

Talk It Over

Epicenter (Week 1) The Crucifixion

SMALL TALK

1. What is the most creative excuse you have ever heard given in an attempt to avoid personal responsibility?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ John 13:30.** John's gospel is filled with themes of light and darkness to teach us spiritual truths. What do you make of John's statement "and it was night"? How did Jesus prepare his disciples for the surprising dark times he knew they would face (John 16:33)?
3. **READ Matthew 27:15-26.** What "custom" did the governor have at this time of year? Why? What important truths did Matthew want us to learn from this?
4. **READ Galatians 2:20** Why did Jesus die? What surprising personal reason did Paul give us?
5. **2 Corinthians 5:21.** Why did Jesus die? What surprising theological reason did Paul give us?

GETTING PERSONAL

6. When have you asked yourself, "Is there more to life than this?" What caused you to ask deeper questions about life?
7. C. S. Lewis said, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." What do you make of his logic?
8. When, if ever, did the crucifixion of Jesus seem more significant to you than an obscure event in history two thousand years ago? Has the crucifixion become part of your own story yet? If so, how?

MAKING PROGRESS

9. One of our core statements is: "Live with eternal significance." What is it about the cross that makes this possible?

April 14, 2019

Crucifixion

Series: Epicenter

Epicenter: Where death was swallowed up in victory

In this two-part series, we untangle the question of the meaning of life, by looking at the very epicenter of our faith, the crucifixion and resurrection.

I believe most people in the world are not surprised by darkness. Most adults have already come to expect that much of what they experience in life is dark.

Comedian and Actor Russell Brand said “Drugs and alcohol are not my problem. Reality is my problem. Drugs and alcohol are my solution. They fill up the hole inside of me.”

That seems like a rather bleak view of reality to me. Jesus claimed to be able to fill that hole when he said things like, “I am the bread of life”. “I have come to give you life to the full”.

And yet, I frequently run into an opposite problem. I frequently run into believers who are surprised by darkness because they misunderstand these sweeping statements of Jesus. Many believers are surprised by dark times as if they thought they should be fully exempt from every form of suffering. But is that what Jesus said? So many are trying to make sense of life.

The actor Jim Carrey said this, “I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.”

What I think he is saying is that everyone chases money, wealth, success and fame, thinking it will bring them happiness, but once they attain it, they will discover that these alone are not enough to satisfy. *“That’s it? What’s all the hype was about? I don’t feel happy. I don’t feel fulfilled. I don’t feel anything. There must be more to life than this!”*

The great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy pondered deeply and struggled.

Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?’ –A Confession, by Leo Tolstoy.

His deep questions weren’t answered by his wealth or success and he had much wealth and he had great success in his writings, as many consider his work some of the best in literature. It looked like he had it all, a wonderful family, a wife and 13 children—but this one nagging question drove him to the verge of suicide.

Tolstoy discovered faith in Jesus to be the answer. There is no question Jesus was a real person in history. There is no better documented person of ancient history than Jesus. The chief question is this: after his crucifixion did he really rise from the dead? And for today, here’s another question. Even if he rose from the dead, why does his crucifixion have any significance for our lives now, today, some 2000 years later?

Here is another way to ask it: **How can his gruesome death be called “Good”?** We call the day he was crucified, “Good Friday”! What if we spoke to his mother Mary that Friday. What would she think of us calling it Good Friday? That Friday was the most difficult day of her life.

I. Don’t be **SURPRISED** by darkness; Jesus

PREDICTED it.

John 13:21 (NIV) After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”

I don't want to ask him, you ask him. I don't want to ask him. Hey, let's get John to ask him. John was the youngest. And John asked him.

Why did Jesus tell him? Why did Jesus tell anyone?

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that none of what was about to happen was a surprise to him. None of it was accidental. Everything that was about to happen would happen exactly as Jesus knew it would.

John 13:27 (NIV) As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.”

John 13:30 (NIV) As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

This is not merely a notation about the time of day! This is describing something we could not see with the naked eye. Spiritual forces of darkness were working overtime along with human agents who were deceived by evil at work.

For those who don't believe in God, it is logical that they don't believe in evil either. And yet, the depths of the evil and the pervasiveness of evil in our world seems hard to explain if there is no such thing as evil. Jesus who came from heaven came to confront a rebel kingdom, a whole world of darkness, and that darkness was deeply dark. Judas entered into that darkness.

That darkness thought they were on the verge of victory. As all the powers of darkness were converging to snuff out the light of the world, Jesus was yielding to a plan that would be the greatest epicenter blast in history, reverberating with the most explosive reversal of all time and eternity.

And yet Jesus made careful preparations for these disciples before it happened, and for us, knowing what we also would face.

*John 16:33 (NIV) “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world **you will have trouble**. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Jesus wants us to know the nature of his victory. Even after the epicenter events, there will still be a great shaking. You will still have trouble, but the victory will be complete! The epicenter of a blast is so large, victory is assured!

<p>We follow an invincible leader who was able to overcome the largest gathering of spiritual darkness imaginable!</p>
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We still fight the gathering storms of darkness. These will someday be completely swallowed up in victory because Jesus has overcome the world of darkness! So, point 1. **Don't be surprised by darkness**, and now Point 2:

II. Don't DENY darkness; You too are BARABBAS

Matthew 27:15 (NIV) Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.

What a strange custom. What feast is this? This feast was the Passover feast! Even now, the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. The Passover was the commemoration of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb and its blood on the doorposts, protecting the firstborn in Egypt. The first Passover prefigured the entire temple system with its elaborate substitutionary sacrificial system which provided atonement, but it

also prefigured how there would eventually be provided the blood of the “lamb of God” that would release us! It was the hype around the festival, and the some of the substitutionary overtones that led to this “custom” of releasing a prisoner, once a year at this time.

Matthew 27:17 (NIV) So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

This is a ridiculous match up. Which one should be released? What a silly question. It seemed to the governor to be such an obvious way out. Let’s see, the murderous thug or the popular and compassionate Jesus? And in our mind, we ask, let’s see, “The sinful one or the sinless one?” What a ridiculous question. And yet, to the ridiculous question there was a ridiculous reply. The people chose Barabbas! They would rather have a notorious murdering insurrectionist thug released than a “do-gooder” Messiah who they believed to be an imposter. John told us in the first few lines of his biography of Jesus, “He came to his own, and his own rejected him.” When Pilot asked “Why?” They gave no reason. They only shouted louder and repeated their chant: “Away with Jesus”, “Crucify him!” “Crucify him!”

**Do you see how the Lamb of God takes Barabbas’ place?
Do you see how we are more like Barabbas, than we are like Jesus?**

You might think, but I’m not a murderous thug! I’m not so bad! Let me answer that sentiment with two lessons.

Lesson ONE: Cottonball Object lesson:

If we had a cottonball throwing contest from the stage? Who comes closest to hitting the back wall? A child or major league baseball player? Probably the baseball player, but only by a feet. But what if it the contest was to see who could hit the sun? Now the difference measured in feet seems meaningless. Your best

throw is just as deficient as Barabbas' throw. Neither one of us has what it takes to hit the Sun. Conclusion: I have a lot more in common with Barabbas than with the Son of God.

Lesson TWO: His Name

What does his name mean? His name means, Son of Abba - Bar Abba - or Son of the Father. This is ironic. The Son of the Father was crucified in place of Bar Abbas the Son of the Father. If you want to be a child of God, that is how it works. The only way to become the son or daughter of the Father, is for the Son of ABBA, to die in place of the Sons of abba.

Who is Barabbas? I am, and you are. Don't deny your darkness.

III. Don't be DEFEATED by darkness; let Jesus ABSORB it

Why did Jesus die?

The most *personal* answer to this question was what Paul wrote in the letter to the church in Galatia.

Galatians 2:20 (NIV) [Jesus] ...loved me and gave himself for me.

YOU ARE LOVED THAT MUCH! Grasp this and everything changes!

Why did Jesus die?

The most *theological* answer to this question was what Paul wrote in the letter to the church in Corinth.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I am blown away that you loved me and gave yourself for me. I know there is darkness in me. I keep messing up my life. Thank

you for absorbing my sin, releasing me, and giving me life. By your life and victory help me to live right with you. Amen.

This message is TO BE CONTINUED! Hope to see you for the Exciting conclusion on Easter Sunday! EPICENTER: Where death is swallowed up in victory!