

## ***“Why did Jesus die?”***

I thought I wasn't going to be doing any more writing for a while, because of starting the Alpha course but, on the contrary, the Alpha course has prompted this current essay, in particular, the session on “Why did Jesus die?”

(It's available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm23Mybew8A> and I do think it's well worth watching – 28 minutes.)

As I watched the video, I made some notes:

- 1) sin = doing wrong things  
—> punishment
- 2) sins —> broken relationship with God (so we need Jesus to save us)
- 3) *(my alternative idea, that I scribbled down at the time...)*  
broken relationship with God —> sins
- 4) evil has been defeated
- 5) death has been defeated
- 6) forgiveness is possible
- (added from thinking back to the film...)*
- 7) the cross can help when facing suffering (re: young chap's dad's illness and death)
- 8) the cross brings reconciliation
- 9) forgiveness is possible, indeed it's essential

(I've only added the numbers, so I can refer back to them.)

I was thrilled that there was so much of the breadth and depth of what Jesus achieved through the cross and resurrection, and there was repeated emphasis – nay, insistence – that this is all based on the fact that God loves us so very, very much.

However, I hope I'm wrong, but I fear that people, coming to this from outside, may hear:

- a) The problem is that we've done things wrong = we have sinned
- b) We deserve to be punished
- c) Jesus was punished in our place (analogy: Nazis want to kill ten people, but volunteer offers to take someone's place, as he's a Catholic priest and has no family)

d) Add to that the graphic example of forgiveness: Corrie Ten Boom forgiving one of the guards from Ravensbrück concentration camp. (Praise God that she forgave him!)

e) Add to that the ex-prisoner who took a strimmer to someone's feet and who took drugs and committed other crimes. (Praise God that he forgave him and he's now helping others in similar circumstances.)

All very memorable, but how does it help these two imaginary characters, Albert and Bertha?

Albert is a really, really nice guy. He was brought up in a loving family, has lovingly raised his own family and then, after his wife died, he selflessly cared for his dying mother. But he just doesn't see any point in being a Christian.

Bertha was abused by her father, and later by her husband, she had no support from anyone because she never complained, and she ended up as a prostitute. ("Go to church? Why would I go there? I feel bad enough about myself already!") [character pinched from *What's so amazing about grace?*]

No, sorry, I don't have any easy answers to help A and B, but can I offer a couple of possible pointers?

First, I know we love to see things in simple cause-and-effect ways, but my note (2) may not be terribly helpful. And does the Bible *actually* teach that we did things wrong and then, as a result, we broke our relationship with a holy God, who cannot look on sin?

So, in my note (3), I pointed to an alternative (but hopefully still biblical) way of seeing sin: the root of the problem is that we ignore God ("*Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities ... have been clearly seen ... so that men are without excuse.*" – Rom 1:20) and, as a *result*, things go wrong.

One of the books I've read (no idea which, sorry!) said that it isn't that God punishes us for our sins, rather that sin is its own punishment. God *allows* sin to take its course and allows our lives to get messed up, in the hope that we'll come to our senses: "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!" – Then just watch him breaking all social conventions, racing down the road and hugging his smelly, pig-stained son! Praise God for his amazing love!

Maybe we should be teaching that it's SIN that's the problem, not sins (plural); it's our attitude to God that's at the root of everything that goes (and has gone) wrong in the world – everything.

So what is SIN? Being simplistic, I like the definition we gave to the 6–10-year-olds in our kids' club at my former church:

**S**hove off, God — **I**'m in charge — **N**o to your ways

And maybe I can change it a bit, in a way that might help Albert:

**S**ounds nice, thanks, but — **I** don't feel any need — **N**ot just now, anyway

If God created the whole universe and loves us desperately and passionately, and is willing to die for us, to reconcile us to himself, then saying, “Not now, thanks”, is a very unwise choice, to say the least. But personally, I don't blame Albert for saying no thanks, when we present him with “You're a sinner who deserves punishment, but Jesus died for you”.

And what about Bertha? Sorry, I don't have an answer; I'm hoping that some of you will be able to help Bertha. I relate better to Albert (not that I'm as nice a guy as he is, but I've never strimmed anyone's feet). But I know for sure that Bertha won't be helped by “You're a sinner who deserves punishment, but Jesus died for you”.

Not answers, just questions, but hopefully this is faith-ful questioning I'm doing, and I'm very, very, very excited by what God is doing in my life, and in Sue-and-my's life, and (please God) in the lives of the dozen or so folk coming to our Alpha course.

Paul Bev. 12.10.18

### **Bibliography**

Irwin, Ben (2015) *The Story of King Jesus* – a **brilliant** children's book that traces humankind's repeated decision to “do things my way” (starting from Adam & Eve) and God's relentless, loving pusuit of us, to draw us back to Him, sending Abraham, then Moses, then the judges, and eventually Jesus, and each time... well, yes, you've got the idea! Brilliant!

Yancey, Philip (1997) *What's so amazing about grace?* A very challenging book!