

## THE FUNDAMENTAL LIST: The Cross

**Introduction:** CityChurch, today I want to begin with a question that if you are already a Christian you may have been afraid to ask. Or maybe you asked a question like this one in your past and you were made to feel like you shouldn't ask that question. And maybe you walked away from Christianity because of it. Or perhaps you've been deconstructing your faith. Deconstructing faith is the process of reexamining and questioning one's foundational beliefs and why you believe what you believe. And let me just say, I don't think that's a bad thing. And the question I want to ask and answer for us all I believe will help you reconstruct your faith based upon a key foundational truth of Christianity.

So, here's the question: **Why did Jesus have to die to save us from our sins?** Why can't the Christian God just forgive us? Like why did somebody have to die for somebody else's sins to be forgiven? Why can't God just forgive us without requiring His son to die? Think about it. God is God. And as God, He can do whatever He wants, right? He makes up the rules so to speak. **Why did Jesus have to die to save us from our sins?**

I mean, you probably forgive people all the time without dying for them or requiring someone else to die for them. Do you get what I'm saying here?

CityChurch, for a moment, let's just step outside our faith system and look at it from an outsider's perspective. Doesn't the whole idea that somebody has to die for others to be forgiven seem a bit brutal? Doesn't it seem a little unnecessary? Couldn't God have found another way to forgive us? **Why did Jesus have to die to save us from our sins?**

**Application:** CityChurch, it is crucial that we not only ask this question but that we also give a meaningful answer to it because the answer to this question serves as one of the FUNDAMENTALS of the Christian faith. And today I will do my best to answer this important question. There are times when as your pastor you need me to do a little bit more of an in-depth Bible Study like the one we will do today, especially when it relates to such a FUNDAMENTAL truth of our faith.

**Review:** Throughout this series we have been creating a "Fundamental List" focusing on the essential elements of the Christian faith. Overall in this series we are seeking to answer this question: **What must a person believe in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus?** What's crucial? What's absolutely critical? What's essential? So far, we have said these truths are fundamentals of our faith.

1. Jesus is God's Son and our King.
2. Jesus came to illustrate what God is like.
3. Sin separates us from God and people.

T. S.: And today we will add another fundamental truth of the Christian faith that resolves the separation that sin causes in our relationship with God. I want us to start with what Jesus believes about his own death.

### GOD

**Background:** Throughout Jesus' 3-year ministry, over and over he predicted his death for all people. He even predicted who would kill him and how he would die. Then as his impending death came near, he told his inner core of disciples WHY he had to die.

**Matthew 20:28 = Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

**Explanation:** Jesus came to serve all people by giving his life as a RANSOM. In Jesus' day a RANSOM is what you pay to release someone who owes a DEBT. When Jesus gives his life on the CROSS, he sacrificially pays to release us from our SIN DEBT.

Then just a short time later, he initiated a symbolic practice for his followers. Some call it "communion", others call it "the Lord's supper". Jesus asks his followers to eat a piece of broken bread and to remember his body that was broken for us. Then he asks his followers to drink red wine telling them this:

**Matthew 26:28 = "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."**

**Explanation:** Here Jesus talks about the significance of his own blood. And I suspect if you are new to church and are still exploring our faith, talking about blood seems a little creepy. But what Jesus is saying here is so significant. Jesus asserts that when his blood is poured out on the cross, that action would lead to the forgiveness of sins. And that means Jesus believes he needed to die to secure our forgiveness.

**Application:** What Jesus claims here is so important for us, because there are theologians today who suggest that Jesus DID NOT need to die to secure anyone's forgiveness. But according to Jesus, they are mistaken. Jesus believes he needed to die for your forgiveness and for mine.

T. S.: Now let's look at WHAT the first followers believed forgives people's sins. Then we will seek to answer WHY Jesus had to die to secure our forgiveness of sins.

**Background:** Let's look at a passage that expresses the essential belief of the first followers of Jesus. It's recorded by the great church leader, the Apostle Paul, who had at one point in his life persecuted followers of Jesus. But when the resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul in person, Paul went from persecuting the church to leading the church. And in one part of his letter to believers in the city of Corinth he expresses the essential and foundational truth of the Christian faith.

**1 Corinthians 15:1-2a = Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the good news I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this good news you are saved ...**

**Explanation:** Here Paul says he wants to REMIND them about the message he had preached to them about how they could be SAVED from the SIN that separates people from God. And he calls this message GOOD NEWS.

T. S.: Paul continues.

**1 Corinthians 15:3a = For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance ...**

**Explanation:** Paul acknowledges that he received this most important message himself from Jesus' own disciples whom Paul had met personally. And he says this message is "of first importance". In other words, Paul asserts that the truth he is getting ready to write down is the most crucial, most essential and most fundamental belief embraced by followers of Jesus.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4 = 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 ...**

**"Christ died for our sins"** - We believe Christ died so our sins could be forgiven. He died so the separation that our sins cause in our relationship with God can be removed. Christ died for my sins and your sins and that is what SAVES us.

**"he was buried"** – Now why do you think the first believers told people Jesus was buried? Why add that detail? Because that's how you know someone is dead! When the Romans crucified Jesus, he didn't just faint. He didn't just pass out only to become revived later. He died and then he was buried.

**Application:** This truth of the good news about Jesus is so important because there are numerous New Atheists out there who suggest that Jesus didn't actually die. They say he just passed out. And they assert that his followers lied about Jesus' death and that they lied about his resurrection.

I find that assertion illogical and unbelievable. Why would the eyewitnesses of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection hold on to such a lie when all it gained them was persecution and death? Why promote a lie when it makes your life worse? They know what they saw. Jesus died and was BURIED.

**"he was raised on the third day"** – Over and over during his earthly ministry, Jesus predicted that he would die and that he would rise again after three days. And the first followers of Jesus heard him say that he would come back to life and then they saw it happen.

**1 Corinthians 15:5-8a = and that he appeared to [Peter] and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at the same time most of whom are still living ... then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me ...**

**Explanation:** Here Paul gives us the REASON to BELIEVE in Jesus. He appeared to so many people after his resurrection. Peter saw Jesus die and be buried. Then Peter saw Jesus risen from the dead. Jesus' own brother James saw Jesus risen from the dead. Hundreds of other people also saw Jesus risen from the dead. And Paul reminds his readers that most of them are still alive, so you can go ask them for yourselves! These hundreds of people who saw Jesus risen from the dead become EYEWITNESSES of his resurrection.

**Application:** Here's why this summary of what we believe about Jesus is so fundamental to our faith. If someone predicts his own death and resurrection and then pull it off—I'm gonna follow that guy whether I fully understand everything about why he had to die or not.

**Me:** And this REASON why we believe what we believe about Jesus changed my life. When I went through my own season of deconstructing my faith, I researched intensely the evidence for the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. I became absolutely convinced that Jesus has risen from the dead. And so, I put my FAITH in him as the one who DIED to SAVE me from my sins. And that's my hope and prayer for you if you have not believed in Jesus yet.

**Application:** Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised on the third day. He appeared to many eyewitnesses. That's the essence of WHAT we believe is fundamental to our faith. This is what is foundational to believe as a faithful follower of Jesus.

T. S.: But now let's go back to the WHY question. **Why did Jesus have to die to save us from our sins?** Paul answers this question in his letter written to believers in Rome.

**Romans 3:20 = Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law, rather through the law we become conscious of our sin.**

**Definition:** The word "righteous" used here is a LEGAL term and it means "to be declared not guilty". It means being declared innocent. It means to be declared RIGHT. And in this context that means declaring a person RIGHT with GOD.

**Explanation:** Paul's focus in this part of his letter is on how people become declared righteous in God's sight. And Paul says no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by doing good works or becoming more moral or becoming more religious. The moral laws were not given to make a person righteous in God's sight. The moral laws were given to make us aware of our own sin.

**Transition Statement:** Are you aware and conscious of your own sin? Paul continues.

**Romans 3:23 = For all have sinned and fall short of God's glory.**

**Application:** Here Paul asserts what we all know is true. All people have sinned. We have all wronged God and others through our actions or words or neglect. Some people may have sinned more, some may have sinned less. Some people may have committed more serious sins, others more of the lesser sins. But we all have sinned.

Jesus sometimes refers to sins as DEBTS. That's why he taught us to pray: "Forgive us our DEBTS as we forgive our DEBTORS." So, when we sin, we create a SIN DEBT. And here is why that causes a separation in our relationship with God.

**Explanation:** Paul says that when we sin, we "**fall short of God's glory**". God's glory is the essence of who God is. The Scriptures tell us that God is LOVE. And he is. But the Scriptures also tell us that God is HOLY and JUST. To be "HOLY" means "**to be set separate from sin and evil**". And because God is HOLY our SIN DEBT causes a separation in our relationship with God. God will not deny who he is as a HOLY and JUST God. So, SIN DEBTS must be JUSTLY PAID OFF so they can be removed from His sight.

T. S.: Paul continues.

**Romans 3:24 = And all people are declared righteous freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**

**Explanation:** This is such good news. People are not declared righteous in God's sight by our good works. People are not declared righteous in God's sight by our good morals or religious rituals. People are declared righteous in God's sight through the REDEMPTION that came by Christ Jesus.

**Application:** When you REDEEM something, you CLAIM something by PAYING it off in some way. And in this context, Paul is talking about PAYING OFF our SIN DEBT. This is like God's DEBT PAY OFF plan. And what's so awesome about God's SIN DEBT PAY OFF plan is that we get it for FREE! God's GRACE moves Him to declare us righteous in his sight for FREE!

T. S.: So, how did God PAY OFF our SIN DEBT and how do we get our SIN DEBT PAID OFF?

**Romans 3:25a = God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood, to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness.**

**Application:** Because God is righteous and holy and just, someone had to PAY for our SIN DEBT. God cannot deny WHO he is. God cannot deny HIMSELF. That's why someone had to PAY OFF our SIN DEBT. But the beauty of God's grace and love is that He allowed his own son to PAY OFF all people's SIN DEBTS. We don't PAY because Jesus did.

And we receive this PAY OFF of our SIN DEBTS not by becoming more moral or more religious or by doing more good works. We receive this PAY OFF of our SIN DEBTS by believing in Jesus' sacrificial payment for us on the CROSS.

T. S.: And according to Paul, Christ's sacrificial death demonstrates God's own righteousness.

**Application:** So now, let me answer the question: **Why did Jesus have to die to save us from our sins?** God's NATURE, the ESSENCE of who He is, will not allow Him to overlook our SIN DEBTS. Because God is JUST and HOLY, our SIN DEBTS must be PAID OFF. But because of God's LOVE and GRACE, He allowed His own son to PAY OFF our SIN DEBTS.

And here is why what God has done for us is so significant. Justice is when you get what you deserve. God's justice says, "You owe, you pay." But grace is when you get what you don't deserve. God's grace says, "You owe, I'll pay."

**T. S.: Have you ever had someone else pay for your own debt? Let me see if I can help us grasp the significance of God's grace.**

## YOU

**Analogy:** Back when I first started driving, I drove too fast through Leon Valley and got my first traffic ticket. Even though I wasn't driving much over the speed limit, it was just a little bit. But technically, I broke the law. The ticket was just. And justice says, "You owe, you pay."

But that's when my dad stepped in. Dad knew I would struggle to pay for the ticket at that time. And he didn't want that to distract me from my school studies. So, he talked with me about what had happened. I accepted responsibility for what I had done. Then dad did something that surprised me. He gave me what I didn't deserve. He paid for the ticket himself. Because of his LOVE and GRACE towards me, he PAID OFF what I OWED!

**Application:** And that is what God has done for you and for me. By allowing His own son to die for our sins, he PAID OFF our SIN DEBT so we can be declared righteous in His eyes. And that leads us to our 4<sup>th</sup> Fundamental belief on our LIST:

### **4. Jesus died so you can be declared righteous in God's eyes.**

**Application:** When you believe in Jesus and what he has done for you, your sins are forgiven forever, all of them. And in God's eyes you are righteous. You are righteous not because of what you have done. You are righteous because of what Jesus has done.

CityChurch, this is the greatest news ever! If you have believed in Jesus, hear me on this. You are RIGHTEOUS. God declares you RIGHTEOUS! Let's say this together as a faith affirmation: **I AM RIGHTEOUS! I AM RIGHTEOUS!**

Because of your faith in Jesus, YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS. In God's eyes, YOU ARE RIGHTEOUS! Now live out of that sense of IDENTITY. Live like who you are. Live like the RIGHTEOUS person you are. This recognition of who you really are in Christ will change your life forever.

**PRAY for believers and invite people to believe in Jesus.**

**SONG: "In Christ Alone"**