

Christ Our Atonement

Let us turn to our Bibles to Mark 15. Mark 15, verses 37 to 39. Mark 15, 37 to 39.

Let us listen attentively to the Word of God. And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed his last. And then the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

So when the centurion who stood opposite him saw that he cried out like this, and breathed his last, he said, truly, this man was the Son of God. Let us pray. In short fashion, God is the style of Mark.

He shows the work of the atonement accomplished, especially in verse 8. The veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. That these things are done away with because Christ has fulfilled the imagery of the symbolism God of the Old Testament ceremonial law, to show us what the atonement was about, God Almighty. May we learn this lesson anew, with the light of the New Testament, especially God, that we be encouraged to strengthen and to draw nigh unto Christ our Lord, who is our Redeemer, who is our Atonement, who has satisfied divine justice and wrath for his people.

Help us to that end, God, to grow in the life of repentance, and especially of faith, Lord, to be strengthened, that you love us with an everlasting love, and we should love you and can, because of what you've done for us 2,000 years ago, and continue to do in the application of that atonement by the power of the Spirit within us. Amen. The first four books of the New Testament are both historical and theological books, or more precisely, they are historical books about our Lord and Savior with a heavy dose of theological instruction.

The instruction comes in a two-fold manner, explicit and implicit. The explicit instruction is through the words of the authors, like when John writes that his book was compiled that the reader may believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. He says that literally at the end of his book.

Mostly, however, the theological nature is implicit to the actions of Christ Himself. For the authors write these things in a context of the Old Testament with readers back then, especially the Jewish readers who understood and knew of the ceremonial law. In a way, we don't.

So we have to go over some of these things to remind us again, because we didn't grow up with a history of 1,800 years from Abraham, 1,200 years from Moses, of doing these things. The implicit characteristic includes the assumed teaching of the Old Testament. In other words, learning from the life of Jesus involves an understanding of the Old Testament, prior theology, what an atonement is.

So when we read of Christ's judgment, death, and burial and resurrection in the last two chapters here of Mark, they are not presented in a vacuum, but with the understanding that the reader knows the implications of what's going on in these acts and what Jesus has done. And as Christ began His ministry preaching the Kingdom of God, so He ends His earthly life establishing that Kingdom that is specifically the New Testament manifestation of that Kingdom with the power of the Holy Spirit in a way that was not shown in the Old

Testament. His sacrificial death, a death that was for our sakes, to bring us into that Kingdom.

We have to be purged of our sins. We have to be justified and sanctified. This is what Jesus did for us, brothers and sisters, 2,000 years ago.

It is testified in a threefold manner here by the simple and brief writing style that I read in verses 37, 38, and 39. Verse 37 reminds us that Jesus died of His own accord, that He willingly gave up His life for you and for me. It was not forced upon Him against His will.

He sacrificed Himself for us, brothers and sisters. Verse 39, a Gentile testifies the divinity of Christ and thus shows that anybody can be saved and that it's more than just the Jews because the Old Testament way of doing things has faded away and is now past and gone as we know today. But the middle verse, especially here, verse 38, the temple curtain being ripped and torn from the top to the bottom, it's a massive curtain, shows that the atoning nature of Christ's unique death for us and it deals with the temple.

The priest therefore and the sacrifices and assumes and directs all these things towards the doctrine of the atonement. Verse 38, then the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom, showed that everyone, not just the great high priest and that once a year, everyone has access to the Holy of Holies now through the death of Christ Jesus. That is in a greater way than they ever had in the Old Testament as they were locked up as children under a tutelage, as Galatians reminds us.

Simplistically, it's often been described from the parts of the word that is this idea of the atonement as at-one-ment, atonement. And that's true as far as it goes. I remember that as a kid, at-one-ment.

Okay, I can remember that, atonement. It deals with, more precisely, the covering of sin and satisfying justice with the result of peace or that at-one-ment with God, the Father, the Judge of the universe. That's why it's all of a piece. So let's explore this important topic in a threefold manner here.

Atonement for What?

First of all, the atonement for what? The necessity of it and some of the understanding of the Old Testament connection to sin. It's a necessary background, of course.

It's our separation. Why the at-one-ment? Because we are far away and divided. We are not united with our God and Creator, but rather divided and separated by our sins and our transgressions, our violations of His holy will.

It began with the fall of Adam, of course. The whole sad story there in chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis. Adam, as the federal head of the human race representing us in the covenant of works, he fell into sin, willful sin.

It wasn't like an accident. We use the word fell, right, or fall. He jumped, okay? He jumped into sin.

And so therefore, because of that, we are all born in sin and iniquity. And yet, not against our will, ask every kid here, they want to sin when they sin. It's not an accident.

You knew this as well as you grow older. Romans 5.12, therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, obviously that's Adam, and thus death spread to all men, why? Because all sinned. That key pivotal verse shows, again, both the representative nature or the federal nature of Adam representing us and doing in our stead as a public person, and we ourselves sinning personally, because we all sinned.

We're doing the sins ourselves as well and most willfully. It's unpacked further in chapter 5 of Romans and shows the effect of Adam as over and against the gracious effects of Christ, and Christ in other words is the greater Adam. He is also a public figure.

He represents us. He's the federal head. He's our substitute and greater than Adam in so many ways.

Verse 17 of chapter 5, that great chapter, for if by the one man's offense, death reigned through the one, of course that's Adam. Much more, those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ, the greater one, the best one of all ones, of all public figures, of all representatives, and there's only two, Adam and Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the better of the two, and because of him, he has overcome the fall of sin, but it only makes sense in the context of Adam.

That's why you have that contrast there over back and forth in chapter 5. The one here and the one there, this one is inferior, this one is better. He has given us the graciousness, the wonderfulness of redemption and salvation. But it's also personal sins, not just the fall of Adam.

Romans 5.13, nevertheless, again, death reigned from Adam to Moses even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness or the similitude of the transgression of Adam. We didn't have that specific sin of eating of the fruit of the garden. That's true.

We have our own particular sins is what he's highlighting here in a negative fashion. We are suffering the consequences. Death reigns over us because we have sinned, but not the way Adam sinned.

It doesn't really matter. It's all of a piece. It's transgressions of the most holy will of God, his Ten Commandments.

These two truths are succinctly described in the Puritan New England Primer. In Adam's fall, we sinned all to the point, both born in original sin and exercising our own particular transgressions, our own personal violations. Paul unpacks this in chapter 3 of Romans, for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they're all under sin.

No matter how you cut it, wherever they're coming from, they're coming from the promised land, they're coming from four corners of the earth, they're all under the violations of God's holy law. As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God.

He's quoting the Psalms of all things and arguing. To his Jewish audience mostly, they had a lot of Jewish influence of course in the early church, the wrong kind of Jewish influence, the Pharisaical kind of Jewish influence, that if perhaps you can obey enough, be obedient enough, you can cover your sins on your own. Paul's like, oh no, why even have a savior? He says elsewhere, what's the point? Why not just sin all the more? No, he says, look, we have fallen.

We have fallen to Adam, we have fallen because of our own sins even. The picture here then of the Old Testament, of the Day of Atonement, has that background. As we'll see in the expression of the ceremonial law, it keeps pushing that point.

We are sinners, we need help, we need redemption, we need an atonement or the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Sometimes translated ransom. It's used in the key passages of the Old Testament for the sacrifice of animals.

It means to atone by offering a substitute. This is seen in the priestly act of course, especially when the priest lays his hands upon the animal to show that he's transferring symbolically the sins of the people as a representative of the people to the animal. That's what's going on in the Old Testament symbolism.

Not as though God was, what, satisfied and we are redeemed by the death of an animal? A thousand times no. It's all the symbolism. Those were the means of grace used by the Spirit to bring conviction and growth in their faith.

They are also the sacraments, the signs and seals of the covenant of the Old Testament. It's a picture of appeasing the justice of God by burning the animal on the altar. Somebody has to die.

Someone has to have punishment for transgressions and sin. It assumes therefore everyone is guilty, that everyone deserved death because every Jew had to have some kind of sacrifice. Even the priest himself had to have sacrifices because they too were sinners.

Thus the shedding of blood is key and pivotal in that whole entire ceremonial system. As the writer of the book of Hebrews brings up a number of times, had to have shedding of blood. The symbolism therein is the fullness of death required because of sin.

And then the animals being sacrificed show the substitutionary nature of the work of Christ. Somebody has to come in the place of you. You're not on the altar.

The priest isn't on the altar. But they knew that they were impure, not just sermonally, but morally. That's what is symbolized.

And everyone was guilty therefore and everyone needed a redeemer, Gentile included. Because no one can satisfy God's justice. And that's why the sacrifices were done all the time.

They were never good enough. The sinful people cannot atone for their own sins is the long short of the ceremonial law. And only the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, can.

He's called that by John the Baptist, right? In the New Testament. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Used in the Old Testament imagery.

They all understood this. They all saw this. And this is true.

This is the guy who is our great substitute. He's our redeemer. This is wonderful news.

It's wonderful news for us. And as we see a little bit here, and you can do this through a good commentary, Matthew Henry. There's another one in the 1800s on the Leviticus as well showing the symbolism.

Yes, we don't have to do these things anymore, which is a great thing. You don't have to kill animals and have sacrifices. But you can see much of sin and much therefore all the more of redemption and the salvation that we have in our Lord and Savior in the ceremonial system, even though it's defunct.

Leviticus 420 is the key passage of the word atonement. And he shall do with the bull as he did with the bull as a sin offering. Thus he shall do with it so the priest shall make atonement for them and it shall be forgiven them.

The word there is used 49 times in the book of Leviticus alone. It's a key idea there. Every case is about atoning by substitution.

And of course God was not satisfied by the death of the animal per se. It was a symbolism pointing to Christ. That their belief and trust in the Messiah to come strengthened by the sign and seals of the old covenant, the sacraments is what these were, sacraments, like our sacraments.

They don't work as such per se. It's the spirit of God granting us more grace and it's our belief, our trust in him that's the difference. These are tools or instruments to strengthen our weak faith and so they were for the Old Testament saints.

That's it. They're not magical tools like the Roman Catholic teachers. They're important so far as God says they're important.

They're based upon his will. He says do it. Father says do something.

You know you ask your father what? How high? Jump? How high? That's what we're called to do. It's expanded, of course expounded, excuse me, in the New Testament. That is the symbolism and explanation of all this idea of the atonement of being satisfied by the death of a substitute of another who is in your place, in your stead, as we say, instead of you.

That's why Christ's ministry is described as one of preaching repentance from what? Sin. The atonement. Every sacrificial act shows two things.

Significance of death, that is sin brings death and then the significance of redemption. Christ is the one who dies for us. They go hand in hand.

That's the point. It makes no sense otherwise to have an atonement without sin, what Christ did for us without sin. The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, Christ declares in the opening parts of Mark.

Repent and believe in the gospel. In fact, Christ has called our Passover in Corinthians. The whole book of Hebrews explains that these things point to Jesus or the work of Jesus one way or the other.

And he says in chapter 9, you got the lampstand, you have this, you have the lever, and I can go into all these kind of details but I'm just going to stop right here and just finish my argument. Give you a summary of what he's saying. He gets pretty specific there.

He's saying all these little things make a difference. So this is the background of the atonement. This is why we have to have an atonement because of sin and that's the symbolism and the connection therein from the Old Testament and the New Testament on why Christ is called the Lamb of God and why what he did here, breaking the veil that separated, that showed visibly that there's a distinction between us, all of us out here outside the veil or the huge curtains, like this thick, it was massive, and the Holy of Holies where only the most perfect can ever reside because God's presence demands perfection.

And it was torn, not from the bottom, from the top. It was huge. I forgot how tall it was, several, taller than me, like 12 or 15 feet, to show we don't need a temple anymore because Christ has come.

Atonement By Christ

The atonement by Christ. Rooted in God, not man. The atonement is rooted in the love and the justice of God.

Love offered sinners a way of escape, one commentator says, and justice demanded that the requirements of the law should be met. And they were met in Jesus Christ and he redeemed us and thus love and justice kisseth the cross. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

The love of God. Justice, Romans 3.24, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through the faith in his blood. Propitiation is satisfaction of God's justice.

Satisfying justice from God Almighty by dying in our place, the Son of God did for us. Propitiation is a particular manner in which the atonement is accomplished. The word is there, it's used a couple of times in the New Testament.

It's a technical term that means the satisfaction of divine judgment against sin. The satisfaction of divine justice against sin. It's important to have this doctrine right because a lot of people say Christ died for people but didn't really cover their sins.

Because if your sins are covered, are you going to go to heaven or are you going to go to hell? You're going to go to heaven. And if he really died for everybody and covered all their sins, what do you have? Oh that's right, universalism which is a heresy and good conservative Protestants in America don't believe that but lots of Protestants in America unfortunately believe Christ died for everyone but not all their sins are covered. You've got this weird contradiction.

Propitiation explains what's going on here. For whom he died, he actually satisfied divine justice and covered their sins, period. It's in this word propitiation.

Not a potential atonement but an actual satisfaction of God's divine wrath. Christ is our propitiation, 1 John 4.10, that he loved us and sent his son to be what? A propitiation for our sins, to satisfy and cover our sins, divine judgments, to satisfy that against sin. The effects of Christ's reconciliation of peace of course is to bring us to him, bring the sinner to God because of his work of the atonement, specifically a specific type of atonement, a propitiation that satisfies divine justice against sin.

The word righteousness sometimes is used in the Bible as a reminder, as a synonym for justice. Because Luther thought when he read there in the opening chapter of Romans of the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel, he read that as the just demands of God revealed in the Gospel. And the epiphany that he had by the power of the Spirit, the opening of his eyes, the shattering of his world when he realized that righteousness is Christ's righteousness imputed to us, judicially declared to be ours in the law courts of heaven.

Romans 3.21, but now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed. So there's that word righteousness, the justice of God, the perfection of God, apart from the law. You can't do it by the law.

You can't obey enough. You will always fail. Being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, so it's righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and to all who believe.

We have it by Jesus Christ in faith in him. The Jews thought they could obey enough and Paul says, as we know earlier, no, no, a thousand times no. It's only Christ and his perfection, his righteousness that is now our righteousness and that by faith and faith alone.

The atonement is a substitute or what they call a vicarious atonement or substitutionary atonement that Jesus is our second head, our second Adam, as we heard elsewhere, is for us as our leader and redeemer. In many places, assume it. Other places are more explicit for

it, as we saw in Romans 5. In John 1.29 we read, the next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and he said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

How can he take away the sin of the world unless he's what? A substitute or it's a vicarious atonement. It's not just any kind of theoretical approach to atonement and there's a lot of different theoretical approaches, for example. It's a specific one.

It's vicarious. It's substitutionary. It is efficacious as well.

It comes to pass because it is a propitiation. All those words add up to what we know that Christ has actually done something for us as an effect upon the judgment of God for those who repent and believe. And you shall be saved.

That's good news. That's wonderful news. And that's why we have here today the Lord's Supper to remind us in a different form, not verbal form, my preaching, but in visual form here.

The righteousness of Christ given to us is the fullness of Christ's perfection of the law of God. He obeyed it and thought we're indeed in our stead. And this is good news indeed because the justice and the perfection of God cannot be whittled down, cannot be exempted.

He doesn't grade on a curve. We have this in school. I think I had only a couple of classes.

He'd grade on a curve. If everyone's doing really bad, then you kind of fudge the numbers so they all kind of pass barely. God doesn't do that.

He's a perfect and holy God. And Christ fulfilled it perfectly for us and gave us that perfection imputed to us. It's external, it's objective, and it's everlasting.

That is the doctrine of justification, the teaching and the truth therein. The atonement is for all of us, that is for those who repent and believe. Another way of looking at this is God demands moral perfection and He fulfilled that demand in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's what's pictured in His death especially because He died in our stead. We should be dead. And our death will come, that is of the body but not of the soul.

And even of the body, it's but temporary. It's not a death the way the unbeliever has death. It's a death transformed, as it were, redirected towards a better end, towards heaven.

So it means, of course, the dangers of eternal death, of hell and damnation in particular. Man cannot, will not, render such perfection. He rebels against God and wants nothing to do with Him.

And that's why the doctrines of grace are often attacked even in the churches because we still have sin within our own breasts as believers, don't we? Being justified doesn't mean I'm personally perfect. It means I'm objectively perfect according to God's law courts in heaven

above because it is an imputed righteousness, a judicial declaration. Sanctification, however, is what we are personally and subjectively.

It comes and goes and we feel it. We feel very weak and feel very inadequate as believers. So don't look to your sanctification, how obedient you are when it comes to struggling with sin.

Yes, you ought to obey and there's a time for that examination and are you doing the right thing or not? It's often pretty much straightforward. But even then, you're going to see sin and that shouldn't destroy you. You should say, Jesus, I need your mercy.

I need your forgiveness. It's just that I've forgiven you and I've given you my perfection and righteousness. Amen and amen.

In Mark 15, 38, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And we see here in the Old Testament symbolism as I explain it in the Old Testament and showing us all these little parts and pieces of the sacrifices and even the temple itself, which is a picture of God's special presence. The Holy of Holies is where God's good graces and presence is especially located symbolically, of course, because God is everywhere.

No one can enter the Holy of Holies but once a year and God's call and discretion and only the great high priest, not just any priest, be the great priest and it'll be once a year Yom Kippur. And that showed us that salvation was shut off to us. You couldn't go in, the typical Jew couldn't go in, the Gentiles certainly couldn't go in.

The symbolism, the picture shows us we need God. He needs to save us because we cannot save ourselves unless somebody is there, the great high priest who represents Jesus, comes and He atones. He satisfied God's divine wrath and covers your sins and does more than covering your sins.

He imputes to you perfection as though you had already obeyed the law forever. And His death is the highlight of that and the center explanation of that. Then the death isn't all there is to Christ, of course, is His life, incarnation, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension.

You need all of that. But the death, if you notice, is especially emphasized in the New Testament over and over and over again. The blood of Christ, the propitiation, the covering of sin is what the New Testament highlights especially for us.

And so we have this, therefore, symbolism of the Lord's Supper, a picture of the atonement, a sign of the covenant of grace of the work of Jesus that centers upon the deliverer Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and nothing else, not animals, but Jesus who is our lamb, who is our priest, who is our temple. And His body broken to show us His, that is the bread broken to show us His broken body. And the blood spilt is shown in the wine given.

And they are symbols of His body and His blood that is the work of Christ's entirety, but especially focus upon His death, not His resurrection, His death. And that's partly because we live a life of hardship, spiritually speaking, even if our flesh is very happy with all the

prosperity we have in America. But spiritually, we live in a valley and we suffer and we struggle for the remainder of our days because we want to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil, and we will fight.

Atonement for You

You can't help but fight if you are one of His. And this reminds us of that. Jesus went through it as well, although perfectly.

He went through temptation, but perfectly. He suffered when He shouldn't have suffered. And when we suffer, we realize, I guess maybe I should suffer.

I mean, I still sin. I still struggle. But of course, that suffering is not a redeeming suffering.

It's a sanctifying suffering. It's a suffering that makes us more holy. Our redemption is by the atonement made by Christ, our Lord and Savior.

The atonement, a wonderful truth, the gospel, the heart of the gospel. Christ died for sinners. And for any who believe in Him, they shall be saved.

So the atonement is for you. If you repent and hate your sin, if you depend upon Christ to save you from your sin and not yourself, may the Spirit of truth and mercy be upon us all as you partake of the Lord's Supper to be strengthened therein that our God and our Savior loves us with an everlasting love. Let us pray.

Our Lord God Almighty, may we as your people, we pray, be strengthened in our heart, be encouraged in our Lord, drawn unto you of the greatness of the mercies of our Lord and Savior, that He willingly died for us and that He tore the veil showing us that the fullness of redemption has been accomplished 2,000 years ago and is still therefore for us today, for you are an eternal God and quick and ready to give us mercy through our Lord and Savior. May we therefore continue to cling to Him. And may the Lord's Supper, we pray, be used especially by your spirit to draw us unto you.

Amen.