

**Alpha Talk #3: Why Did Jesus Die?**  
**The Alpha Course @ New City: Is There More to Life Than This?**  
**Romans 3:21-26; 5:8**  
**April 6, 2008**  
**By Kevin Haah**

Good morning. Welcome to New City Church!

My name is Kevin Haah. I am one of the pastors of New City.

Before we go to the message, I want to start off by sharing a little bit about the vision of New City.

**Our vision is to be an inclusive, gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ who connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God's kingdom.**

If you look at the vision statement, it is divided into two sections: the first section is about what we want to **be**: an inclusive, gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ; and the second section is about what we seek to **do**: connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God's kingdom. Let me focus only on our dreams related to the "do" statements.

- Our dream is to connect residents in and around downtown LA and all of Los Angeles to God. We want to be a church that connects people--as they are--to God. That means we have to be a church where people who are not comfortable in church are comfortable. How will they learn about God unless we become a come-as-you-are church?
- Our dream is to grow together. We know that a relationship with God changes our hearts. We feel different; we see differently; and we want different things. And when that happens, our lives change.
- Our dream is to serve the city of Los Angeles. We will, in partnership with others, serve the needy; we will serve the lost; we will serve the forsaken; we will serve the hopeless; we will fight for social justice. We will serve the city because God loves the city and we love the city. We are not here to just take from the city; we want to give to the city and seek for the prosperity of the city.

- Our dream is to extend the Kingdom of God by becoming a movement of church planting in and around Los Angeles, around the state, and the world.

Connect, grow, serve and extend. Those are our **do** words. What do we do? Connect, grow, serve and extend! That's our vision of what we want to do.

Now, let me segue to the talk.

### **What do the following people have in common?**

- Madonna, Prince, Bono, Naomi Campbell, and the Pope.
- One answer is that they all wear a cross. We're so used to it, and we are not very shocked.
- There's nothing wrong with wearing a cross, but it would be amazing if I came wearing a miniature electric chair around my neck. I actually did a Google search as well as an eBay search for jewelry that has an electric chair and I can tell you that I don't think it exists.
- The cross is a form of execution. In fact, it is one of the cruelest forms of execution ever invented by humans.

### **But, the cross is a symbol of Christianity.**

- Half of the Gospel of Mark is about the death of Jesus. Much of the rest of the New Testament is about explaining why Jesus died.
- Communion, one of the central parts of a Christian worship service, focuses on the broken body of Christ and the shed blood of Christ on the cross.
- Virtually every church has a cross in a very prominent place.
- The cross is the centerpiece of Christianity.

### **Why is the cross so important to Christianity?**

- When Paul went to Corinth, he said, **"I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ (the topic last week) and him crucified"** (1 Corinth 2:2). That's the topic this week.

- Most leaders who influenced nations or impacted history are remembered for their lives.
- But Jesus, who changed the course of history more than any other person that ever lived, is remember more for His death than His life.
- Why?

### **Why is there such a concentration on the death of Jesus?**

- What is the difference between His death and the death of Socrates, or one of the heroes or martyrs? What did His death achieve?
- Even Time Magazine did a cover story on this question: Why did Jesus have to die?  
[Show cover]

That's what we're going to look into today. In order to answer this question, we have to understand:

- (1) a couple of key things about God and human beings,
- (2) the problems they present, and
- (3) the solution.

## **I. First, a few key things about God and human beings**

### **A. The Scripture tells us that God is Love.**

God loves us unconditionally. John 3:16 says:

**For God so loved the world (the Greek word here is *agape*—which means unconditional love) that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (But, what is eternal life?)**

The eternal life that Jesus is talking about is not just about going to heaven when we die; it is also about the quality of life now here on earth as well as after we die. Jesus tells us in John 17:3:

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. **(This eternal life has to do with a relationship with God.)**

When you love someone, what do you want more than anything else? You want a deep and lasting relationship with that person. I don't think it is possible to ever love someone and not want to have a relationship with that person.

I remember when Grace and I first met for the second time (it was love at second sight), I started to be very attracted to her. My roommate and I stayed up hours at night trying to figure out the most natural way for me to get to know her. I can't say I was in love at that point, but nonetheless, I longed for a relationship with her. As I got to know her better, and as I fell in love with her, the one thing I wanted more than anything else was a mutual loving relationship with her. Multiply that by a million and you have God's perfect love for us, which propels His desire for a relationship with us.

**B. Scripture not only tells us that God is love, it also tells us that God is Holy and Just.**

Scripture tells us that God is holy, which literally means set apart, pure good, and without any sin or evil.

It also tells us that God is just. What is justice? Romans 2:6-8 defines it as follows:

<sup>6</sup>God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” **(In other words, God is fair and impartial; you get what you deserve.)** <sup>7</sup>To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. **(You do good, you get eternal life.)** <sup>8</sup>But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. **(You follow evil, there is wrath.)**

According to this passage, there is fair and impartial judgment of what we have done and there are consequences--reward or punishment.

So, Scripture not only says that God is love, it also says that God is holy and just—that we will get what we deserve. Now, let's go into a couple of key things about human beings.

**C. Scripture says we were created in God's image.**

Genesis 1:27 says: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him; male and female he created them.”

Theologians debate a lot about exactly what it means to be created in the image of God, but they generally agree that one of the primary things it means is that we were created as morally free spiritual beings with the need to have a spiritual relationship with God. We're not just flesh and blood. And we're not moral puppets. We have a choice. We can either have this relationship with God or do our own thing.

But when we do our own thing, we find that there is something missing from our lives.

- We feel this vacuum, this emptiness in our hearts. I heard someone describe it as “a deep deep void.”
- People try to fill this emptiness in their hearts with a lot of different things.
- Some try to do it with money. But, it does not satisfy. Aristotle Onassis, who was one of the richest men in the world, said before he died: “Millions do not always add up to what a man needs out of life.”
- Others try drugs or alcohol abuse or sexual promiscuity. One girl said: “These things provided instant gratification, but left me feeling hollow and empty afterward.”
- Others try hard work and success. If only I can make VP. If only I can make partner. If only I can get that job. If only I can get into that school. But, even after we get it, we find that it doesn't satisfy that deep hunger inside us.
- Others try good works. If only I can do something good in this world. But, even when we do good, it still feels like something is missing
- Even the closest human relationships, like marriage or parenthood, as wonderful as they are, don't satisfy this emptiness inside.
- Nothing will fill this gap except the relationship with God for which we were made.

**D. And although we desperately need this relationship with God, Scripture also tells us that we all have in fact turned away from God and decided to be our own god. This is what Scripture calls sin.**

The essence of sin is that **we** decided to bow down to the idols of ourselves, our pride, our ambition, our needs, our feelings, our entertainment, our things, our body, our achievements: me me me. And God become somewhat inconvenient. Many of us even left God and the church at one time because we just didn't have time for Him. There was simply no space for God in our lives. But, what has happened to us is that we are faced with a thirst we can't seem to quench, and meaninglessness, confusion, darkness, addiction, depression, and brokenness.

Isaiah 59:2 says:

**But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.**

The prophet Isaiah said the problem is not that God can't hear you when you talk, but that the things that we have done wrong have caused a separation between us and God. Your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear you. People say: "There seems to be a block. I don't feel I'm getting through to God. There seems to be some kind of a barrier. It's almost as if he didn't exist."

**II. This leads to my second point. The Problems: There are two problems--*we* have a problem and *God* has a problem.**

A. First, Our problem:

God is holy, but we are sinful. We are separated from God. No matter how hard we try, we fail to measure up to the perfectly holy God. Even when we decide to be a better person and say, "I am really going to change," we often end up *doing* what we *don't* want to do and end up *not* doing what we *want* to do. It's almost like we're addicted to sin and we can't fix it even if we try. We just can't be righteous and holy enough to enter into His presence. And without God, we face *permanent* separation from God, which is what the Bible calls *hell*.

B. Second, God also has a problem:

God still loves us because His love for us is unconditional. But He can't just "let us off" without ceasing to be holy and just. God can't just say: "I forgive you" because where then would be His holiness and justice? He faces a conflict between love, on the one hand, and

holiness and justice on the other. He wants a way of rescuing us that preserves my nature as a person to choose and His as God to be righteous.

Let me use an illustration of a law court. Let's say that you are a judge known to be just and loving. Someone you love is found guilty of a crime. The law mandates a penalty. But you love this person with all your heart. If you say, "it's okay. I love you; so, don't worry about it," where is justice? If you just impose the penalty for the crime, where is love? How could you be both just and loving to this person at the same time?

### **III. Let's go on to the third point: God's Answer—the Good News: Jesus Christ:**

#### **A. God became a man, lived a sinless life, and gave Himself the punishment I justly deserve.**

To continue the law court illustration: the judge fines the person the appropriate amount of the penalty (say \$100,000 and jail time), comes off the bench, and writes a check to him for \$100,000 and goes to jail for him.

That's what Jesus has done. God had to be just, but He loves us, so He came down in the person of His Son and paid the penalty for our wrongdoing. And in case of Jesus, it wasn't just a fine or some jail time; it cost Him an agonizing death on the cross.

God Himself became the sacrifice for our sin. This is the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:21-26 says:

**21 But now a righteousness** (righteousness means essentially a right relationship with God) **from God, apart from law** (meaning apart from trying to live up to the moral law of God), **has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify** (meaning that it was prophesied in the OT). **22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe** (the right relationship with God comes through accepting what Jesus has done for you). **There is no difference,** **23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** **24 and are justified** (meaning deemed not guilty) **freely by his grace** (grace means gift—and in this context, it means undeserved free gift) **through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** **25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he**

had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 (Why did Jesus die?) **he did it to demonstrate his justice** at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Then, Romans 5:8 says:

**<sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Why did Christ die? To demonstrate God's love for us.)**

So, Scripture says Christ died to demonstrate God's love and God's justice. The cross is where God's love and God's justice met to reconcile us to God.

Sometimes people say, "It's barbaric what you're talking about! Jesus, an innocent third party, paying for someone else. It's like Jesus was a whipping boy for our sins." That would be cruel. But, Paul put it like this: God was IN Christ reconciling the world to Himself. It's very important that He says "God was *in* Christ." God Himself came in the person of Jesus to die for us, in order to bring about reconciliation, restored relationship. It's God, the standard bearer of justice, Himself who takes the punishment for our sin, and not some third party.

The more you look at the cross, the deeper it is, and more beautiful and amazing it is. The more we understand it, the more we are transformed by it.

- There are so many ways to look at it, and Scripture uses a lot of different illustrations to try to help us understand the cross.

**One illustration that I gave already was of a law court in the story of the judge and the criminal he loved.**

**Here's another illustration to understand the cross, and it comes from the slave market.**

- Nowadays, if you have too much debt, you can file a petition under chapter 7 of the Bankruptcy Code.
- At the time of Jesus, there was no bankruptcy system. If you had too much debt and you couldn't pay it, you had to sell yourself as a slave.
- Suppose you were standing in a marketplace trying to sell yourself and a very kind person came up to you and had pity on you and didn't want you to spend the rest of your

life as a slave and asked, “How much are your debts? I’ll pay your debts for you.” Such a person was called a “redeemer” and the price he paid was called a “ransom.”

- Scripture says, “**redemption came by Jesus Christ.**” Jesus said that He came to give His life as a **ransom**, to set free people who were in slavery to sin.
- Jesus said: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”
- The Christian faith is all about freedom!
  - Freedom from guilt
  - Freedom from addiction
  - Freedom from fear
  - Freedom to know God
  - Freedom to love
  - Freedom to transform into the person you really want to be

**Here’s another illustration that helps us understand the cross (picture of trading places with someone):**

I have three kids, a 7 year old girl--Kaetlyn and 3 1/2 year old twins, Bennett and Eliana. Let’s say Kaetlyn developed a cancer and was dying. But, if somehow, I could put my hands on her and take her cancer away and transfer it to me, I would do it in a snap, even if it meant suffering and eventual death for me. Now, if all three of our kids had cancer, I would do the same for all of them, even if it multiplied my pain and suffering threefold.

Now, the perfectly loving God, in the person of Jesus Christ, took the cancer of the whole world and the excruciating pain of suffering multiplied by 6 billion people upon Himself, and suffered and died and experienced hell so that we might be healed.

That’s what Prophet Isaiah meant when he said this in Isaiah 53:4-5:

**“4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**

**Another way to explain the meaning of the cross comes from Isaiah 53:6 (another illustration of trading places).**

“We all like sheep have gone astray and each of us has turned to his own way,  
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

- I once saw this verse explained like this: Suppose this hand represents you and me. What the verse says is: We all, like sheep, have gone astray—we’ve all done things that we know are wrong. Let this book represent the things in our lives that we do wrong. Those things cut us off from God. We all, like, sheep, have gone astray. We’ve turned to our own way.
- Let this hand represent Jesus Christ. He never did anything wrong. He lived a pure, sinless life. There was nothing separating Him from His Father in Heaven. What the verse says is: All we, like sheep, have gone astray—we’ve turned, everyone, to our own way; *the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Move the book to the other hand.)
- That’s why Jesus on the cross cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” At that moment He was God-forsaken, He was cut off from God for you and for me. The wonderful news is this.
  - **Do you see where this leaves us?**
  - **It leaves us free to have a relationship with God.**

### **What was the result?**

John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son *so that* everyone who **believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

### **What does it mean to believe?**

Earlier on I used an analogy of a judge and a criminal he loved. I want to go back to that illustration, because in a sense that is what God has done for us.

- He has come down in the person of His Son and given us a check just like the judge did for the criminal.
- I’ve written out a check here. It’s written on the Bank of Heaven.
- Instead of writing out a sum of money, it says: “forgiveness, freedom, cleansing, reconciliation, eternal life.”
- All the riches of heaven on the dollar amount.

- It is signed by the Lord Jesus Christ because He's the one who made it possible, the one who paid the price.
- And the date is today's date because in a sense it's today that He makes this offer to every one of us.
- I've left the name blank so that you can fill in your name. Because it's to each one of you that God makes this offer, today.
- And in effect, just as in the other scenario in which the judge came down and offered that check to his beloved friend, the friend had a choice, you and I have a choice too. We can **reject it and say, "No thanks. I don't want it. I'd rather pay the penalty myself if there is a penalty to pay."**
- Or we can **accept it, believe it**, and say, "Thank you. Thank you that you died for me. I put my trust in you. I receive the gift that you offer."

Let's pray.