



Good morning everyone and welcome to CPC. It's been almost a year since I've preached here at the Foster City campus. Some of you probably have no idea who I am! My name is Rob Hall. I've been on our pastoral staff now for 4-1/2 years. I'm currently serving at the North campus and I also oversee outreach and missions for both campuses. I'm married to an amazing woman, Missy, and we've been blessed with two children, Levi and Annelise.

We have been studying the Apostles' Creed, so let me read the line we're looking at this morning, "*I Believe in Jesus Christ... Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, he descended to the dead.*"

Here's the question—Why did Jesus have to suffer and die? I've thought and read a lot about that question the last two weeks and let me be honest, it was a little overwhelming. The weight of Jesus' suffering and death just hit me in a new way this week. I've wrestled in my mind and heart with how to best explain and apply this truth with all of you.

Preaching about the death of Jesus Christ is like a starving man going to a Las Vegas buffet. Seeing all the food and everything there is to sample and try can be overwhelming. After living in Las Vegas I became a professional buffet eater. Step one—scan the entire buffet. Take your time and look over everything. Some of the best food is usually hidden a bit. Then go straight for the expensive stuff. Crab legs, prime rib, steak. Don't waste any time with the salad bar, pastas, and vegetables!

The death of Jesus is a buffet of biblical truth—justice, reconciliation, redemption, atonement, propitiation, expiation, victory, forgiveness, love, sin, grace, mercy, suffering, death, God's wrath, substitution, sacrifice, righteousness, salvation, and glory are all areas the death of Jesus Christ deal with. Here is what spoke to my heart this week and the area of the buffet that I want to focus on this morning—the death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin and the depth of God's love. The place to begin our study is at the epicenter, the cross.

The True Story of the Cross.

You may find it surprising that Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the Apostles' Creed. I sure did. Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea who sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. The Creed's reference of Pilate securely anchors the death of

Jesus in history. This is not some fairy tale someone made up; go look it up for yourself. Jesus really did live and die. The mention of Pilate also brings out the public nature of Jesus' trial, suffering and crucifixion. The four Gospels spend a considerable amount of time explaining the events surrounding the death of Jesus. They devote about one-third of their content to the final week of Jesus' life leading up to the cross. We sometimes call these events the Passion of Christ. "Passion" comes from a Latin word meaning *suffering*.

Explanation and summary of Jesus' crucifixion

What many people don't realize is that in the ancient world the symbol for Jesus, which is the most famous symbol in all history, the cross, was an object of Roman brutality and suffering. In our day, it would be like the electric chair becoming the world's most beloved symbol. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus called crucifixion "the most wretched of deaths." The pain of crucifixion was so horrendous that a word was invented to explain it—*ex-cruciating*—which literally means "from the cross." Most people who were crucified eventually died by asphyxiation. They struggled to breath because of the weight their hung bodies placed on their lungs. Not only was the pain of crucifixion unbearable, but the shame was awful. Crucifixion was done in public for all to see. Crowds would gather to mock, spit, and curse at the victim. Once dead the victim would be left on the cross for vultures to pick apart while dogs chewed on the bones that fell to the ground. Tens of thousands of people were crucified in the ancient world. Yet, for Christians, we say that the cross is the good news and celebrate it every year on Good Friday.

Why in the world do we celebrate the death of Jesus as good news? One of the best summaries of the Good News, what we call the Gospel, is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4:

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

The Death of Jesus Reveals the Depth of our Sin.

In this packed section of Scripture Paul says that the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in all of history. It is of first importance, he says. He then explains why this is such good news by using one simple word—**for**. Jesus died “for our sins.” The word **for** in the original language can also mean “because of.” Jesus died **because of** our sins. Remember when the movie, *The Passion of The Christ* came out? There was so much buzz around the movie. A news channel contacted the church I was a pastor at in Las Vegas to get an interview. One of the questions they asked me was, “Who killed Jesus?” I thought about it for a moment and told them that there were many people who could claim they killed Jesus. Pontius Pilate, the Jewish religious leaders, the crowd who yelled “crucify him,” and even Rome is to blame. The news anchor was quite surprised when I said that because of my sin, I am also to blame. Your sin and my sin killed Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin.

From the very beginning of the Bible (Gen. 2:17) to the end (Rev. 21:8), the penalty for sin is death. Listen to what the Bible says about the seriousness of sin:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:6,12).

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus died to take upon Himself the penalty for our sin. Jesus died in our place for our sin on the cross. Theologians call this the atonement. Let me explain what that means.

Adam was our representative in the Garden of Eden and through his disobedience God counted us guilty as well. Jesus was also our representative and unlike Adam, obeyed God perfectly (Rom. 5:18-19). Jesus had to be man in order to be our representative, to obey in our place and to fully pay the price for man’s sin. Jesus also had to be fully God to bear the full penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in Him. Only someone who was truly God and truly man could be the mediator between both God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

In the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), was the most important day of the year. It was intended to deal with the sin problem between a holy God and a sinful people. On that day, two healthy goats without defect were chosen. The first goat was a sin offering. The High Priest slaughtered this innocent goat, which was a substitute for the sins of Israel. He then sprinkled

the blood around the Most Holy Place inside the Temple (Lev. 16:15). The blood, which represented life, was given as payment for sin and cleansed the sins of Israel. God’s holy wrath was satisfied. Then the High Priest took a second goat and with his hands laid on him, confessed the sins of the people. This goat, called the scapegoat, would then be sent away into the wilderness away from the people, symbolically taking their sins with it. All of this was a foreshadow of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who mediates between unholy people and a holy God. He is the sinless substitute who died a bloody death in our place for our sins, and the scapegoat who takes our sins away to be remembered by God no more. Jesus, our God, became man to restore a right relationship between God and humanity.

I remember cringing as I watched *The Passion of The Christ*. My stomach turned as I saw on the movie screen all that Jesus went through. Remember with me those events. After a long and sleepless night where Jesus was in such agony He was sweating blood, Judas betrays Him with a kiss. Jesus was arrested, falsely charged, and sentenced to be murdered. After being beaten by a mob of angry men, He was stripped naked, in great shame He was scourged by a cat-o'-nine-tails. The whip was a series of long leather straps and at the end of some of the straps were balls of metal which would rip the flesh right off. Jesus was beaten so severely that you couldn't even recognize Him. Most people didn't even make it to the cross after such a beating.

Jesus then had a crown of thorns pressed into His head. He was forced to carry a wooden crossbar, weighing about 100 pounds, to His place of crucifixion. Since wood was so expensive in those days, the used crossbar no doubt was covered in the blood of other men. Upon arriving at the place of crucifixion, they pulled Jesus' beard out, an act of ultimate disrespect in ancient cultures, as they continued to spit and mock Him. Jesus then had five- to seven-inch, rough, metal spikes driven into the most sensitive nerve centers on the human body, His hands and feet. Naked, bloodied, traumatized, and in shock, Jesus labored just to breath. Rather than fighting back or declaring His innocence, after seven last words, Jesus breathed His last and died.

Jesus hung on the cross for six hours. He died quickly enough that His legs were not broken in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. To ensure He was dead, a professional executioner ran a spear through His side, which punctured His heart, and water and blood flowed from His side. Mark Driscoll in his book, *Death by Love* notes, “Jesus died with both a literal and metaphorical broken heart.” Because Jesus was poor, a wealthy man named Joseph of Arimathea, generously gave his own tomb as a gift to house the body of Jesus. He lay in it rotting for three days. Next week, we'll talk about the resurrection.

Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why didn't God strike Him down with a bolt of lightning? I think many people today don't really

think they are all that bad. Hey, nobody's perfect, right? There are many Christians who really don't see just how sinful they are and why their sin required Christ's death. It's kind of like a story I read this week. A frantic 911 call brought police to a home. The caller had only been able to communicate that she needed help and was being killed. When police arrived, they found a bloody knife beside her lifeless body on the kitchen floor. Blood was spattered across the room, yet upon examining the body they did not find a single cut or puncture wound. They noticed a trail of blood leading into the next room and followed it. Entering the room they found a large dying boa constrictor. Apparently the snake had been raised as a pet but on this day the snake had wrapped itself around the woman as she was cooking in the kitchen. For whatever reason, she had allowed the snake to entwine her body in its coils and once it began to constrict its muscular body around her she sensed the danger. In a panic she grabbed a knife and began to slash away at the snake and, while managing to mortally wound it, she was killed herself in the process.

This tragic story is a vivid example of the power of sin in our lives. We often take subtle compromises into our lives as an innocent pet, thinking we can handle them without any real risk, and so we deal with sin flippantly, all the while placing ourselves in great danger. I know I sure do that. Jesus suffered so brutally because He was fully paying the price for sin. God dumped on Jesus the sum total of every murder, every lust, every envy, every theft, every profanity, every act of racism, every injustice against the poor, every sin of every person from every generation. His death was literally killing the Ancient Serpent the Devil. Jesus Christ really suffered so that our sins might be forgiven. The death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin. It also reveals the depth of God's love.

The Death of Jesus Reveals the Depth of God's Love.

My daughter makes me sing to her before bedtime every night. One of the songs I sing is, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so...yes Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so." I felt that I understood God's love for many years and then I had kids and my appreciation for God's love grew even more. I would do anything for my children, I love them that much. I love them so much that it often hurts. God loves every person who has ever lived more than I love my own children. That's hard to understand especially when you think about all the annoying and terrible people out there! Listen to what Francis Chan says in his book, *Crazy Love*, "So why, when we constantly offend Him and are so unlovable and unloving, does God persist in loving us? Why does God still love us despite us? I do not have an answer to that question."

I don't have an answer either! God loves us despite us. This reminded me of a "lost dog" sign that I've read in an email forward. There was a big cash reward for whoever found the lost dog, and

the sign had this description of the dog: "He's only got three legs, he's blind in the left eye, he's missing a right ear, his tail has been broken off, he was neutered accidentally by a fence—ouch!—he's almost deaf, and he answers by the name 'Lucky'." That dog isn't lucky! He's been through a whole lot of mess. But, he's lucky because he's got an owner who loves him and wants him back. You have an owner who loves you and wants you back. Listen to some of these great verses about God's love:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9–10).

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Some people think that we need to do away with all this talk of sin and Christ's bloody death. Let's just talk about how God is a God of love, they say. Here is the problem. If you take away the cross you don't have a God of love. Without the cross, you and I would be stuck in our sin. We would be under God's wrath and judgment. The cross reveals the depth of God's love and the price He was willing to pay. Tim Keller in his book, *The Reason for God*, makes a great point that real love is always a personal exchange, "It is impossible to love people with a problem or a need without in some sense sharing or even changing places with them...It requires very little of you to love a person who is pulled together and happy."

Consider parenting for example. My kids are both totally and completely dependent upon me and my wife to survive. Missy and I have given up much of our independence and freedom to love them. We didn't have to do that, but we chose to do it out of love. To love my children well, we have to constantly sacrifice our freedom for theirs. Keller says that, "All life-changing love toward people with serious needs is substitutional sacrifice." God, in His love, died in my place and for my sins. Why? For love.

I've been asked before, "Was there any other way for God to save human beings other than sending his Son to die in our place?" First, God did not have to save anyone. God did not spare the angels, but cast them into hell when they sinned (2 Peter 2:4). But once God, in His love, decided to save some human beings, there was no other way for God to do this than through the death of His Son. That is the way He chose to bring salvation and redemption. Jesus even asked God the same question in the Garden of Gethsemane—is there any other way? God's answer was no. His wrath against sin and His love for humanity compelled Him.

Did Jesus descend into hell?

The Apostles' Creed says, "*He descended to the dead.*" Another version of the Creed that came out many years later says that "*Jesus descended into Hell.*" Some have asked, does this mean that Jesus descended into hell? What did Jesus do for three days before the resurrection? Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished!" meaning that there was no need to pay the debt of sin any further. Everything that needed to be done to save sinners was done at the cross. Jesus did not go to hell to fight with Satan and further complete His work. Don't believe some of those preachers on TV! Jesus did not need to go to hell to further pay the penalty for sin because it is finished! Jesus suffered the hell of God's wrath while hanging on the cross and when He died He went immediately into the presence of the heavenly Father, "Into your hands I commit my Spirit." Remember too what Jesus said to the thief on the cross? "Today you will be with me in paradise." Paradise and hell are two very different places, right? Some people point to 1 Peter 3:19 as a proof text for this belief, "***After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits.***" In context, this passage is not saying anything about hell. The point the Apostles' Creed is trying to make is that Jesus really did die. He descended not to hell, but to the dead. Jesus was really human and He really died.

There are so many applications I can offer in closing. Let me say just two things. First, God is very serious about sin and you should be too. Think of the worst thing you've ever done. Thank Jesus for paying for that too. Listen to these words from Col. 2:14, "***having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.***" Don't minimize or play games with sin. Don't keep a large boa constrictor in your home either! Jesus suffered and brutally died and paid the penalty for it. Confess your sin. Repent and turn away from it. Thank God for what He did. And walk in freedom and forgiveness. Are you keeping a pet snake?

Second, do you really understand not just in your head but in your heart that God loves you? He is absolutely crazy about you. The cross reveals the length He would go to show you His love. Once you really begin to understand His love, which is a life long process, you'll run to Him frequently and zealously. The results are intimate time with Him in prayer and in His word. Our motivation changes from guilt, shame and fear to love. If you struggle with understanding God's love, just look at the cross. Ask Jesus to fill your heart with His love again.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2012 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1368-4