

Reconciliation



The Bible offers us a variety of solutions to our diverse problems. Remembering that truth comes as story and that different stories speak more powerfully to people at different times, the Bible has multiple ways of understanding our quest for reconciliation – with one another and the Divine.

-- Living the Questions 2.0

NOTE: While there are breaks provided to spread discussion questions through the whole video, the material in this session may be best served by watching the video all the way through before discussing the questions...

1st break:

If the Exodus story is the Bible's way of showing people's need for liberation from bondage, where do you see the story applying to life today?

2nd break:

What are some of the "isms" and concrete expressions of bondage from which Carcaño has been liberated?

How does the Passover Seder affirm that the Exodus story is "true" about us?

List some of the cultural messages that, as a matter of course, subject us to bondage.

3rd break:

What is the “solution” to the human reality of anxiety and rootlessness described by the story of the Babylonian exile?

4th break:

How does Temple sacrifice and the “Priestly” story speak to the human need for forgiveness from sin?

How ironic is it that Jesus’ death became a symbol of the Priestly story even though Jesus himself was against the sacrificial system of the Temple Cult?

In what ways might the dominance of the Priestly story and the doctrine of the atonement diminish the broader Biblical message?

Describe the function and benefits of the three “macro-stories” in speaking about the need for reconciliation and the diversity of the human predicament.

General Reflection:

What do you find most helpful or interesting from the material so far?

What are the implications for your personal spiritual journey? For Christianity as a whole?

Words of Wisdom

Perhaps one of the most important and least acknowledged events contributing to the shaping of Western Culture was the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C.E. The brightest and best of Jewish leadership was taken into exile in Babylon where they served the courts and needs of the Babylonians for generations. This was not only a political defeat, but also a crisis of faith: Babylon's victory was perceived as a victory for Babylon's patron god Marduk over Yahweh of Israel.

Read Psalm 137

In both Greek and English, there are two ways to interpret Paul's declaration that "Christ died for our sins." The first, most popular understanding is, "Christ died to save us *from* our sins." However, an equally acceptable reading of the passage has very different implications: "Christ died *because of* or *on account of* our sins." Early Christians picked up on the first idea of Jesus' death as sacrifice. The first evangelist, Mark, devoted the first half of his gospel to Jesus' life, and the whole second half to his suffering and death. By the time the writer of the Gospel of John was writing, the idea of Jesus as sacrifice had gained so much influence that the storyline was changed: John even changed the day of Jesus' death so it could be said Jesus was slain at the exact moment the Passover lambs would have been slain.

A generation or so later, *The Letter to the Hebrews* takes it to the next level, setting Jesus' death against the backdrop of *another* Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement. In a sad irony, the Jesus of the Gospels, who overturned the tables of the money-changers in the Temple, protesting not only economic corruption, but the cult of animal sacrifice itself, is simultaneously portrayed in *Hebrews* as the High Priest that offers the sacrifice and as the perfect animal whose blood is spilled in order to satiate God's need for blood.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

Spirit Practice

Spend time in prayer, reflecting on your words and actions that unintentionally or intentionally hurt another person.

Is there someone with whom you have a strained or broken relationship?

Find a picture of that person or write their name on a piece of paper. Place it in space where you will see it frequently. Pray for that person and yourself.

Consider steps toward reconciliation. If possible, you might invite that person out for coffee or to share a meal.

Try it

For your Personal Journey: Forgiveness Day

The modern practice of Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement) has many advantages over the rote prayers of forgiveness recited in many Protestant congregations. One element is the period of time set aside the week before the holiday to seek out those with whom you've had a disagreement in the previous year and seek to make amends.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:23ff may very well be an amplification of a similar practice already taught by the Pharisees:

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (NRSV)

Short of instituting a celebration of Yom Kippur in your congregation, integrating an annual day of forgiveness may be a helpful tradition in assisting people to restore relationships. The Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance (<http://www.forgivenessday.org>) is dedicated to demonstrating the power of forgiveness across cultural and national boundaries. Part of their mission includes establishing the first global holiday, International Forgiveness Day, to be celebrated on the first Sunday of every August. The Alliance website has ideas and contact information for those interested in organizing local observances of International Forgiveness Day, both in religious and non-sectarian settings.