

## What's It For? (The Epic of the Cross Series – Part V)

3/29/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. For the Roman government, what was the purpose of the cross?

It was not only to kill the criminal; it was to cause public torture and humiliation. The cross was clearly meant to send a message to everyone who passed by that the cost of doing something the government didn’t like was more than they wanted to pay. Thus, it was meant to be a deterrent for the population as much or more than it was to be a punishment for the criminal. If all they wanted to do was kill the guilty, they could have done that with a quick sword in a darkened room.

2. How did Jesus fit into this purpose?

He didn’t. The Romans were perplexed and tried to avoid clearly punishing an innocent man, but didn’t want to risk a riot of the Jews. Ultimately, they gave in to appease the masses crying for his crucifixion.

3. Everyone knew this was a painful way to die. How did Jesus approach it?

Jesus was fully aware of what was ahead of Him, but, more than the painful death, He agonized most over the separation from His Heavenly Father, even though only for a short time. He knew why He had been sent to Earth and set His face toward Jerusalem knowing his fate (Matt. 16:21). Yet, His human side didn’t want to endure what was about to happen, as shown so poignantly in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39).

4. The Romans wanted to use the cross for punishment and deterrence. Pastor Dave said Jesus used the cross for three different purposes. Read Col. 2:13-14 and talk about the role of the cross in providing **forgiveness**.

We have all sinned and are unworthy of any relationship with God, but our sins were nailed to the cross with Christ. Thus, we are forgiven, if we will receive this gift, acknowledging that our only hope is to trust in Christ’s death to save us from eternal damnation. God now holds nothing against us. We need to hear and feel that we are forgiven. God forgives; we respond.

5. Even while hanging on the cross, Jesus was thinking about forgiveness. How do we know that?

Luke 23:34 – Jesus asks God the Father to forgive those who are crucifying Him even though they have not asked for forgiveness. It's another sign that it is God's nature to offer forgiveness and then our role to respond.

6. What does this forgiveness mean to us? How is it different from the forgiveness we give each other?

We have a new beginning. God can turn our problems into assets as we witness to others how we have been changed. Further, we are now in a position to develop a close relationship with God, because we have been made worthy. We are back to where we were in the Garden of Eden.

It is critical that we don't look at God's forgiveness in human terms. People sometimes continue to hold grudges even after they say they have forgiven us, but God forgives and forgets. Our accounts are wiped clean. Thus, if we continue to hold onto memories of mistakes, He must wonder what we are burdened with, since it doesn't exist.

7. Read Mark 8:34-37 and talk about the role of the cross in setting the stage for **following**.

The focus moves from our self-centered agenda to a focus on serving God. We shift from "me" to "we", as we begin fellowshiping with other Christians and follow the example of Christ in how we treat those with whom we come in contact. We see that others need the gift of forgiveness that we have discovered. Thus, we take up our own version of the cross. We have found a key, but we are not sure what it's for until God shows us.

8. Read Romans 6:6-14 and talk about the role of the cross in giving us **freedom**.

Everyone has an innate inner desire for freedom. The key to unlocking the chains of all our sinful nature (v. 6) is the cross. We need to make the cross a part of our pathway to freedom. Then we will be free from any fear of our earthly death (v. 8-9). Pastor Dave used the illustration of a power drill. The power of the cross is like the power supplied to the drill. If the drill is not plugged in (if God had not sent Christ to the cross to die on our behalf allowing us to be forgiven), then nothing is going to happen. However, God won't do it alone. We have to pull the trigger by offering ourselves to God. At that point (v. 14) sin will no longer be our master.