

CoreGroup Guide | Why Did Jesus Have to Die? – Part 5

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From Pastor Charity

Hey friends! Easter is just around the corner and we are in DIRE NEED of volunteers across all ministries. *We still need 105 volunteers for the 9am service and 125 volunteers for the 10:45am!* Sign up here to serve: <https://gatheringnow.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/1077/responses/new>

Welcome

We did it! We've made it to Holy Week! As we move through the final days before Easter, we are considering an atonement theory that spotlights some of the ugliest parts of human nature and how Jesus saves us from them. The scapegoat theory is a relatively new idea, but its roots are in the Old Testament practice of sacrificing a goat that symbolically carried the sins of the people. Although most of us will never sacrifice a goat, we may still need someone to save us from the worst parts of ourselves.

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God,
We gather together today at the end of a long journey toward the cross. As we reflect on Jesus' suffering, guide us not only to understand it, but to be transformed by it. Be present in our conversation, in our listening, and in our sharing.
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen

Ice Breaker

Would you rather be wrongly blamed for something small or admit to something embarrassing that you actually did?

The Head

The scapegoat theory of atonement is a perfect example of how Jesus recontextualizes and brings new meaning to Old Testament practices. The Israelites' practice of sacrificing a literal scapegoat looks a lot like our culture's tendency to avoid acknowledging our part in a situation by placing blame on others. Jesus' death and resurrection stand to show us the problem with demanding violence as a way to feel absolved of our sins.

Luke 23:13-25

Then Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people. He said to them, "You brought this man before me as one who was misleading the people. I have questioned him in your presence and found nothing in this man's conduct that provides a legal basis for

the charges you have brought against him. Neither did Herod, because Herod returned him to us. He's done nothing that deserves death. Therefore, I'll have him whipped, then let him go."

But with one voice they shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us."(Barabbas had been thrown into prison because of a riot that had occurred in the city, and for murder.)

Pilate addressed them again because he wanted to release Jesus. They kept shouting out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

For the third time, Pilate said to them, "Why? What wrong has he done? I've found no legal basis for the death penalty in his case. Therefore, I will have him whipped, then let him go."

But they were adamant, shouting their demand that Jesus be crucified. Their voices won out. Pilate issued his decision to grant their request. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown into prison because of a riot and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will.

- What stands out to you about the choice between Jesus and Barabbas?
- Why do you think the crowd was so insistent about Pilate's choice?

Isaiah 53:4-5

*It was certainly our sickness that he carried,
and our sufferings that he bore,
but we thought him afflicted,
struck down by God and tormented.*

*He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us whole;
by his wounds we are healed.*

- What descriptions of atonement stand out to you from this passage?
- How would you describe the scapegoat theory in your own words?
- Do you think Jesus' death was primarily the result of human scapegoating, part of God's plan, or somehow a combination of both?

The Heart

The uncomfortable truth of the scapegoat theory is that a group of people who once worshiped Jesus were the same people who demanded he be crucified. This theory is bold enough to suggest that humans would rather let Jesus take the fall for their sins, than own up to the ways they have done wrong. This acknowledgement of our personal and communal sins is the first step toward a reconciled relationship with God.

- How do you feel when you imagine yourself as a part of the crowd that puts the blame on Jesus and demands his death?
- What about the act of placing blame or scapegoating makes it an easy choice in difficult situations?
- How can remembering that Jesus' suffering was a result of systemic sin allow you to feel closer to him?

The Hands

Having our sin is a difficult thing to face, but the beauty of the Easter story is that it doesn't end in death. When he was resurrected, Jesus exposed the patterns of sin in the world, and made clear that they would not stand. If we are part of the group that demanded violence, we also have an opportunity to choose a different way.

- How can we become better at recognizing sin in ourselves and the world, instead of choosing to avoid it?
- How could you incorporate a regular practice of confession into your life?
- What would it look like to follow Jesus in refusing to scapegoat others?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God,
 We thank you for this time together. Help us to carry what we have learned over the course of this series with us into our daily lives. Remind us that no matter how far we stray, the cross has the power to free us, forgive us, and show us how to love. We give thanks for your sacrifice, rejoice in your resurrection, and seek to live out our redemption every day.
 Amen.

Going Deeper

This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a memory verse that you can learn on your own or together with your group. The recommended memory verse for the *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?* series was John 3:16-17 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. 17 God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Whether you memorized it or not, read through this verse three times together as a group. For those who have the verse committed to memory, try closing your eyes as you recite the scripture together. How does God speak to you through these words?