

# Why did he die? → Atonement Theory

*Isaiah 53:5 He was pierced for our transgressions*

## **THOUGHTS:**

- Jesus dying for us is technically called '**Atonement**'
- Theologians down the centuries have tried to understand and describe how Jesus dying for us actually works. These are called '**Atonement Theories**'
- These theories can be a source of controversy! In 2004 Steve Chalke's book 'The Lost Message of Jesus' created a storm by critiquing one theory known as 'Penal Substitution'
- Use the take-away leaflet to read about some of the theories  
*OR* use the cards in a group to compare and discuss the theories

**PRINCIPLE:** What God did in through Jesus dying on the cross is *HUGE!* Surely no single theory can fully capture this and get it all right. Maybe it is better to hold the different theories together and in tension, treating them like *Windows onto the Cross*, i.e. each viewing the same thing, but from different angles.

*Jesus died on the cross → we can be forgiven, set free and know Him*

## Why did he die? → Atonement Theory

**Ransom Theory:** Our wrongdoing creates an enormous debt. This is paid by Jesus by giving his life on the cross (akin to a slave being set free by someone paying a ransom).

**Satisfaction Theory:** Our wrongdoing is an affront to God's honour, effectively us not giving God honour due to Him. Jesus self-giving death on the cross gives that honour on our behalf, 'satisfying' the honour due to God.

**Moral Theory:** Jesus' servant heart and self-giving serves as the prime and complete example of dedication to God for all of us to follow.

**Penal Substitution:** “*Commit a crime and do the time!*” When we break the law there are just consequences/penalty. Jesus pays this penalty on our behalf so that we can go free.

**Christus Victor:** Jesus' death on the cross defeated the power of the enemy and the evil domain, effectively emptying it of its power.

### Questions

Which of the above resonates with you the most?

Would you want to promote one above the others, even to exclude the others?

What other illustrations might you use to describe what happens on the cross?

### Responses

Make your own prayer to thank Jesus for what He has done on the cross for you. Use the cross or the art table if that helps you express yourself

# Prequels to the Cross in the Old Testament

*Genesis 22:13 Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket*

## THOUGHTS:

- Way back in Genesis Abraham is given a strange request to take his only son up a mountain and sacrifice him there
- Yet just at the crucial moment God interrupted him, and he saw a ram in a thicket caught by its horns – a ram that could be sacrificed instead
- This story is thick with allusions to both the Jewish sacrificial system and with Jesus dying on a cross!
- Use the take-away sheet provided to work through and reflect on these yourself

**PRINCIPLE:** Jesus dying on a cross was not a freak quirk of history! Instead it seems to be a rich seam woven through the whole fabric of history, and is visible in different ways at various points through the Jewish people and the 'grand story' of the Bible. It is as if God was laying down markers or clues all the time about where things were heading, preparing mankind for the great event.

*God purposed that His Son would die → It was always in the story →  
We now become part of that same story*

# Prequels to the Cross in the Old Testament

Read Genesis 22:1 to 19

v2 Mount Moriah – now look up 2 Chronicles 3:1 and see that this is the same mount on which the temple was eventually built!

v8 Abraham had faith in God's providing for the sacrifice! Now look up Romans 8:32

v13 Caught up in the thorns – now look up Matthew 27:29

v13 The ram made into an offering. Now look up Leviticus 16: 7 - 10

## Questions

Does the devotion God requires of Abraham seem way too much?

But then notice how God provides the key ingredient for Abraham to see that devotion through! Do you believe that God will give you the key ingredient(s) for whatever He asks of you?

What other Old Testament stories or snippets can you think of that lay down markers or clues to Jesus dying on the cross?

## Responses

Make your own prayer to thank Jesus for what He has done on the cross for you. Use the cross or the art table if that helps you express yourself

# The Guilt Offering

*Isaiah 53:10 The Lord makes his life an offering for sin*

## THOUGHTS:

- In Leviticus much of the Jewish 'ceremonial law' is laid out
- One aspect of this is the 'Guilt Offering' – which has a focus in Leviticus 5:1 through to 6:7
- The offering covers cases where people find themselves to be in the wrong, violating the holiness (or 'cleanness') of God – they can make an offering to put things right
- Note though that these offences are all unintentional – the people find themselves in the wrong not through their own malice, but by neglect or lack of thought
- The death of Jesus covers a much wider scope of wrongdoing – it includes also *our own deliberate fault*

**PRINCIPLE:** The Old Testament Jewish Law sets a framework of holiness, and an array of offerings to keep and restore that holiness for the people. The reality though is that we can never keep ourselves in the right, so it trying to obey the full Law becomes a relentless struggle. The death of Jesus is a once for all sacrifice that has the capacity to cover everything.

*Jesus died for us → We are not justified by works, but by faith in Him*

# The Guilt Offering

*Read Isaiah 53:10 and then Leviticus 5:1 through to 6:7*

Notice the offering requirement is a lamb or goat (Lev 5:6). However if they are poor lesser provisions are acceptable (see v7 and 11).

Note in each case of verse 6, 10 and 13 the priest is said to 'make atonement for' the sins.

Note how the crimes that affect other people require reparation as well as the guilt offering (e.g. 6:4 - 5)

## Questions

These offerings are about 'unintentional sins'. How much bigger is our guilt when our wrongdoing was in fact intentional or pre-meditated?

God offers the people a 'way out' of their predicament. Is this God being legalistic or offering grace?

How much bigger is the grace offered through the death of Jesus?

## Responses

Make your own prayer to thank Jesus for what He has done on the cross for you. Use the cross or the art table if that helps you express yourself

# Easter Devotions

*Psalm 111:2 Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them*

## **THOUGHTS:**

- Make space & time this week to ponder the cross afresh for yourself
- There are many many devotional resources available
- Photocopied here are just two articles – feel free to pick one
- Or have a look at the devotional books here on the table
- Or pick one of the Gospels and read the chapters that tell the story of Jesus being arrested and led out to the cross. Take time to ponder, consider journaling your thoughts

**PRINCIPLE:** We can never fully master the massive implications of the cross. Perhaps we may never really get our heads round it. But we can ponder and pray – let God speak to us about it and bring to mind thoughts that are helpful for us *today*. Those thoughts might be different to what we needed a few years ago, and in the future God may lead us to understand it from yet another angle. Just as in a relationship where we learn new things about each other, we can learn new things about God by pondering Jesus on the cross afresh.

*By knowledge of him my righteous servant will justify many  
(Isaiah 53:11)*

## **Make Your Own Prayer**

*John 19:25 Near the cross stood his mother, his mother's sister, and  
Mary Magdalene*

*Pause here at the cross and  
make your own prayer –  
either silently in your heart or  
write something on the slips  
provided and leave them here at  
the foot of the cross.*