

## Who Killed Jesus? – Suspect #6 (You and Me)

1. Warm-up Question: On Sunday Jeff shared the story of the first time he can remember committing a sin. He told of a time he let his sister get punished for a bugger he put on the wall. What's the first sin you can remember committing?
2. Sunday was the finale in our "Who Killed Jesus?" sermon series. The goal of the series was to determine who bears ultimate responsibility for the death of Jesus. We considered the most likely suspects – Judas, Pilate, and institutional religious leaders. We even considered whether God the Father or Jesus himself bear some responsibility for his death. But in the final analysis, Jeff suggested that the chief culprit is you and me. We've all probably heard preachers say that our sins put Jesus on the cross. On Sunday we wrestled with what that means. It starts with getting in touch with the magnitude of our own sin.
  - a. Talking about sin can be uncomfortable for some of us who come from church backgrounds where sin was wielded as a club to beat us up, induce guilt, and scare us into conformity. How would you define the difference between responsible conversations about sin versus abusive or manipulative conversations about sin?
  - b. Jeff confessed several of his sins. Actually, the Bible encourages that. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." Scientific studies have confirmed that confession is good, not just for the soul, but also for the body. Why do you suppose confessing our sins in the presence of others is so beneficial to both body and soul?
  - c. As you look back over your life, tell us about a time when you've sinned – one of your deepest regrets, a moment you really wish you could go back and undo? (Please don't feel any pressure to share something that feels too personal.)
  - d. At one point in his sermon, Jeff said he was guilty of involuntary manslaughter. He told about buying a \$2,000 Paul MacWilliams' original, then noted how that money could have been used to feed several Yemeni children for a couple years, staving off death by starvation. "The logic is inescapable," he said. "I have made decisions that have indirectly resulted in the death of little children. It's unavoidable. It's almost impossible to live in an affluent culture and not make decisions like that. The truth is, we all have blood on our hands." What are your thoughts about this part of the sermon? Do you agree or disagree – and why?
  - e. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no not one." How do you feel about saying, "I am a sinner." Is that something you'd say about yourself or would you phrase it differently?
3. If we are sinners, the obvious next question is: where does that leave us? Most preachers would say, "That's why Jesus had to die, so we can be forgiven for the

- terrible things we've done." But when you think about it, it seems a little odd. God is full of grace and mercy. God can do anything. So why couldn't God just forgive us? Why was it necessary for Jesus to die in order for us to be truly forgiven?
- a. To help us think about this, Jeff told the story of Michaela DePrince. As a small girl, she watched as rebels in Sierra Leon attacked her orphanage, made a bet on whether her pregnant teacher was carrying a boy or girl, then cut her open to see who won the bet. When Michaela tried to stop them, they stabbed her. Then Jeff asked us to do a thought experiment. Read the thought experiment on p. 3, then respond to the question stated there.
  - b. Jeff reminded us of the story of the South African woman whose husband and son were kidnapped, tormented, and brutally murdered by white apartheid police officers. Years later at a hearing of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the officer who led those attacks confessed his crimes and expressed deep remorse. When asked what sentence she wished to have imposed, the South African woman not only forgave the officer; she invited him to become like a surrogate son to her. Her grace was so overwhelming, he fainted. How do you feel about what that woman did? How would you have felt if instead a white judge on the Commission unilaterally declared the officer to be forgiven?
  - c. Tell us about a time when in you have been badly victimized. How did that feel? Does the fact that Jesus also suffered as a victim increase your willingness to trust him to decide when and how to forgive the person who victimized you? Why or why not?
4. The suffering of Jesus is described in a famous Old Testament prophecy. Read Isaiah 53:3-7, as printed on p. 3, then tell us what word or phrase in that description of Jesus most jumps out to you.
  5. In Revelation 4-5, the Apostle John describes a vision where he's told that Jesus is about to appear to him in his heavenly form. Jesus is described to John as "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah" and as "the Root of David," creating the expectation that Jesus will appear in the form of a mighty conquering lion or as a regal king with crown, flowing robes, and a golden scepter. Instead when Jesus appears, John is stunned to see "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered." Jeff showed us a photo of a severely injured dog on Sunday to help us grasp the emotional impact of what John saw. Why do you think Jesus appeared in this form? What does it tell us about him?
  6. Jeff summed up the central thesis of his sermon like this: "Jesus' death was necessary for both the victim and the victimizer. The victim needed to know their pain was validated and embraced. The victimizer needed to know that the grace offered them was real, and not cheap. The truth is, each of us is a complex mixture of both victim and victimizer. We all need a Savior who has the moral authority to speak to both parts of us. The part that has suffered and struggles to forgive, and the part that has caused others to suffer and struggles to find forgiveness. That's why Jesus had to die." Critique that statement. Does it resonate with you? Why or why not?

## **Thought Experiment: Based on the Story of Michaela DePrice**

Imagine yourself as the mother of the young teacher who was ripped open by those two rebels. Suppose after doing the unthinkable, the rebels came to their senses and pleaded with God to forgive them. And suppose God, with the wave of a hand, without imposing any punishment, simply said, “Ok, you are forgiven. Let’s forget it ever happened. As far as the east is from the west, I will remove your sins from you. I will remember them no more.”

If you were the mother of that young woman, how would you feel? What would you say to God? You’d probably say something like: “Was my daughter’s life that cheap? These two men rip her open for a bet, and all they have to do is say, ‘Please forgive me,’ and you, God, forgive them. What right do *you* have to forgive them for killing *my* daughter? There you are sitting in heaven surround by all its glory, living like the Queen of England, untouched by fear or pain, never having known what it feels like to be a victim. How can you really understand what it feels like to see your child ripped apart on a whim? You have no right to speak for me or for any other victim!”

Question: Do you think that mother has a fair point? Is it possible for someone who has never suffered as a victim to have the moral authority to forgive those who have caused suffering? In other words, was it necessary for the Son of God to suffer in order for him to have the moral authority to forgive those who victimize? Your thoughts?

### **Isaiah 53:3-7**

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces. He was despised, and we held him of no account.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.