

death

module

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Consider

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations. Jesus came and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles.

Continuing the Story...

Jesus is famous for his teachings, perfect life, miracles and claims. Yet his mission did not stop at living a good life...

Day One: The Last Goodbye...

“On a long enough time line,” wrote Chuck Palahniuk in the *Fight Club*, “the survival rate for everyone drops to zero.” Memorable words! We live with the fact we’re mortal. Best-selling author Brandon Mull ‘hit the nail on the head’: “You spend the first portion of your life learning, growing stronger, more capable. And then, through no fault of your own, your body begins to fail. You regress. Strong limbs become feeble, keen senses grow dull, hardy constitutions deteriorate. Beauty withers. Organs quit. You remember yourself in your prime, and wonder where that person went. As your wisdom and experience are peaking, your traitorous body becomes a prison.”

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All of us know that the ‘seeds of death’ are ticking away deep inside each of us and have been from the day we took our first breath. An old song puts it this way: “They say the moment that you’re born is when you start to die, and the first time that we said hello began our last goodbye.” Truer words have never been spoken – almost!

Jesus claims to be the one exception: no ‘seeds of death’ ticking away inside him. Paul, an early Christian author, described Jesus’ death by writing that Jesus became “obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Strange words. I couldn’t be disobedient to death if I tried. I have a sneaking suspicion you couldn’t either. Imagine – had Jesus not deliberately laid down his life as a sacrifice for sin, he wouldn’t have died. And at his next birthday, someone would be trying to fit more than 2000 candles on his cake!

Explore the Bible

Read John 19:30.

What did Jesus give up? What does this mean?

Day Two: Please, Don't Feel Sorry for Jesus...

Life can just randomly 'dish up' some mean and miserable experiences and we become the innocent victims. You might be one of them. The elderly are mugged in their own homes; innocent little children are abused; good people contract serious and incurable diseases they don't deserve. It happens all the time. Only the most fortunate get through unscathed. As genuine victims, we deserve much love and support.

Sometimes, though, people choose to play 'the victim card'. Why? Maybe it's easier than taking responsibility for ourselves and growing through the hard times. Let's face it, many of us get our 'tea, cakes and cuddles' – by crying 'poor me'.

Some people wrongly think Jesus was a 'victim'. But the Bible will have none of it. Jesus didn't cry 'poor me'. In fact, he said of himself: "I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:17–18). Hardly the words of someone 'playing victim'. Innocent? Yes! Victim? No! Jesus had come to die deliberately as a sacrifice for sin – fulfilling exactly what the detailed Old Testament prophecies had foretold about his death.

Here's just a few. Jesus would be:

- Sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12–13)
- Tried and condemned (Isaiah 53:8)
- Silent before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7)
- Tortured and spat upon (Isaiah 50:6)
- Mocked and insulted (Psalm 22:7–8)
- Put to death (Daniel 9:26)
- Pierced in his hands and feet (Psalm 22:16; Zechariah 12:10)
- Crucified with sinners (Isaiah 53:12).

None of that speaks accident or victim. Sounds more like 'intention'.

Explore the Bible

Read Isaiah 53:3–9.

What prophecies of God's Messiah can you find?

Day Three: What Will I Do with My Debt?

Debt. None of us likes it. Student loans. Mortgages. Credit card debt. There isn't one of us who hasn't dreamed of being free from debt.

I remember my first job. I went to work as a 'junior' for a large bank earning a huge 11 dollars a week! Eventually I found another job – but I would need my own transport. After a lot of discussion, my mother agreed to lend me \$800 to buy my first car. But the repayments were definitely a struggle. My grandma always said, “No one ever drowned in sweat!” – but I thought I might be the first. There were 'board' payments, running expenses for the car and personal items. All out of 11 dollars! After a few months, my mother took pity on me. She lovingly cancelled my debt. No more payments. No more struggling. The cloud lifted.

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But what if there's an even worse kind of debt than a financial one?

How fascinating that, when Jesus died, he cried out: “Tetelestai!” (translated “It is finished!”) – a Greek word commonly used in business and accounting that meant ‘paid in full’. Back then when a bill had been fully paid up, “tetelestai” would be scribbled across the invoice and the invoice became a receipt. Gasping his last breath on the cross, Jesus whispered the best of all words any of us could ever want to hear: “Tetelestai!” The debt had been cancelled. The payment for sin had been made in full. On our behalf, Jesus had experienced the full fury of God's judgement on sin. There's nothing left to pay. Nothing at all! It's finished. The penalty has been paid.

Can you feel the cloud lifting?

Explore the Bible

Read John 19:30.

Have a go at writing this verse out in your own words.

Day Four: Love Is a Verb...

Back in the 'old days' down on the farm, one or two times a year we'd amuse ourselves by greasing a pig and then spending hours trying to catch it. There were squeals of excitement all round – mud too! We hardly ever got our hands on the pig – it was just too slippery. The word 'love' is like that: we use it so many ways... "I love ice cream!" "I love tennis." "I love the beach." "I love my job." "I love my friends."

Teenage lovers just discovering each other say, "I love you!" But that's different from what a couple who've been married for 50 years mean when each of them tell of their lifelong partner, "I love you". It was Richard Wurmbrand (a Romanian Christian minister of the mid-20th century) who reminded us that the boy who wants a girl just for the night, and a man who wants to marry a young woman and be with her forever, both say "I love you".

When the Bible talks love, it's talking about a lot more than 'feelings'. It's talking commitment and action – love that takes the initiative to do the very best for the one loved, whatever the cost! Love in the Bible is a verb, a 'doing word', which is why Jesus said: "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27).

And Jesus knew how to 'do' love. Paul put it this way: "... the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Jesus loved us and proved it by paying the penalty for sin. There's nothing slippery about that.

Explore the Bible

Read John 15:13.

What is the greatest expression of love? Does Jesus really love us that much?

Day Five: Ex-cruci-ating...

None of us likes pain. It doesn't matter what it is – stubbing our toes, blister-burning our fingers, bumping our not-so-funny 'funny-bones'. And don't forget the toothache! Worse still, its treatment! – all the drilling and filling... and the billing!

One of the most frustrating things about pain is that only the one suffering the pain really knows how bad it feels. There's no blood test to show how much we're suffering. And it's hard to say just how much pain we feel. So the doctors have come up with a 'pain scale' – they ask us to choose on a zero-to-ten scale... ten being 'excruciating'.

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Now there's an interesting word – excruciating. Pronounced 'ik-skroo-SHe-atiNG'. It comes from the 16th-century Latin word 'excruciare', which comes from 'cruciare' (to crucify) which comes from the root word 'cruX' (cross). Excruciating pain is crucifixion-type pain.

The physical pain Jesus suffered must have been truly excruciating. When a person was nailed to a cross with hefty iron spikes driven through hands and feet, death was a slow, agonising process. Sometimes they hurried up the process by spearing the heart and sometimes by breaking the legs, causing severe shock.

As bad as that was, the emotional pain was even worse. In the crucifixion, experiencing intense emotional and spiritual agony, Jesus screamed out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Why? Because he was suffering the full fury of God's judgement on our sin – and that judgement was separation from God. He had never known a moment when he wasn't the Father's delight. Then, he was separated. For him – excruciating pain. For us – everlasting gain!

Explore the Bible

Read Matthew 27:46.

How does this verse impact you?

Explore

Discussion starter

Q – Why do think wearing a cross can be seen as trendy, even though it’s a symbol of death?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Mark 10:45 and 15:24–37.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this section.

Q – What did Jesus claim was his mission?

Q – What would you have thought about Jesus if you were near the cross when he died?

View

Video episode 9 – death

Five things God wants us to know about Jesus’ death:

1. Jesus’ death was a payment for
2. Jesus’ death was a payment for all
3. Jesus’ death was a payment for all
4. Jesus’ death was a payment in
5. Jesus’ death was a payment of

Discuss

Questions I have

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For more information...
see www.longstoryshort.co/death





