break the cycle of getting even.

A debt owed to justice can only be paid through suffering. Someone is going to suffer. God could not just let evil go because it would destroy the world. He had to break the cycle. He loves us and wants to forgive us. On the cross he takes the suffering upon himself. He pays our debt to justice for us. Sin cannot be forgiven without suffering. Our sin debt required the blood of Jesus. Some people object to talk about the blood of Jesus as a way of providing our forgiveness. They claim that it is primitive and advocates bloodshed. How awful is a God that requires the death of his own Son to appease his wrath? It is the ultimate child abuse! We can only understand the death of Jesus in light of the Trinity. God is one God in three persons. When Jesus dies upon the cross, it is God giving himself in the person of Jesus. God is shedding his own blood to pay our debt against him. He appeases his own wrath by giving his life for us. The debt to justice is paid so that justice can be restored and the cycle of evil can be broken.

“He did this to demonstrate his justice.” The death of Jesus upon the cross is more than a legal transaction to cancel our sin debt. It is something that changes us—transforms our hearts. The cross demonstrates who God is. He is both judge and justifier. He is the kinsman redeemer who pays the debt to set us free. Remember the requirements of a kinsman redeemer? He is flesh and blood. Jesus became flesh and blood and lived among us. He became one of us. He gave his life not out of compulsion, but because he loved us. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” He paid for our debt by bearing our sins upon the cross. He did not pay for the debt with money. He paid for the debt with his own life because our debt was infinite.

To be a Christian is not to strive to be like Jesus. It is not about trying hard to be good: go to church, obey the Ten Commandments. That is what we do for God, and it is not enough to pay the debt. To be a Christian means that we admit we are slaves to something, we owe a debt we cannot pay. We need a kinsman redeemer to pay the debt for us and set us free. To be a Christian means that we accept Jesus Christ as our Redeemer. When we look at the cross and realize what God did for us, it changes our lives. The cross of Christ transforms us. We are set free from whatever addiction enslaved us. We are free to love and give and live. We are free to become all that God created us to be.

Why did Jesus die? Because he loves you so much. Will you accept him as your Redeemer, Savior and Lord?