

Why Did Jesus Have To Die?

On Sunday, we began Holy Week by pondering the death of Jesus.

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff began Sunday's sermon with a joke about three friends sharing their "secret sins" in a game of Truth or Dare. They confessed things like playing the slot machines and craving Baskin Robbins Oreo 'N Carmel Ice Cream. 😊 What is a silly "secret vice" of yours?

2. All joking aside, sin is a serious subject that resulted in Jesus' death. Read Luke 23:33-48. As Christians we often say that "Jesus died for our sins" and that "our sins put him on the Cross," and that "if he hadn't died, our sins couldn't be forgiven." Jeff said that, when younger, he struggled to make sense of statements like the foregoing.
 - a. If God can do anything, that means God could have, with the wave of a hand, declared all sins forgiven, sparing Jesus the agony of the cross. Have you ever wondered why God didn't do that? Have you ever struggled to understand why Jesus "had" to die?
 - b. Suppose you said something terrible about another person, then confessed and asked their forgiveness. Suppose they said, "Ok, I'll forgive you, but first somebody or something has to die. I demand a sacrifice before I forgive you." Would that be an appropriate thing to say? Why or why not?
 - c. Despite our struggle to understand, Jesus himself believed his death was necessary. Somewhere in the middle of his ministry, we're told that "from that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering . . . and be killed. . . ." Matthew 16:21. Imagine what it must have been like for Jesus to know that he was going to be executed within a couple years. How do you think that made him feel?

3. Our goal on Sunday was to dig deep in an effort to understand what it means to say that Jesus "had" to die for our sins. With that in mind, Jeff told us the story of an Ethiopian girl named Aisha who died of starvation in 1993. Earlier that same year, Jeff said, he chose to spend \$4,000 to fence his entire one-acre backyard, so his dogs would have a huge play area, which they never ended up taking advantage of. Jeff pointed out that if he had donated \$4,000 to an Ethiopian refugee agency, instead of spending it on a lavish fence, that money would have saved the life of Aisha (or some other child). This led Jeff to conclude that, in God's eyes, he is guilty of negligent homicide. "I made a choice," Jeff said, "that led to the death of a child somewhere on the globe."
 - a. What do you think of Jeff's example? Do you think it's valid? As a matter of simple moral logic, is he guilty of negligent homicide in the eyes of God?
 - b. Have you ever made similar decisions? If so, give an example from your past. How does all this make you feel?

- c. Try to imagine the moment when Aisha died. How do you think her mother felt watching her child die while knowing she would have lived if more people were generous? What feelings do you think her mother experienced?
 - d. The point is that we humans cannot avoid making decisions that sometimes cause great harm to the people around us. Inevitably we make some bad choices. That's why the Bible says, "There is none righteous, no not one. . . . All have turned aside. . . . There is no one who shows [consistent] kindness, not even one." Romans 3:10. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23. When you hear these verses, what do they mean to you? What's the point?
4. Despite his moral culpability, Jeff said, "Even as I confess my crimes, I know God still loves me with an infinite love. I know God has no desire to cast me aside." Have you ever loved someone deeply who did something terribly wrong? How did that make you feel? Did you stop loving them?
 5. Jeff said, "I know God wants to forgive me. But it's not all about me. It's also about Aisha and her mother. Suppose God were to say, 'Jeff, I know your neglect and selfishness resulted in the death of little Aisha, but that's ok. I forgive you. I hereby wipe it away, as if it never happened.'" If God did that, how do you think Aisha's mother would feel?
 6. God stands with victims everywhere. God stands with the victim of child abuse, with the slave, and with the transgender woman who has been beaten to a pulp. Yet God also loves sinners who have lost their way. So God faces a cosmic dilemma. Victims cry out for justice. Offenders cry out for grace. Love for the victim demands justice. Love for the offender demands grace. So what should a good God do? Answer: Jesus as judge announces his decision. Jeff is guilty of negligent homicide and justice demands imposition of the penalty of death – life for life. But then Jesus takes the penalty upon himself. He stands in Jeff's place, sentencing himself to death instead. By so doing, Jesus vindicates the infinite worth of both victim and offender. Justice and Grace join hands in harmony. How do you feel about that explanation of the Cross? Does it resonate with you? Why or why not?
 7. Jeff also suggested a second reason why Jesus "had" to die. He gave the hypothetical example of Pastor Vivian punching him in the nose and stealing one of his cookies, then feeling convicted and asking forgiveness, only for Pastor Jason to pipe up and say, "I forgive you," as Jeff stands there thinking, "What right do you have to forgive her for what she did to me. Only I can do that." The point being: to have moral authority to forgive offenders on behalf of victims, Jesus himself had to become a victim.
 - a. What do you think of that explanation of the Cross? Does it resonate with you?
 - b. Jeff told the true story of the old South African woman who forgave the police officer who kidnapped and killed her husband and son. Jeff compared the old woman's actions to what Jesus does for us. What thoughts or feelings did that story evoke in you?