

The Suffering Servant: Why did Jesus die?

Various Scriptures

Imagine for a moment that you are sitting at a bench in the mall and someone sits down next to you, looks at you, and says, “The Lionfish is an invasive species from the Indian Ocean that is destroying the underwater ecosystem of the Atlantic Ocean.” Your first thought would be, what does this person mean by this? Why is he or she telling me this? There are a number of options for what this phrase means and why this person is sharing it with you as you are parked on that bench at the mall.

One option could be that this individual has mistaken you for a friend and they have been carrying on a conversation regarding threats to marine life so he thinks he is continuing the conversation with his friend. Another option could be that this person has recently been to counseling for extreme social anxiety and his counselor has told him to try to overcome his anxiety by approaching random strangers at the mall and engaging them in conversation. So, he starts with what he knows. A last option that we will discuss is that this person is a Russian spy and he’s been instructed to use that line to make contact with another agent.

How would you be able to make sense of this sentence and what it means? Well, you would obviously have to have some context, but more specifically you would have to know the story of the person who is speaking to you. Of course, we want to know what the sentence means, but we also want to know how to respond to this person. Do we call security? Do we enter a nice conversation with a person who needs to overcome social anxiety? We can only know what to do if we know the story that led us to this point.

Now, it’s important that we set that ground rule that you can only make sense of an event or a sentence in light of the bigger story of which it is a part. I’m afraid that we too often approach this question of why Jesus died like we are trying to understand that sentence apart from the story in which it comes. We tend to think about the death of Jesus in isolation from the story of the Bible and the grander purpose of God in creation. We ask this question, Why did Jesus die? And we answer it, to forgive us of our sins and to give us eternal life. There’s nothing inherently wrong with that statement, but I would submit to you that’s it certainly

doesn't tell us the whole story and it often can end up self-centered and disconnected from God's bigger goal.

So, we've just studied the death of Christ in the Gospel of Mark and in a couple of weeks we will look at the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. But today I want to try to give you the story in which the death of Jesus makes sense. This will deepen and broaden your grasp of Christ's work and help you to then respond to Christ's work in ways that are more faithful and filled with more joy.

Let's go back to that bench in the mall for a minute. If someone spoke that sentence to you without the context of the background story, what would you have to do to understand the meaning of the sentence? You would have to ask that individual questions and begin to unfold the story in which that sentence makes sense. So this morning we are going to ask a couple of questions to help fit the death of Jesus into the story of Scripture. **2 questions to clarify the purpose of Christ's death so we can respond faithfully.**

1. What was God's goal in creation?

Clearly the death of Jesus is the climax of the biblical story, but you cannot make sense of the climax of a story if you don't know overall what the story is about. The Bible begins with the story of God's creation of everything that exists. It's stated so simply in Genesis 1:1, but we want to ponder the question of why God created anything at all. What was He hoping to accomplish in creation? The answer to this question will give us a context in which to interpret the work of Jesus.

So, I'm going to give you a one sentence answer to this question and then we're going to show you how we got to this answer from the Bible. **God's reign through his servant-kings over creation for His glory** – Jeremy Treat. Notice at the end of this sentence that everything God does is ultimately for His own glory. He deserves praise, honor, and worship because of His character and because of His works. And of course, his character is put on display through His works. So, what work was he pursuing by creating the world?

If you turn to Genesis 1 you will see that the creation of the world happens by God speaking everything into existence. He is presented as the absolute Lord of all and the Creator of all. Because He is the creator and everything else is created

it all belongs to Him. Over the course of 6 days He speaks and it comes to pass. There is no challenge to His authority and He is the King and everything is good.

But the high point of his creation is reached on the 6th day when He creates human beings. The biblical writer slows down the pace and zeros in on human beings. He says something about humans that has not been said about any other part of creation till this point. Look at verse 26. Human beings are made in God's image.

We tend to think of being made in God's image as meaning that we as humans possess certain innate qualities. We are rational, logical, etc. But this is forcing too much onto this concept here. Being made in God's image means that we are related to God as beings who reflect him and worship Him. How do we do this? God tells the human beings how they are to properly image Him in the rest of verse 26 through verse 28.

Men and women together image God by fulfilling the task He has given to them. They are to rule over creation, cultivate creation as God's servant Kings. That is seen through God's command to humans to have dominion over creation. God places the man and woman here to reign over the world as his vice-regents or governors. This reign would begin in a special garden with the goal of spreading out over the whole world as his image bearers cultivate creation, reflect God, and worship Him in relationship with Him. Look down at Genesis 2:15 as the author zeros in on the creation of man and his placement in the garden.

The goal of this dominion was that man would cultivate the earth as a farmer plows and cultivates a field, and that the earth would be a suitable dwelling place for God to dwell with men.

The problem is that this purpose of God in creation hit a dramatic snag in Genesis 3. Rather than ruling over creation and under God's authority, the man and woman reversed the order and let an animal have dominion over them. Adam and Eve listened to the lies of the serpent and doubted God's good Words. As a result, the command of God for man to take dominion over earth would be so much more difficult and now the man would be tainted by sin and sin would result in death. Listen to God's words in Genesis 3:17-19.

So, the mission has not been eradicated, but God says now it will not take place apart from a seed which will come through the woman. Look at 3:15. Two important points to note about this promise. There will be victory through this seed and there will be suffering by this seed.

But in the mean time God cannot allow sinful people to dwell in His presence in the garden and so they are exiled from the garden to multiply and fill the earth with image bearers. But things do not go well. Immediately after leaving the garden we find out that Adam and Eve's one son, Cain, murders their other son. Things get so bad that God destroys nearly all human beings through the flood and restarts again through Noah. Noah is given the same commission as Adam to fill the earth and take dominion over it in Genesis 9, but of course, Noah falls into sin as well. The purpose of God is still intact, but no one is able to bring it to pass.

So, here's what we find in the OT. We find that the mission of humans reigning over creation as God's servant kings for God's glory is still there and is passed down from Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Israel, to David to Solomon. It's like we get a restart with each person or group and we also see each person or group fail because of sin. But as this pattern develops we also gain more specificity regarding the one who will ultimately win the victory through suffering and bring God's original purpose for creation to pass. We find out that this seed will come through Abraham's line and that God will place his descendants in a land that will be like the Garden of Eden and will be the starting point for their fulfillment of this mission. We find out that this seed will come through Judah and be a king. We find out that He will be in the line of David and He will suffer on behalf of his people.

So, what was God's goal in creation? We find out in the early chapters of Genesis and then see that goal progress through the OT until we reach the fulfillment of the OT in the NT with the story of Jesus. And that brings us to our second question to find out why Jesus died.

2. How does Jesus bring about that goal?

I want to answer this question in two ways and we'll call these the vertical way and the horizontal way.

We are very used to answering this question vertically and I think that dominates our thinking. What do I mean by vertically? Well, Christ's death accomplishes a vertical reconciliation between man and God. The relationship in the garden was severed and Jesus brings the two together again by forgiveness of sins. Of course, this is wonderfully true. Romans 5:1 expresses this.

But, if you isolate the vertical dimension of Christ's work from the horizontal dimension then you miss seeing how Jesus completes the story of Scriptures and brings about God's intended purposes. What do I mean by the horizontal impact of Christ's death on the cross? If you think about the story of the Bible as progressing along a line as we typically think of stories doing, then Jesus is the climax of that story. It is through Him that the story is brought to completion. Where do we see this?

What does Jesus come onto the scene proclaiming in the gospels? The kingdom of God. I was taught the Romans Road approach to the gospel growing up. You string together verses from Romans 3 on sin, Romans 6 on the penalty for sin, Romans 5 on Christ's death and Romans 10 on our response of faith. Of course, there are glorious truths in that approach, but it can't make sense of the fact that this concept of the kingdom dominates the gospels. But, if you begin with the purpose of God in creation expressed this way: God's reign through his servant kings over creation for his glory, then you can see what Jesus means by his proclamation of the kingdom of God. Jesus is proclaiming in the gospels that He is bringing about God's original design in creation to reign over the world through human vice regents for God's glory.

We are so used to thinking of the meaning of the death of Christ in terms of my relationship to God that we fail to think about how the death of Christ completes God's plan.

So, we fit the vertical and the horizontal together when we say it is by means of the atoning death of Jesus for sin that he brings about God's reign through his servant kings for his glory. Jesus accomplishes the victory over the enemy, sin, death, and the devil, by his atoning suffering and is therefore exalted as the reigning human king. Let me show you a passage where the victory of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins are brought together. Look at Colossians 2:13-15 but let's begin in verse 15.

You can see the triumph that Jesus wins is over the powers of darkness, most likely Satan and his forces. How does Jesus accomplish this? Look back to verses 13-14. He suffers an atoning death on the cross that secures our forgiveness of sins.

Now, obviously, this has been an extremely brief and summarized look at how the death of Christ fits into the overall story of Scripture, but I do want to draw a couple of significant application points out of this. I told you before that a story helps you to make sense of what is happening but it also shapes how you respond to events. So how do we respond to this fuller and I think richer understanding of why Jesus died?

First, when you understand that the death of Jesus is the climax to the biblical story and the means by which God accomplishes His original purpose in creation it helps you to anticipate the future. This provides hope. What is that hope? It's a genuine hope that God will one day accomplish his purpose of human beings serving him by ruling creation for his glory and completely free from the curse of sin. Our future is not to float on the clouds with harps and to sing and be bored forever. I want you to notice what the multitudes are praising Jesus for in Revelation 5:9-10. These believers anticipate reigning on earth as God's people and Him as their God. The story of God's purpose will come full circle and that is something to hope in and rejoice in.

Second, it gives me hope that I will one day be a human being, free from sin, and able to live as God originally intended humans to live. Can I be honest with you? Life is often frustrating. Things don't go as I would like them to go. Things break around the house and I have to try to fix them and I often mess them up further. My body hurts and I'm in my mid to late 30's. Beyond those physical difficulties, I so badly want to be a person of joy, peace, and faithfulness. I want to be helpful to people and a man of character. But I can't even tell you how often I am grumpy, anxious, and lack integrity. The fact that Jesus died in order to restore God's mission for creation means that I will experience creation as God intended it with Jesus. His death was for me and so I will become the human being God intends me to be.

Third, that process of becoming that full human being is already taking place in you if you are a believer. It's called sanctification. It's a struggle, but you don't

have to wait till you die to experience the wonderful benefits of the new creation. Listen to how Paul puts this in Colossians 3:5-10. We are being renewed after the image of our creator. Clearly this is what God intended in Genesis 1 that we will live as full and accurate reflections of him. And we can begin to live that out now.

So, why did Jesus die? To make things right and to accomplish God's purpose for creation by the redemption of His people to His praise, honor, and glory.