

The Discipleship Project-Summer 2021

Series 1: Who's to Blame

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Jesus Took Our Blame

Series Big Idea

Because Jesus Christ took our blame through His death on the cross, we must assume responsibility for our own choices and trust in His grace and mercy.

Lesson Big Idea

Because Jesus Christ took our blame, we must assume responsibility for our own choices and surrender our lives to Him.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Isaiah 53:4 (PPT)

The scientists who headed to work at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in northern Ukraine on the morning of April 26, 1986, had no idea they were about to experience the worst nuclear disaster in history. Soon after they began working on a new series of tests in Unit 4, however, something went wrong. Two explosions shook the unit. Immediately two engineers were killed. As bad as that was, however, it was only the beginning of a much larger problem. A fire ensued in the light water graphite moderator reactor that sent clouds of radioactive smoke into the sky. Due to the exposure to high levels of radioactivity, forty-nine workers died over the next few weeks.

Things, however, could have been even worse. A few weeks after the initial explosion, the plant chiefs became extremely concerned that a second explosion, much worse than the initial one, could occur. If this were to happen, experts estimated millions would be impacted as the nuclear fallout could spread to over half of Western Europe.

In order to keep this from happening, someone needed to drain a pool of water under the reactor. The story is often shared as one of the most heroic acts of self-sacrifice in history. D. G. Hewitt writes,

According to most accounts, two plant workers and one soldier stepped forward to take on the job. Undoubtedly, the plant workers—and most likely the soldier as well—would have known that the basement of the reactor was highly radioactive. Even if they could get the job done quickly, they would still be exposed to lethally high doses. In short, it was a true suicide mission, and the Soviet authorities even assured the men that their families would be looked after financially.

The conditions were treacherous. The three men put concerns of their own safety to the back of their minds and, after much trying, finally found the correct valves to open and drain the pool. (historycollection.com)

According to historical accounts, the men did not die from exposure to radioactive material; they lived for many years afterward. That, however, is not the point. The point is: they were willing to sacrifice their lives for others. This was a heroic act.

FRAME

Such stories of sacrifice are uncommon, and even more so when the hero is despised by those being rescued. Yet such is the story of **an innocent man who was sentenced to death.** (PPT)

With this man having done no wrong, one might wonder why the kangaroo court reached such a verdict. After all, the one who had betrayed Him returned the bounty and declared Him to be innocent (Matthew 27:4). The wife of the governor who presided over the innocent man's trial maintained He was a righteous man. She even begged her husband to leave the innocent man alone (Matthew 27:19). Even the Roman governor himself had pronounced, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4). And the Jewish ruler at the time, the same guy who had given the order to cut off John the Baptist's head, also declared Him to be innocent of all crimes.

The death of this innocent man was a great injustice, yet it was justice. After all, **the innocent man had drunk from the cup.** (PPT) "He drank from the cup?" you might ask. "How did the innocent man drinking from the cup cause His death to become some sort of justice?"

Interestingly, it was not even His desire to drink from the cup. It was His Father's. The drink was repulsive. It was vile. He understood it to be part of a master plan, yet even He had asked, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39, KJV). Though He understood the severity of drinking from the cup, He willingly drank from it.

- **What must it have been like to take on all the sins of the world?**

The Bible connects the imagery of the cup with the anger of God. (PPT) Jeremiah 25:15 refers to a "cup of this fury," and Isaiah 51:17 speaks of the "cup of his fury." The innocent man, in drinking of the cup, took upon Himself God's fury against every sin that had been and would be committed: every crime, every act of adultery, every murder, every lie, and every form of gossip and slander. The innocent man, the only born innocent man the world has ever known, aligned Himself with the will of the Father—"Your will be done," He had prayed—and drank from the cup.

Seven hundred or so years before the innocent man was born, Isaiah foresaw His suffering. But that is not all. Isaiah also foresaw why this innocent man would suffer. Isaiah pointed out the person responsible for the death of the innocent man. According to Isaiah, the person is me, and the person is you. We are to blame. We are the rebels. We are the guilty party. As Isaiah put it, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6, KJV).

Going our "own way" is of no small matter. (PPT) Our own way speaks of our failures, our sins, and our iniquities. Going our own way speaks of the erroneous thought we can somehow be good enough to overcome the bad in us. Going our own way is thinking our righteousness will save us. Of course, it cannot. Our righteousness is as filthy rags. Hence, going our own way is a rejection of the right way and a rejection of the innocent man.

Isaiah noted our rejection of the innocent man. He stated that the innocent man was "despised and rejected of men," and "we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3, KJV). Yet despite our rejection, **the innocent man took our place.** (PPT) In Isaiah 53, notice our involvement,

- He bore *our* griefs (verse 4).
- He carried *our* sorrows (verse 4).
- He was pierced through for *our* transgressions (verse 5).
- He was crushed for *our* iniquities (verse 5).
- He was chastened for *our* well-being (verse 5).
- He was scourged for *our* healing (verse 5).
- He took on the iniquity of *us* all (verse 6).
- He was stricken for *our* transgression (verse 8).

- He will bear *our* iniquities (verse 11).
- He bore the sin of *many* (verse 12).

We were to blame. These were our sins, our iniquities, our transgressions. And He took them all. And we despised Him.

- **How do our sinful actions show we “despise” Him?**

This is difficult for many of us to accept. We like to think someone else despised and rejected Him. But if we are to lay claim to the fact that He carried “our sorrows,” if He bore “our griefs,” if “He was wounded for our transgressions,” then we must also accept the responsibility that “we esteemed Him not.”

Perhaps we find the thought that we are responsible to be highly inaccurate; after all, we are alive nearly two thousand years after His crucifixion. Yet it is clear, we are indeed responsible. **We are both the rejectors and the recipients.** (PPT) We all have gone our own way, yet He took our blame.

Why the rejection? Why do we find Him to be repulsive? It is because He represented everything we are not. He was lowly; we are not. He embraced humility; we reject it. He became a servant; we reject servanthood. We want prominence; we desire to be important. He taught the opposite and lived it too. His whole demeanor, His philosophies, His mindset, His values—what He thought was important and unimportant—everything about Him was contrary to us. So to protect ourselves and to protect our self-image, we despised Him.

Yet despite it all, **Jesus Christ ransomed us and took our place.** (PPT) He did not take our rejection personally. He did not reject us because we rejected Him. Instead, He loved us and gave Himself for us. He could have laid greater blame on us, but instead, He took our blame. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin” (II Corinthians 5:21, ESV).

His taking our blame was all within the plan of God. God knew that we, as sinners, had no hope. We could do nothing; we were the guilty ones. God, however, was not willing to leave us in our guilt. We were condemned. We were to be blamed. But God . . . was manifested in flesh (I Timothy 3:16). He—God manifested in flesh, Jesus Christ—became our mediator (I Timothy 2:5).

- **What does it mean to be a mediator?**

A mediator is one who acts as the middle person—the go-between person—to work with opposing sides in order to bring about a settlement. A mediator’s job is to resolve disputes between two parties.

God has a dispute with humanity because of humanity’s sin. Sin is a transgression against the law of God (I John 3:4). Sin is rebellion against God (Deuteronomy 9:7). God hates sin. Our sin puts us at odds with God. Furthermore, the wages or penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). We cannot be the mediators because we are guilty. We are the ones who are to blame. But “the man Christ Jesus” (I Timothy 2:5), God manifested in flesh, has become our mediator. He mediates for us, like a defense attorney mediates for a client, telling the judge, “Your honor, my client is innocent.” And the reason He is able to say so is because He drank the cup. He took our blame; now we can stand blameless before God (Colossians 1:22). Our defense attorney took our place.

This was God’s plan all along. He knew humanity would mess up and fall into sin. He knew humanity would need a mediator. So before the beginning of time, God instituted His plan. Jesus Christ, God manifested in flesh, became “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8, KJV). **Jesus Christ came into the world to die** (PPT)—to take our place and die for our sins.

Taking the cup included the horrors of His death—the crown of thorns, rejection by humanity, abandonment by His friends, and turning away of the Father while He became sin for us. It also included Him being silent when standing before Pilate after being accused by the chief priests and elders. Pilate asked Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly” (Matthew 27:13–14, NKJV). He could have spoken up. He could have said, “I am not to be blamed. Humanity is to be blamed.” But He answered not one word.

- **Jesus refused to blame others, even when pushed to the limit by His accusers. Have you ever blamed someone out of frustration? Explain.**

Often we are quick to blame others, saying: “It is my mother’s fault; she is to blame. It is my dad’s fault; he is to blame. It is my uncle’s fault, my grandparent’s fault, my neighbor’s fault, the church’s fault. It was that one particular pastor’s fault. It is the devil’s fault. Everyone else is to be blamed.” Seldom taking personal responsibility, we point a finger at others, passing the buck and rendering ourselves to be helpless at changing anything.

But not Jesus Christ—**Jesus, the one who knew no sin, the only blameless man, said, “I will take all blame, (PPT) all sin, and be nailed to a tree, so you can forevermore live blameless.”** Think about it: He is the one who could have started naming names. “John—he is to be blamed; he is filled with lust. Sally—she is to be blamed; she is a murderer. She never killed a person in cold blood, but she likes to gossip and slander others with her tongue. Billy—he is to be blamed; he is a conniving, cheating, narcissistic person. Annie—she has run around on her husband, not once, but many times. Joey—he is filled with pride; he is a very arrogant person who has no respect for others. George—he is a racist. Kim—we don’t even want to go there; there are too many things to list here.” And so the list goes on. But Jesus, who knows all of humanity and the intent of their hearts, was silent. He did not say a word.

And so it was that the blameless one passed no blame.

Knowing that Jesus Christ took our blame—my blame and your blame—should move us to cease blaming others. (PPT) Yes, they did us wrong. Yes, what happened should not have happened. But those who have been recipients of grace should extend grace to others. Not because they deserve it, not because they earned it, but simply because He who did not have to extend grace to us, nevertheless, did so. We should cease blaming others because He took our blame.

- **When someone does us wrong, what should be our response instead of blame?**

FINISH

Grasping the magnitude of someone else becoming our substitute is somewhat difficult. Such stories make great impressions on our lives. Although they are not common, they do occur from time to time. Consider the following:

Beginning in the later part of 2019 and through 2020, the coronavirus led to many deaths, created economic upheaval, and shaped society in ways that are still being revealed. During this, though, we saw a glimmer of hope for humanity. Several stories of sacrifice have emerged that, while tragic, are also heartwarming.

Consider the story of an elderly woman from Belgium who died of COVID-19 after having declined the use of a ventilator that might have saved her life. She reportedly told the doctors, “I don’t want to use artificial respiration. Save it for younger patients. I already had a good life.” She was ninety years old (boston25news.com).

Or consider the woman from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, who made news for the changes she made to her will. She was reported as having said if she needed life-saving equipment, she didn’t want it if someone else needed it. She said, “I am willing to give up my ventilator to someone who still has a life to live.” She acknowledged she had underlying medical issues and would likely need a ventilator if she became ill with the virus. She said,

I don’t want to take some college student’s ventilator. I don’t want to take some young mother with four children’s ventilator. I don’t want to take a seventy-year-old person’s ventilator who maybe has a disabled child that they’re still caring for. I’ve lived my life. I’m sixty-five years old. I’ve raised a whole family. I spoke to them about this decision. They respect this decision. (www.wtae.com)

MANUSCRIPT

Such stories are somewhat difficult to grasp because they stand in contrast to human nature. Our human nature is selfish, self-centered, self-seeking, self-absorbed. We are mostly out to get what we want, to take care of self, to look out for number one—and number one is me.

Jesus, however, came to deliver us from self—from all our hang-ups, all our shortcomings, and all our sins. He has taken our blame. We can now experience His nature and become an extension of His grace to others.