

A night out with Jesus

Jesus mixed with and got to know all sorts of people. He ate, drank and spent time with them. He was even accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. Enjoy a night at your local pub – grab a table, a drink and some snacks; reflect with your companions on what the good news might mean to each of you and those around you. Then spend some quality time sharing views on what the story of Jesus means in your lives.

Try to contribute to a great conversation, perhaps a debate.

If you would like some particular talking points, why not reflect on the topic and questions below? You never know where your discussions might lead ...

Why did Jesus have to die?

Do you have an opinion/theory/belief on why or whether Jesus had to die?

Do you think it's important for Christians to be able to explain (to themselves or to others) why Jesus died?

There is no shortage of theories to consider in your reflections and discussions:

The Satisfaction Theory

Bible ref: Galatians 3:1-13; Proponent: John Calvin

Idea: Our sins against God dishonour God and the insult given is so great, that only a perfect sacrifice could satisfy God. Jesus, being both God and human, is this perfect sacrifice.

A variation on this theory is the commonly held Protestant 'penal substitution theory' which, instead of considering sin as an affront to God's honour, sees sin as the breaking of God's moral law. Sinful humanity is therefore subject to God's wrath; the essence of Jesus' saving work is his substitution in the sinner's place, bearing God's curse for us (Galatians 3:13).

Discussion points:

- If God is omnipotent, why couldn't he just forgive us without a sacrifice?
- Is the crucifixion, even the very incarnation, all about pleasing a wrathful, angry God?
- Is this 'cosmic child abuse' – a Father punishing a son for the mistakes of others?

The Ransom Theory

Bible ref: Mark 10:42-45; Proponent: Gregory of Nyssa

Idea: In this theory, Jesus liberates humankind from slavery to Satan, and thus death, by giving his own life as a ransom. Victory over Satan consists of swapping the life of the perfect, Jesus, for the lives of the imperfect, humankind.

A variation of this view is known as the 'Christus Victor' theory, and sees Jesus not used as a ransom but rather defeating the captor Satan in a spiritual battle and freeing enslaved humankind.

Discussion points:

- Did God have to suffer and die to defeat the devil? Isn't God omnipotent?
- Would God have to 'trick' the devil to win?
- Doesn't this make the whole incarnation/crucifixion all about the devil and not about God?

The Moral Influence Theory

Bible ref: Matthew 16:24-26; Proponent: Paul Tillich

Idea: The real point of Jesus' obedience and death was to provide an example for humanity to follow – to stay faithful to one's convictions even in the face of injustice, brutality, and ignorance. The universe is structured to deal with consequences – and consequences are *not* punishment. They're just consequences. Jesus had to deal with the consequences of his actions and so do we.

Discussion points:

- Did Jesus have to die to be an example to us?
- Does this mean that the crucifixion didn't actually change anything?
- Does this underestimate the seriousness of our sin?

The Recapitulation Theory

Bible ref: Romans 5:17-19; Proponent: Irenaeus

Idea: Christ is the new Adam, who systematically *undoes* what Adam did. Where Adam was disobedient and broke God's command concerning the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Christ was obedient even to death.

Questions

- Does this theory presuppose a literal Adam?
- Does this let us off the hook?
- Does this answer why Jesus had to suffer?

Consider also ...

The Scapegoat Theory

Human beings want what they see other human beings have, and this can lead to violence (read about [Cain and Abel](#)).

As human societies grew, they needed a release valve – a scapegoat mechanism – to let off the pressure of increasing rivalry and violence: an innocent, sacred victim is chosen, everyone's sin is piled onto the victim, and the victim is sacrificed, thus relieving the pressure of violence.

In Christ, God becomes the one who is scapegoated, rejected and expelled. The scapegoat here is not one sacrificed to appease an angry deity. Instead, God enters our society, becomes the scapegoat himself, and thereby eliminates the need for any future scapegoats or sacrifices.

The Accident Theory

Christ's death was an accident, as unforeseen and unexpected as that of any other victim of human hatred.

Feminist Criticisms

Most theories of why Jesus had to die are conceived by men, who inherently uphold the cross as a justification of powerful violence against the powerless and oppressed.

Words of wisdom?

Literature offers many, many more thoughts and theories around the death of Jesus. Do you have a favourite quote or passage to throw into the conversation?

'...nearly two thousand years [ago], one man [was] nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be to be nice to people for a change'

From *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams

'We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed. Any theories we build up as to how Christ's death did all this are, in my view, quite secondary: mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself.'

From *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis