

Experiencing the Atonement

Beginning 2005 Atoned



January 7

The Atonement: God's Eternal Redemption

In the first evening we will learn about the importance of "sacrifice" to God. We will begin with an introductory exegesis outlining the parallels between Jesus in Hebrews 9-10, and the sacrificial lamb at the Exodus, and the Levitical sacrificial systems. This Old Testament/New Testament comparison will help reveal "messianic foreshadowings" of Jesus Christ within the OT sacrifice, and help us to have a transcendent understanding today. The continual need for a sacrifice of blood, shows why Jesus had to suffer. Through Jesus' death we can now approach God with confidence!!!

In Hebrews 9-10, we see that Christ's sacrifice sets us free from sin. Hebrews 9: 15 states:

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from sins committed under the first covenant.

Jesus' death gives us the "promised eternal inheritance," and it was through his blood (Hebrews 9: 14) that we have our consciences cleansed. We are clean, and are God's sons and daughters because of what Jesus did. Not what we do. Jesus made the animal sacrifice more perfect (see Hebrews 9: 11-13), and he died once for all (9: 27-28) and thus was a better sacrifice than the repeated animal sacrifices.

Old Testament Sacrifice

God established the animal sacrificial system for the Jews to atone their sins, and he primarily used the blood of sacrificed lambs to protect them from the angel of death before the Jew's Exodus from Egypt.

Exodus 12: 1-11. The sacrifice of the lamb and the blood was the symbol of protection, reconciliation and salvation. God made this very clear to Moses, and

Moses instructed the Jews to observe what God commanded (see Ex. 12: 21-23). In verses 24-27 the Jews were to “obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance” for themselves and their descendents. The sacrifice of the lamb was to be strictly observed and this observance was to be passed down through generations.

- Imagine you were at the Passover. How would you view the sacrifice? How would seeing the blood on your door impact you?
- Imagining you are a child being told the story by your mother and father after the Exodus. How do you think you would feel?
- How important do you think it is to make sure we follow God’s instructions? Teach them to our children?

After God took the Jews out of Egypt he gave them the Law in the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is historically presumed that God gave the revelations to Moses, and it was within the book of Leviticus that God sets out His sacrificial system, in order to take the Jews’ sins away so that they could continue to live a life close to God. It is fitting that in Leviticus, God speaks the most out of any other book in the Bible. He is almost exclusively the sole speaker!

This is what you experience with the book of Leviticus. Strange ceremonies and sacrifices, many old restrictions, dietary issues and various other difficulties which appear to have no significance. Then we discover that they are installed by God to enable the Jews to have his grace in a relationship with him. This relationship is clearly stated in Leviticus, and to understand the meaning of this book we turn towards the end.

In Leviticus 20: 26 God makes an incredible statement:

You are to be holy to me because I the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

You can sense the seriousness of God in this scripture. We need to be holy, because God is holy. God has also set us apart. This is the reason for Leviticus – God wants us to be His. We are His through holiness, because God is holy. However, the Jews could never be holy by themselves, they needed the blood sacrifices. God looked at the Jews and made them “whole” through the sacrifices. The Jews were broken without the blood of the animals.

Leviticus 20: 24. God set the Jews apart - to be holy is to be “set apart.” The Jews needed to be distinctive. The reason the Jews were broken was because they were in a broken race. Their attitudes were wrong. Their vision of life was incomplete. God needed to set them apart - he needed to break the Jews from the mould of the world. God needed to deliver them - straighten out their thinking and get their hearts right and mend their relationships.

- Why did God need to set the Jews apart from the other nations?
- How are we distinctive (set apart) as Christians?

Leviticus 17: 11 - life is in the blood. There is a need to understand the Jew's incompleteness. This basis is blood. Anyone who has read the OT, knows it is full of blood - strange sacrifices. Why all the blood shed? God is trying to impress on the Jews a fundamental fact - *the issues of life run very deep*. These issues can only be solved by a death. The basis for wholeness is a life given up – the Jews need to discover a new life - and we have to give up the old before we can discover the new.

- A struggle in our Christian life may be that we try to hang on to the old life and refuse to accept the new. Are there any things we are keeping hold of from our old life?

Leviticus 20: 7 The Jews needed to consecrate themselves. God wanted them to live for him. Leviticus 20: 26. This is what God is aiming at. He wanted the Jews to be his. God was saying "you will be mine." For Christians today, God looks at us in our brokenness, our hurting condition and puts his arm around us. This is the Grace of God - It is all over the Bible. The Book of Leviticus then is a shadow of the Cross - an example of God's amazing grace.

Jesus' Sacrifice

However, the history of the Jews reveals that the importance of following God's commands left them. They forgot about holding onto God's laws in the way God wanted, and they twisted his commands. Idol worship, inter-nation marriage, breakdown of the sacrificial system and exile ensued. They lost the significance of God's GRACE. Ezekiel 22: 30 shows that no one in Jerusalem was obeying God the way he wanted. Furthermore, the returned exiles fell back again. Malachi 1: 6-14 shows that there was no belief and conviction on the importance of God's commands. The sacrificial systems was abused, and respect for God was diminished.

Hence, Jesus had to come to be the perfect sacrifice to make atonement for the world's sin's and to reconcile man and woman to God. Following Moses' instruction that the Jews' should carefully obey God's commands, the author of Hebrews carefully details the tabernacle in Hebrews 9: 1-10. In verses 9-10, we see that the sacrifices were not "able to clear the consciences" and that there were mere "external regulations." This is in total contrast to Jesus. His sacrifice manifests an *internal* "cut(ting) to the heart" (see Acts 2: 37). The difference is that the animal sacrifices only made the worshipper "outwardly" clean (v. 13), but Jesus makes us inwardly clean by cleansing our very consciences! (v. 14)

- What is the difference between the animal sacrifice and the sacrifice of Jesus?
- How do you feel knowing that Jesus' death cleanses your conscience?
- Is there anything that Jesus cannot clean in our life?

Hebrews 9: 15. We have a promised eternal inheritance. It is a promise of God. Does God break his promises? NO! This is our future. A future of heaven. This promise is

guaranteed by blood. Just as in Leviticus 17: 11 we understand that “life is in the blood”, Hebrews 9: 22 states:

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

The blood of Jesus was required for our forgiveness. Through this forgiveness we can now “draw near to God” (v. 21), and we need to keep encouraging each other to be confident in this.

- How do you feel towards Jesus knowing this?
- How do you feel knowing that his sacrifice is our guarantee for our place in heaven?
- How much do you want to make sure that we all remember this (Hebrews 12: 15)?

Conclusion

Consider this introduction to the “sacrifice” and think about how this will help you draw near to God. You may want to make some practical decisions on how you will get closer to God in 2005. But whatever you decide – remember you are *atoned!*

January 14

The Atonement: The Lord’s Supper and the Cross

Around 740BC Isaiah wrote his prophetic scroll, and in it (52: 13-53: 12) it includes a messianic prophesy about Jesus and His death, and the cleansing of sin through his death. His death is the atoning sacrifice for the world. In Isaiah 52: 13, Isaiah talks of God’s “servant” who will “act wisely.” This is the symbol of God’s blessing (1 Samuel 18: 14), and Jeremiah 23: 5 signals that the messianic King will “reign wisely.” This passage of Isaiah describes Jesus’ exaltation, which is referred to in the New Testament in Acts 2: 33; 3: 13. (See also, Ephesians 1: 20-22; Philippians 2: 9-11).

Isaiah makes some remarkable predictions about how this “servant” will save the world. In 52: 15, he will sprinkle many nations (with his blood), in verses 53: 5 – 7 he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, his punishment brought us peace. Indeed, God laid on Jesus our sins.

What is interesting for our understanding of the atonement, is that in verse 7 it states: *he was led like a lamb to the slaughter*. Isaiah also states that he will be “cut off” (v. 8), “assigned a grave” (v. 9) his life was a guilt offering (v. 10). This servant was to become a sacrificial lamb!!! This is a remarkable statement. Throughout the history of Israel, an animal was used to perform the sacrificial ritual, but now, for the first time, one of God’s prophets (Isaiah) states that the animal will be substituted for a human – in this case the servant. The messianic servant – the messiah: Jesus Christ. (We should consider this passage with Hebrews 9: 9-14, as it depicts the transferring from the animal sacrifice to the sacrifice of Jesus).

Isaiah goes on to inform us that (53: 10-12):

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied: by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

These words are so moving and powerful. We can read about the suffering of Jesus in the Gospels and learn about his resurrection (“see the light of life”). We can take great comfort that He has justified us (Paul talks so much about this in Romans), and that God considered him a King – as he “gave him a portion among the great.” We breath a great sign of relief that Jesus is interceding for us – the transgressors! Praise be to God for this prophesy!

- How would you have reacted if you lived in 740 BC and you heard this prophesy for the first time?
- How do you think most people reacted?

Jesus and the Passover Feast

It is with this prophesy in mind that we now turn to the Lord’s Supper as recorded in Luke 22: 7-20. Jesus was eager (v. 15) to eat the Passover with his disciples. In the Jewish calendar this fell on Nisan 14. With the same stringent following of the regulations as Moses, at the first Passover, Jesus sends Peter and John to make preparations (v. 7). Jesus wanted to make sure that everything was prepared. This was a crucially important night – it was to be the beginning of the fulfillment of the original Passover. Jesus was now going to “perfect” the sacrificial system (Hebrews 9-10). He was going to make better all the inadequacies in the animal sacrifice and fulfill salvation for everyone by offering himself as the sacrifice.

It is probable that Jesus was eager to eat the Passover, because he was about to fulfill what Isaiah first recognized – that the “servant” would be sacrificed in place of the animal sacrifice. Thus making the perfect fulfillment of reconciliation. The transfer of the animal to the man was about to take place, and then Luke tells us of Jesus’ new instructions on remembering His (not an animal’s) sacrifice (22: 14-20):

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. After taking the cup he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, “This is my body given for you: do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you...”

Jesus changed the route to God. We need to be holy to be with God, and a sacrifice is the only way. Jesus became that sacrifice – because of his undying love of the whole world. He wants us to remember Him. When we take the bread and the wine, we remember what Jesus did for us. However, we do not just receive grace upon taking the Lord’s supper, we receive it every minute of the day! 1 John 1 : 7 reveals that we have purification all the time as we “walk in the light.” It is continuous. We need to not forget that and make sure that nobody forgets that (Hebrews 12: 15).

- Do you now understand the genealogy of the sacrificial system from the Passover to Jesus? If not make a personal study plan to understand it.
- Do you find it easy or difficult to accept the Grace of God?
- Is there anything in your life that you feel God will not/cannot forgive?
- Is there someone you have not forgiven for sinning against you? If so, what steps are you taking to forgive them?

Paul’s Teaching on the Lord’s Supper

For this evening it would be a wonderful idea for us all to bring a dish and have a “Lord’s Supper” including taking the bread and wine. We could organize for a menu to be set, and structure the evening to encompass the communal meal.

In 55AD Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church (firstly noting their idolatry, 1 Corinthians 10: 14-22) and identifying some ways they were acting in an “unworthy manner” (v. 27). Paul establishes that there is a right and wrong way to observe the Lord’s Supper. Firstly, it should be noted that we remember Jesus by taking the bread and wine (v. 24-26) in Church, but we do not (normally) eat a “supper.” This is not wrong, and does not nullify our “communion,” but in the Corinthian Church their communion included a meal. Furthermore we regularly eat together in other circumstances.

Paul was concerned that the Corinthians meetings did “more harm than good” (v. 17), and that divisions caused problems at the Lord’s Supper. Firstly people did not wait for each other (v. 21) displaying no love or respect for the brothers and sisters by some of the Church, and that some Christians were eating and getting drunk and not caring for those who were hungry (v. 21). It appears that the rich Christians were “humiliating” the poorer Christians who “have nothing” (v. 22). It is in this context that Paul says that “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (v. 27). It is not that if you have sinned you cannot take communion, it is if you are causing “harm” in the ceremony of taking the communion you bring judgment on yourself (v. 29). The “examining” which Paul talks about in verse 28, is making sure that if you have a lot to eat, that you share with those who have none.

What Paul is encouraging is what Jesus commanded in John 13: 34-35 – loving each other. The Lord’s Supper is an occasion for our mutual expression of love for each other. This is what the sacrifice of Jesus is all about – bringing us all together. In John 12: 32 Jesus says; “But I, when I am lifted up from this earth, will draw all men to myself.” We should also draw closer in love to each other, as a family of God. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus thus breaks down all the barriers that keep us apart or in friction with one another.

- Plan a Lord’s Supper in your home for a few Christians
- What meal will you bring to this evening’s Lord’s Supper?
- What is significant about the Lord’s Supper to you?
- What do you remember in Jesus as you take the bread and wine? Do you think of different aspects of Jesus? Which is your favourite part of Christ’s character?

January 21

Free From Sin: A Confessional Atonement

This evening we will have an opportunity for men and women to form groups for confiding, confession, prayer and encouragement. We all need relationships. It is as simple as that! We need to experience the love of Jesus and show people the love of Jesus – this is all done in relationships.

There are times in everyone's life where we just need to talk – *to let it all out*. Tonight is an opportunity to do this. Of course this cannot be "forced" it must be natural. You may want to form groups or just make pairs. We may not want to meet up all together, we may want to go out for a meal in our group or go to someone's house, etc.

A good practice would be to form the groups in the first week, and begin to spend time with each other and get to know each other (if you do not already). This is because this evening is extremely important, because what we are practicing, we should be doing all the time in our Christian lives. If you feel you are that is great! However, if you feel you are not, then this is a wonderful opportunity to develop strong relationships which can become life-friendships which we all need at difficult times in our lives.

Mutual Moments

Ultimately what you talk about is up to you. However, we should be encouraging each other to grow in faith and knowledge of God (Hebrews 5: 11-6: 3). Furthermore, the Bible highlights some areas which should be present in our relationships:

- a) Encouragement – there are many scriptures indicating the importance of “encouragement.” We all need encouragement in this *discouraging* world. Hebrews 3: 13 and 10: 25 are good scriptures.
- b) Confiding – we get closer to people by just letting them know who we are. It is very difficult to make a true friend unless we are vulnerable. In John 15: 15, the apostles were Jesus’ friends because he was vulnerable with them. Let people know the real you, and then you will make real friendships.
- c) Confession – when we confess our sins to God we are forgiven, and it is as simple as that (1 John 1: 9). However, we need each other to help us combat Satan in prayer and when we are open with each other we can pray for each other (James 5: 16).
- d) Prayer – it is always great to pray together (Acts 16: 25). Our relationships together are extremely important, but our prayers put each other’s lives on our hearts. We bring each other to God and show him how much we love each other.

January 28

Living An Atoned Life: The Cross is Our Future

Through the encouragement of scripture, God planned to give the Jews a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29: 11) and he wanted future generations to praise him (Psalm 102: 18), and Paul completes God’s genealogy of encouragement and hope with the moving words in Romans 15: 4;

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope.

This is what these four evenings have been about – focusing on the encouragement and hope of God’s atonement. It is the central message of the Bible. It is God’s central message through his expression of love for us. Indeed God loves us so much he sacrificed his son to save us. John 3: 16-17 states;

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Jesus' death makes us want to know him more, because he died for each and every one of us. We cannot but fall in love with Jesus because of his sacrifice for us, and as the scripture indicates we are to "believe in him." Paul desired to know Christ, and considered his journey and realized that ultimately, Christ was calling him "heavenwards." In Philippians 3: 12-14, Paul movingly displays his personal Christian quest;

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

Thus the Christian life is not about allowing the past to drag us down. Jesus calls us heavenwards. Jesus wants us to focus on the future. Not on the past. We cannot let our past sins, or hurts stop us from "meeting the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4: 17). Again, Paul encourages, "And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." (v. 17-18).

Remembering and Reconfirming the Cross

To conclude these evenings on the "atonement" I want to (using Paul's words) "remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand" (1 Corinthians 15: 1). After Paul details the practices which were taking the Corinthian Church away from God, and instructs on how to correct their unbiblical practices, he concludes his letter with a wonderful treatise on the grace of Jesus: through his death and resurrection.

In verses 1-11 Paul details the importance of holding onto the scriptures (v. 1-4) and states that what he was preaching about was of "first importance," (v. 3). The subject that was so important was that "Christ died for our sins" (v. 3), and then Paul goes onto claim that he persecuted the church, but even though he did such evil sins, the grace of God still had "effect" in his life (v. 10). God's grace covered his sins, so that he could go on and not be burdened by his past mistakes.

- Do you feel that God's grace cannot cleanse your sins?
- If you do what can you and others do to help you understand God's grace more?

Paul truly understood God's grace, and how Jesus' death washed away his sins. The key to Paul's victory in his understanding is that he was close to Jesus. You can feel

his personal relationship with Christ all over his letters. Paul is obeying Jesus' words, when he said in Matthew 11: 28-30;

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

We are only able to keep looking forward if we come to Jesus, and receive *his* rest. Life is unsustainable without rest. We need it. But the kind of rest we need must be centered in Christ. We must take Christ's yoke, do things Jesus' way. Live life Jesus' way. With Jesus we look to the future. (Remember the footprints illustration – God is carrying us!)

Grace is the greatest gift in the world. When people receive forgiveness from each other it gives a sense of relief, and freedom, and a future. Grace is the future of life. It frees us here on earth, and it is the atonement which guarantees our acceptance by God into heaven.

We pray that we all learn to fully experience God's atonement within our inner-beings, and that the grace we received will motivate us to live lives worthy of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to Jesus for his death and resurrection. Amen.

We conclude with two passages of scripture:

Psalm 103: 8-14.

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever: he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust...

Romans 5: 8-11.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

