

## *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

### **Week One: Introduction and Chapter One (Nobody Knows the Trouble I See)**

Listen to “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” Paul Robeson

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=pwYpqJVHHmo&feature=share>

On page xiv, Dr. Cone states, “Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, this symbol of salvation [the cross] has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and oppression of human beings.....” Do you agree?

Did it ever occur to you to link the cross and lynchings in this country? Do you think that it is accurate to say that lynching is a “memory that most white Americans would prefer to forget?” Does a collective lack of remembrance lead to the “fraudulent perspective ...of the meaning of the Christian gospel for this nation” as Cone claims?

Do we sometimes forget that the Cross is a paradox because it “inverts the world’s value system with the news that hope comes by way of defeat”? (p. 2) Does reading even this far in the book renew your understanding of the cross?

Cone says, “this dialectic of despair and hope defined black existence” (p.14). Can you think of situations today that embody this? What are some contemporary situations in the black community that might parallel the lynching era?

The classic question of theodicy - if God is good, why does suffering exist – takes on special poignancy when considering the plight of black people in the era of lynching. What became the refuge and comfort for them during this time? The Black Church and Community. Are there contemporary examples of this kind of refuge?

See Dr. James Cone’s lecture, *Wrestling with The Cross and the Lynching Tree*,

<https://youtu.be/g1S2Pj1HCsQ>

### **Week Two: Chapter2 (The terrible Beauty of the Cross)**

On page 30, Cone says that “the crucifixion was clearly a 1st C. lynching.” Discuss why he says this (see page 31 for some descriptions.)

On page 35, Cone reflects on Reinhold Niebuhr’s “transvaluation of values”. Do you agree that Jesus was crucified because people expected a Messiah “perfect in power and perfect in goodness”? How do you see Jesus?

On page 51, Cone asserts that Niebuhr’s failure to deal with racial issues is a serious failure by someone often called America’s greatest theologian. How well do you think the Church and religion in general today treats issues of race? Discuss how your congregation is or is not addressing issues like mass incarceration, police brutality, and whatever local instances there may be of racism.

Would you agree with Cone's statement that "groups don't love" (p. 53) and that, therefore, "love is the motive, but justice is the instrument." Reflect on what this means in practical