

West Valley Presbyterian Church
Why did Jesus die?
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The Titanic.
It seemed OK on the upper deck. Champagne was flowing
Happy laughter, carefree conversations
But underneath the alarms were going off, and the boat was filling
with water.
People were facing death and they didn't know it.

RICO tells us that the cross is the only lifeboat we have, from our sin
and our separation from God.
RICO reminds us that hell is real and that we need a Saviour to take
our sins away

That is why the cross is the central figure, symbol, logo for Christians
today...
But think about it...
The cross is a terrible symbol.

It is gruesome, it is a symbol of torture and pain
It is not a pleasant symbol at all, or at least it wasn't in early
Christianity
It actually was a gentile symbol because it was a means of death
created by the Romans...

What if PG&E decided to create a little electric chair to be their logo...
and underneath it said "**the power is on**". (IMAGE?)
Do you think that would be a good marketing strategy?
Do you think people would be drawn to that kind of a logo?

That would not be a good logo.
That is because an electric chair's current brings death.
You know companies pay marketing guys a lot of money to sit around
in a room and discuss logos – what is going to represent us? What
symbol, image, configuration of images is going to make people
say..."I want that. I love that. I just to have to have it. That will make

my life better. That will entertain, keep me happy, make me more efficient, that will definitely satisfy, or be a good company to invest in.

What is the LOGO that is one of the best LOGOS ever created in the last 35 years? It's the FEDEX LOGO? (**IMAGE**) Why?

Because of the little white arrow neatly disguised between the E and the X. Ever notice that? It means...its going...on its way...and it will get there.

These kinds of LOGOS are all over. They manipulate you without you even noticing. They are flashy, subtle, and they make us want what they represent.

And what do we have as our symbol, logo, focus? What do we get that defines us? It isn't flashy. It isn't manipulative.

In one way its down right unappealing.

Christians have the cross. Now the cross is all over

It's the most widely used and known logo ever

So we don't even think about it that much

Actually...

the cross was originally developed by the Persians and then used more prominently by Alexander the Great, but the Romans really perfected it as a means of putting down rebellion. It was intended to be fatal in a way that would not only be incredibly painful but also humiliating. **The word excruciating comes from the Latin word for crucifixion.**

It is just like that PG&E electric chair.

It is a symbol of torture and agony.

Not exactly something that is going to draw in the crowds folks.

And for the early church, the cross is such a strange symbol too

Here is this struggling little band of followers of Jesus in Acts

Trying to convince people of Jesus, draw them in, get them going

And they choose to preach and teach about this terrible form of gentile execution...the cross!!

Who is going to rally around that?

Who thought that was a good idea?

And yet...and yet...it is our lifeboat today...it is the very core of our faith

This is the image that represents the church.

Why such a terrible symbol?

I am going to take you back to the Old Testament a little bit.

We've heard how Adam and Eve sinned

We've heard about how they were cast out of the garden

How sin separated them from God

What had been right was now made wrong

But God didn't give up on wanting a close relationship with his creation

The next step he takes is to make a covenant with Abraham

This covenant is going to be a very important word in order to understand the nature of God and the Cross.

A lot of people entered into covenants back in those days.

When kings entered into a covenant, it was always to get something, to get water rights or trade rights or access to land or something.

Covenant was an agreement made between two parties that was mutually beneficial.

So when God makes this covenant with Abraham he says, "Abraham if you follow me, and do what I tell you to do, I will bless you."

What does God get out of this covenant then? He gets someone to bless. He gets a relationship with a person whom he can benefit.

That is the nature of God. Wanting relationship, wanting to give...

When you read about the covenant, that's what it keeps saying. God says, "**I will bless you, and everybody who blesses you, I will bless.**"

The Old Testament writers are shocked by the fact that this God, is not just a God who created everything, but he was a God who wanted relationship and created an agreement – if you follow me...then I will bless you...Over 280 times in the OT God is called the **God of the Covenant...God of the Agreement** so to speak.

Always trying to work it out with us...relentlessly pursuing us to have this relationship.

Now that sounds great, but the other thing you have to understand is that

to enter into a covenant was real serious business. It couldn't be entered into lightly.

You had to own up to your side of the agreement.

Hebrews would often talk about cutting a covenant, and here's why. If we enter into a covenant together, we are making promises to each other.... That can't be broken.

And they would CUT a covenant...they would take animals and literally cut them in two, and they would lay out one-half of the animal here and one-half of the animal there, and then they would do a covenant walk it was called. They would walk in between the pieces of this covenant. The symbolic meaning of this is...May what happened to these animals be my fate, if I do not honor my covenant with you.

Jeremiah 34, verse 18 says, "The men who have violated my covenant...I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces."

That's the covenant walk. Amazingly in one part of scripture, God himself does this covenant walk with Abraham.

In Exodus 15, God has Abraham bring some animals to Him...a ram, a goat, a heifer. Cuts them in two, sets the halves apart, and then what is amazing in this story is who it is that does the covenant walk.

Genesis 15:17, "... a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces." On that day, the Lord cut a covenant with Abraham.

Now in that day, in the Old Testament, smoke and fire symbolized the presence of God.

God, not Abraham, is taking the covenant walk. **God humbles Himself to take an oath...Abraham, I want so much for you to trust Me; I will take the covenant walk. May it be so with Me, if I do not keep My promise with you.** It's a remarkable story. No other god like this.

Incredible!

When people cut a covenant, blood got shed. It was serious business. If you violated the covenant there were consequences to pay.

When a little kid is making a serious promise, what do they say, "I promise, cross my heart, hope to...die." That's kind of scary, isn't it? "Cross my heart, hope to die."

Consequences come into play when promises are broken. Things get very unpleasant for the violator.

The question is, who will pay for it? Whose blood will be shed? Whose body will be broken?

Remember the calf...body broken...in two. May it be so to me if I do not keep my promise.

Later on God's people are trapped in slavery in Egypt, and God is going to bring them out to free them.

The Exodus is the main picture of redemption in all of the Old Testament.

They are to eat a meal together in which they remember God's faithfulness. This is very important. Not just any lamb will do. ***It has to be a lamb without blemish, a lamb without defect, a flawless lamb that will be sacrificed. Then they are to take some of the blood of the lamb and put it on their doorposts. God says, "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you."***

The shed blood of a spotless lamb will be the sign of their deliverance from slavery and death. Redemption is coming. God is going to redeem His people, but redemption is coming at a cost. A sacrificed lamb.

We also see sacrifice for sin happening on what today we call Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement. In Israel, when wrongs had been done there needed to be payment.

I can steal from you \$200 bucks, and come back and say "I am so sorry I stole that money" but until I pay you back, that apology is pretty lame.

Well the Day of Atonement – literally “at-one-ment” came in order to deal with Israel’s sins. Israel knew they were sinning all the time, and they needed a way to fix their violations, their lack of faithfulness to a righteous, holy and just God.

Every time we sin, every time we mistreat somebody, every time we ignore somebody, every time we cheat somebody, every time we manipulate, flatter, deceive, use, exploit, gossip, demean, oppress, marginalize, judge, every time we relate wrongly with other people or with creation or with ourselves, we violate a God whose character is nothing but

perfection and whose will for all of His creation is nothing but good.

Therefore, on the Day of Atonement, it was a very gripping drama that was played out. Hebrew culture was very, very visual, and so two goats would be taken, and lots would be cast. It was, kind of, their way of expressing the sacrifice will be chosen by God. On one of the goats there would be blood that would be put over the atonement cover in the Ark.

Then the chief priest is to take the other goat, a live goat.

"He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites, all their sins..."

How long do you think that would take? "...and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task...The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place."

Anybody here know what the old King James Bible called that goat? It's a scapegoat. It's a scapegoat. All their guilt, all their shame, big sins, vile sins, tiny little hidden sins, things that don't even register on my conscience...everything. All the sin of all the people loaded onto one goat. Where is that goat going to go?

One tradition says, in the text it says they would get a man appointed for the task to take the goat out. One tradition says they would get a Gentile to do that, because no Israelite was going anywhere near that goat that was loaded with everyone's sins. Take him out into the wilderness where it was presumed the goat would die.

The idea is then on that day, the Day of Atonement, everybody in Israel could say again for a day, "I have a clean slate. I'm a forgiven person. I know this last year, what I've done, what I've said, what I haven't done, what I haven't said, I know, but I'm a forgiven person. I don't have to be loaded down with all my guilt and all my shame and all my regrets."

Of course, all those sins don't just disappear. Everybody knew there was nothing magic about that goat. The goat is just a picture, just a reminder. When sin happens, there is a price that has to be paid by somebody.

So the question I want to ask you is this...

Who would love you so much, they would voluntarily take all of your sin on themselves, on their head, and go to a solitary place for you?

Mark has been leading us to this solitary place all through his gospel up to this point. The predictions of his death, and the Old Testament witness show us that this is all a plan of God, and Jesus willingly is participating in this plan.

As I have said, and continue to say...

The cross was intentional

Planned out...and Jesus did it for you to restore the relationship between us and God.

The reason why people love Jesus so, the reason that His story, His words, His life continue to grip the world 2,000 plus years after He was on the cross, is God says, "You want to know what I'm like? Look at Him."

When it was time for Him to die, Jesus went to Jerusalem to have a last supper, where He would celebrate Passover with His friends, when they would remember God would pass over His people as He saw the blood of the lamb where they would remember that the blood of the lamb was to be shed to be a sign of deliverance, the blood of a flawless lamb.

At that last supper He poured out a cup of wine, and He said, "This cup is the new covenant..." They all knew exactly what He was saying. There was an old covenant. God is the God of the covenant, but it never worked out. People couldn't keep it. We couldn't get it right. God had cut a covenant with Abraham so long ago, and it had been shattered. It was left in ruins, and those ruins are partly my life and partly yours. It wasn't God's fault. That covenant was broken by us.

If there was going to be a new covenant, somebody would have to pay. If there was going to be a new covenant, somebody would have to be broken, somebody who did the covenant walk between those broken sacrifices would have to be broken and sacrificed Himself, and Jesus sits there with His friends and says, "This cup is the new covenant ***in My blood***, which is poured out for you." They knew just what He was saying.

This man Jesus did the covenant walk of sacrifice to a place called the cross, and is broken for us; it shouldn't have been him who paid. It should have been us.

Jesus does the covenant walk...and is forced outside the city walls...to be broken, just like that calf was broken in two. Jesus is forced outside the city walls, just like that goat was sent outside away

from the people with all the sins on himself...away from the people to die.

He was the perfect lamb...slain. We're supposed to understand this. That's why Jesus crucifixion happens during the festival of Passover in Jerusalem.

I hope you are getting this. What kind of a God does this? No other God...I hope you love him today...I hope you respond not with a lukewarm kind of "that's nice" walking out of here.

The Mark curriculum will ask you – How are you responding to Jesus?

Are you like the soldiers on the cross who are so caught up in their job and the business of life that you don't realize what's happening right in front of you?

Or, are you like Pilate, who believes Jesus is innocent, and yet succumbs to crucifying him because of peer pressure?

Are you a religious person, who feels deep down that you are good on your merit, and the sacrifice of Jesus is not crucial to your salvation?

Or are you like the centurion, who stood at the foot of the cross and looked up and said, "Truly this was the son of God."

I hope you are like that centurion and respond with your whole life... that you get how much the heart of God yearns after you...that you get the passion of God for you...and that you understand that you need to respond wholeheartedly and completely.

That's our part to play in this new covenant relationship.

On the cross, the price that needed to be paid, the death that had to happen, the sin that needed to be atoned for, the rupture between God and human beings that needed to be bridged, was accomplished finally and fully in Jesus.

You will hear in the DVD Rico talking about the curtain in the temple that spanned the width of a man's hand...the curtain that separated people from God's presence in the temple...was torn in two (Mark 15:38) – meaning that now we had free access and a new covenant through Jesus Christ.

So as a church then...we don't have a flashy logo. We don't have anything that is about success, and wealth, and satisfaction, an appealing by-line, a catchy tune, a new product

Friends, what we have is the cross...the tragic, gruesome, glorious, beautiful, victorious, life changing, sacred story of the cross...that's

our life boat....thats our hope. Cause you and I have a problem...it's a heart problem that has distanced us from God...it's a sin problem...and the Bible is very clear that "the wages of sin is death" and "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves" ...its like living on the top deck of the Titanic when the alarm is going off underneath...

Today look at the cross...see Jesus there...repairing that broken covenant, becoming the calf cut in two, the lamb that was slain, the scapegoat, the sacrifice...

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

I talked to my friend this week. She was mad at her church because she said to me that all they ever do is tell people how much God loves them, but not ever talking about how people are called to respond back in love to God.

I don't understand, she said. After all that Jesus has done, God longing to have a relationship with us, and people lead double lives...at church they appease their guilt...and then go and live the way they want to! I don't understand why they don't love him more. I don't understand what more God could do...

I wanted her to come talk to you today but she I found out was laid up with a broken pelvis. So I told her to send me her story...she has many...and the story I asked her for was the one I thought would fit best with what I thought we were doing this week...I thought we were repeating last weeks chapter...

We weren't. I thought she sent me the wrong story. Actually she sent me the right one...when I figured out what topic we were actually on...It's a story about the power of the cross...I'd like to end with it...

Life at the foot of the cross.....

My shame was palpable....

I was a certified failure in every category of human decency**and I knew it.** Despair and hopelessness kept me drinking and using; it was my only relief from the living hell that was my life.

Through what could only be described as divine intervention, I was introduced to a new way of living in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. They loved me into a life of sobriety I never dreamt possible.

Still, underneath was an unsettled feeling that this loving God was kind of nuts to give somebody so rebellious and hostile a shot at a

new life. It didn't make sense and it certainly wasn't fair. Why should I get off 'Scott free'?

Home alone one night, newly sober, scared, unemployed, and going through a divorce, I turned on the television to hear Billy Graham talk about 'going to hell' and needing Jesus.

Sheesh..... what a crock!

These people needed a reality check so I called the 800 number flashing on the screen.

Even a vulgar tirade didn't dissuade the compassionate, patient man who took my call. Gently and simply he explained the cross.

My freedom had been costly. A huge price was paid.

Redemption for losers was God's plan all along. But what a lousy exchange for Jesus ~ my filthy rags for HIS righteousness!

In some deep place in my soul it made sense. That night I made a decision... 'GAME ON!'

I was going to live with Jesus, in His presence, and by His power.

And so it began And still is.

My life remains centered at the cross. Of course there have been foolish lapses of prayer and costly disobediences. I quickly become graceless and self absorbed. No wonder Jesus said to REMEMBER..... not the empty tomb, but the cross.

His blood. His broken body. It's at the cross I find the forgiveness, grace, and redemption He alone gives, and I still desperately need. And what flows from that is the resurrection power that still turns this world upside down. It is that victory that bears witness to my life in Christ. .

I once was blind, but now I see. I was a walking dead woman, but now I am fully alive.....

Yet it's not me..... It is Jesus! It's the Cross of Christ!

Would you bow your heads? Let's pray. Now for those of you who have not been clear on this decision before, who understand why the Cross is at the heart of Christianity, this is a moment for you to talk to God, and you can simply tell Him...you can use these words...Heavenly Father, I confess before You today that I am a sinner, and I understand when Jesus went to the Cross, He was taking my place. He was paying my debt. So, I want to be real clear with You, Heavenly Father, I would like to receive Your forgiveness and Your grace as a gift because of what it is

Jesus has done for me. I want to invite Jesus now to be my forgiver and my leader and my friend and companion through life.

It is that simple. If you have made that decision, I want to encourage you to tell somebody, a Christian friend, a brother or sister, so that they can help, and as a church we would love to know and help you to begin to grow spiritually.

While everybody here is still praying, still with your heads down, maybe you know God, maybe you have been following Jesus, but you're just carrying sin, regret, a burden around, and what God wants to whisper to you right now is...You know that scarlet thread is still for you. All of your sin, past, present, future, has been placed on the head of somebody else, and He has carried it to a solitary place. You are forgiven. You are cleansed. You are whole. You are healed. You are loved.