

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: Sacrifice

Isaiah 53

What comes to your mind when you think of the word, “sacrifice?” Maybe you think of a parent who daily sacrifices his or her own interests to care for the needs of their child. There are stories of heroes who save someone from a burning house, putting their own safety at risk.

“Sacrifice” in the culture of the ancient world meant something entirely different. A sacrifice involved the killing of an animal. In the Old Testament, the animal’s life was taken to picture the punishment deserved by a human. For example, when Adam and Eve sinned, they realized they were naked. After God confronted them, he offered them animal skins for clothing. Where did the animal skins come from? Obviously, God killed an animal to clothe Adam and Eve to cover their shame. Instead of Adam and Eve’s continued shame, the animal suffered and died.

Perhaps the most famous example of sacrifice happened before the tenth plague in Egypt, when Israel was enslaved there, around 1446 BC. God instructed each family in Israel to kill a lamb and paint the blood around the door of their house. If they did this, then the firstborn son inside the house would not die. The Egyptians did not believe the Lord and offer the sacrifice. Their firstborn died. In the homes of those believing God, the lamb suffered death so the firstborn son would live.

When God put Adam in the garden, he warned him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate, they would die. Because they disobeyed, their relationship with God was broken (remember they hid from him) and eventually they died physically. The result of sin is death, which is separation and loss.

The book of Leviticus is all about the kinds of sacrifices Israel was expected to give to the Lord. Sin offerings were given to remind people that the result of sin is death, separation from God. When an animal was sacrificed it reminded them that they deserve to be punished with death, to be separated from God.

Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of Jesus’ suffering and death. The lamb was killed, as a picture of how Jesus would be killed.

7 He was beaten down and made to suffer.
But he didn't open his mouth.
He was led away like a sheep to be killed.
Lambs are silent while their wool is being cut off.



Rembrandt. The Descent from the Cross. C. 1650/52. 142 x 110.9 cm. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Widener Collection.

In the same way, he didn't open his mouth.
8 He was arrested and sentenced to death.
Then he was taken away.
He was cut off from this life.
He was punished for the sins of my people.

*The death of this person is compared to the death of a lamb. Why is this significant?
Why was this person killed?*

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming down to the Jordan River to be baptized, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world."

What do you think John meant by that? Why would this statement be important?

Mark 14 is an account of the death of Jesus.

It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the Jews.

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last...

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Retell the story in your own words. According to this story, could Jesus have only suffered and not died? Why do you think the Gospel emphasized the death of Jesus?