

# The Atonement...



CONTEMPLATING  
CHRIST'S GREAT  
REDEMPITIVE WORK

## The Atonement: Its Benefit

### Matthew 11:28

I want to pick up where we left off last Sunday morning. I made reference to A. W. Tozer's proposition that "the man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems." When Tozer says this he is making a profound statement as to the effect of sound and rich theology upon the day-to-day life of the Christian. He is saying that when the reality of the Majesty in the heavens breaks into your soul the significance of the everyday things can, at last, be properly evaluated. He is saying that all of life - every aspect, every dimension, every compartment, every endeavor, every relationship, every challenge, every difficulty - all of life takes on a different meaning when life is appraised in light of the stunning and awesome significance of the fact that the very Son of God suffered and died in your place. In other words, when life is appraised in light of the stunning and awesome significance of the atonement.

Tragically, far too many preachers obscure this magnificent, life-changing and life-sustaining view of God. Rather than opening up to their people the glories of God week-in and week-out, in the name of meeting felt needs, they choose to apply the Word of God in ever-creative ways to the "ten thousand temporal

problems” of which Tozer speaks. Consequently, struggling saints rarely get a glimpse of the resplendent *glory of God in the face of Christ* (**II Cor. 4:6**). Discouraged disciples all too often leave the place of worship without being cheered, buoyed up by the unsearchable *wisdom* and the infinite *power of God* in the gospel (**I Cor. 1:24**). Temporarily stimulated to certain actions, they are, however, rarely overwhelmed by the marriage of the unflinching *justice* and the boundless *mercy* of God in the cross of Christ. Rarely do they feel the heat of the consuming *wrath* of God against all unrighteousness. They sense neither the paralyzing terror of their dilemma nor the energizing thrill of their deliverance. O, their belief **in** God is genuine and sincere enough. But their view **of** God and of His glory in Christ is a low one. And so they are easily and brutally “thrown” by the bucks and twists of life like a cowboy is thrown from a rodeo bull.

We have tried to offer you something different. Beloved, that you might continue in the way of holiness; that you might joyfully endure in and through the hardships that, in the providence of God come your way, we are leading you to reflect much upon the wonder of the work of Christ and reckon that what He accomplished, He accomplished for you. This gospel assurance alone fits the Christian to maintain your balance in trial; to maintain something of a sweet and humble attitude in difficulty; to faithfully take up and maintain your place among the people of God; to serve others rather than being consumed by self-interest; to know the joy of the Lord; to live godly in this present age; and, finally, to know ease of conscience and peace of soul. In a word, to rest; to actually know in your day-to-day experience the joy of the invitation of Jesus, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. [Indeed], you will find rest for your souls” (**Matthew 11:28-29**). This morning we want to examine a bit more closely what Christ accomplished for us on the cross and

how this tends to our rest or peace of soul. Rest will be yours as you reflect much upon the wonder of the work of Christ and reckon that what He accomplished, He accomplished for you.

For the last three weeks we have focused our attention on the doctrine of the Atonement. Atonement is defined as Christ's satisfying divine justice by His sufferings and death in the place of sinners. Atonement is the heart of the Biblical message. In the Bible we discover that the work of Christ on the cross has several glorious dimensions. Using the terms historically employed by theologians, we want to explore four things accomplished by Christ's atoning sacrifice for us.

The death of Christ accomplished **expiation**. We have learned that sin is guilt. With every violation of God's law liability to divine punishment attaches itself to us. "The Old Testament worshipper when he brought his offering to the altar substituted an animal victim in his place. In laying his hands upon the head of the offering, the sin and liability of the offerer was transferred symbolically to the offering. This is the pivot on which the whole transaction turned. The notion in essence was that the sin of the offerer was imputed to the offering and, as a result, the offering bore the death penalty. The offering, as a substitute, endured the penalty or liability due to sin" (Murray, p.25). Jesus, as the Lamb of God, offered himself a sacrifice, taking our guilt upon Himself, purging away our sins. Of Christ **Hebrews 1:3** (KJV) says, *when He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*. Gordon Clark says, "Expiation is not a moral improvement of the sinner ... If guilt means liability to punishment, expiation removes the liability. Expiation does not remove defilement or depravity; it cancels the guilt – that is all" (*The Atonement*, p.72). When **I John 1:7**

assures us that *the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin*, that's what it means. The death of Christ accomplished expiation – the cancellation of guilt.

The death of Christ accomplished **propitiation**. “God made us for Himself, made us so that we should be His people, and live in obedience to His commandments. When we failed to do so we inevitably aroused His settled opposition, His wrath” (Morris, p.151). [God's wrath] is not capricious passion, but the stern reaction of the divine nature towards evil. It is aroused only and inevitably by sin” (p. 150). “Sin evokes the holy displeasure or wrath of God” (Murray, p.30). Maldwyn Hughes says, “The fact which we have to face is that in the nature of things there must be an eternal recoil against the unholy on the part of the all-holy God” (*What is the Atonement*, p. 54). “Propitiation presupposes the wrath and displeasure of God, and the purpose of propitiation is the removal of this displeasure” (Murray, p.30). Propitiation is the divine means of averting God's wrath; turning it back from the sinner. God appeases his own holy wrath by exhausting it; pouring it out on His own Son on the cross. It is in the propitiatory work of Christ that the love of God is demonstrated. **I John 4:10**, *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*. It is in the propitiatory work of Christ that the righteousness of God is demonstrated. **Romans 3:25-26** speaks of Jesus, *whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*. The death of Christ accomplished propitiation – the appeasement of the wrath of God.

The death of Christ accomplished **reconciliation**. We speak of marriages that are in need of reconciliation. Husband and wife are at enmity; alienated from one another. "Reconciliation presupposes disrupted relations between God and men. It implies enmity and alienation. The cause of the alienation is, of course, our sin" (Murray, p.33). **Isaiah 59:2**, *But your iniquities have made a **separation** between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.* It follows that "if there is to be peace between the two something must be done about that sin" (Morris, p.229).

Now here's the big question. Did Christ shed His blood to work a change in our disposition toward God? Did Christ shed His blood to induce us to lay aside our hostility toward God? It is often suggested that reconciliation is an action on the part of God to turn our animosity into love; to put away our enmity against Him; to ease our hostility against him; to change our attitude toward God. We would argue that something else was afoot when Christ shed His blood. Yes, **Romans 5:10** leaves no doubt that we were *enemies*, hostile toward God. It must also be acknowledged that God does not remain inactive or passive in the face of sin and iniquity. His is a holy wrath, a righteous anger against sin. *God is angry with the wicked every day.* So we cannot overlook the fact that the alienation is a mutual, a reciprocal hostility.

Listen to **Romans 5:8, 10, and 11**. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while** we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ... <sup>10</sup> For if **while** we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son ... <sup>11</sup> And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now **received** the reconciliation.* Beloved, notice that there is an aspect of reconciliation which is outside man, an objective element. ***While we were enemies** we were reconciled.*

The New Testament view is that reconciliation was wrought on the cross *before* there was any corresponding goodwill in man's heart (see Morris, p.225). We are said to have *received* the reconciliation, which, therefore, is in some sense independent of us (see Morris, p.25). In his commentary on Romans, Godet says, "The enmity must above all belong to Him to whom wrath is attributed; and the blood of Christ ... did not flow in the first place to work a change in our dispositions Godward, but to bring about a change in God's conduct toward us." (p.330). H. P. Liddon says, "Christ's death removed God's enmity against man, and man's enmity against God only ceased, as a moral consequence of faith" (*Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p.100). John Murray says, "Reconciliation deals with the alienation of God from us on account of our sin; by taking away the sin reconciliation removes the ground of this alienation, and peace with God is the effect" (p.38). The death of Christ accomplished reconciliation – the restoration of fellowship through the blood of Christ.

The death of Christ accomplished **redemption**. In the Bible redemption implies the securing of a release by the payment of a price – a ransom. **Mark 10:45**, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" "The word of our Lord Himself in Mark 10:45 should place beyond all doubt that the work he came into the world to accomplish is a work of ransom; that the giving of his life was the ransom price; and that this ransom was substitutionary in its nature" (p.43). By the death of Christ we have been released from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). We have been released from the bondage of sin.

Just as **expiation** answers the need created by our guilt, as **propitiation** answers the need that arises from the wrath of God, and as **reconciliation** answers the

need arising from our alienation from God, so **redemption** answers the bondage to which our sin has consigned us (see Murray, p.43). The atoning sacrifice of Christ, on the cross, accomplished for us the removal of death-deserving guilt, the turning back of the wrath of God, the restoration of fellowship, and our release from bondage. Rest will be yours as you reflect much upon the wonder of this work of Christ and reckon that what He accomplished, He accomplished for you.

Certainly, Matthew 11:28 is an invitation to lost and weary sinners to come to Him for rest. But Jesus invites the struggling believer with the same words ... "*Come unto Me.*" When we trust Christ we enter into God's promised eternal rest (**Heb. 4:3a**). This eternal rest will find its fulfillment in heaven. Our rest will be fully realized when we are glorified and enter into the presence of God Himself in heaven. **Hebrews 4:9** promises, *there remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.* In this eternal rest those who have trusted Christ *will* know the cessation of our earthly labor in the service of the Master (**Rev. 14:13**). In this rest we *will* know the refreshment of being freed at last and completely from the power, and yes, even the presence of sin.

In between now and the day we will shed this bodily tent there is an earthly life to live by the grace of God and for the glory of God. It is my understanding of our text that the believer in Christ is to know and experience spiritual rest in this life. We recognize that the rest we experience and enjoy now is but a foretaste of the rest we shall know fully in heaven in the presence of God, but it is a real rest all the same. Men have spoken of this rest. W. E. Vine says, "Because the Sabbath rest is the rest of God Himself (**Heb. 4:10**) its full fruition is yet future, though believers *now* enter into it" (pp. 2-3). Dr. McGee said, "There is also a

rest which the believer *experiences*, and it comes through commitment and consecration to Christ" (*Matthew*, p.65). John Calvin, "For we *here* begin our blessed rest in him; *daily* we make fresh progress in it" (*Institutes*, I, p.396). We sing of this rest. *Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art* (#188). *Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side* (#689). *My faith has found a resting place, from guilt my soul is freed* (#468). Rest is the covenanted benefit of every child of God and it flows to us from the fountain of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Even so, our lives are not always restful are they? Indeed, they are often tumultuous. We are something of a pitiful lot - plagued by doubts, defeats in battles with sin, disappointments and discouragements in ministry; confused by frowning providences; wearied by self-effort and performance; weighed down with the guilt of unconfessed sin, we say with the Psalmist, *My iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me* (38:4); downcast in spirit and countenance, we ask with the Psalmist, *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me* (42:11); disappointed with our inadequacies and shattered dreams; discouraged by hard circumstances; searching for sweetness like a bee buzzing from flower to flower in search of nectar but all to no avail. We are weary and burdened creatures.

In this condition even the redeemed soul may look for rest in a number of things that are sure to disappoint. Some seek rest in **pleasure**. Usually this amounts to no more than heedless self-indulgence – in sexual mischief both real and imagined; in the accumulation of money (Luke 12:19); in spending to excess in hopes that the things themselves will satisfy. Some seek rest in **philosophy**. They engage in mental gymnastics by which they justify themselves or they embrace the rules, regulations, and laws of a man-centered religious system.

Some seek rest in their **physical surroundings**. My disturbed soul will settle down if I move into a new house, relocate to another part of the country, change jobs, or leave my family. Some seek rest in **privacy**. If I can get away from other people. If I can just order my personal world I'll find the rest I desire. Some even seek rest in **religious experiences**. Millions have gone down this road only to discover that it too is a dead end. Many go after the experience of revival. Others go after the experience of holiness. Still others go after the experience of abandonment in which "entire surrender to Jesus is the secret of perfect rest" (Andrew Murray, *Abiding in Christ*, p. 18). Sounds good doesn't it? I have discovered that the effort to maintain a state of entire surrender becomes as heavy a burden as trying to keep the Law ever was.

Beloved, the rest Christ promises is the soul's quiet repose in the adequacy of His atoning work on the cross; in all that He accomplished by His sufferings and death in our place. Rest will be yours as you reflect much upon the wonder of the work of Christ and reckon that what He accomplished, He accomplished for you.

This atoning work of Christ has been set before you this morning in the sermon. That same atoning work of Christ is now set before you in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. While I am a man of warm religious affections, I believe our rest is rooted in deep and sound theological truth; in knowledge of and in hearty reliance upon the gospel. As you come to Christ in the Word and in the Sacrament know the rest of soul that flows from reckoning that the promises God sets before you are true.

As Christ has been set before you in the Word and is now set before you in the Sacrament ... rest, knowing that your guilt has been expiated; removed by the sacrifice of Christ. As Christ has been set before you in the Word and is now set before you in the Sacrament ... rest, knowing that the consuming wrath of God has been stayed, averted, turned back, propitiated by the sacrifice of Christ. As Christ has been set before you in the Word and is now set before you in the Sacrament ... rest, knowing that Christ, by the sacrifice of Himself, has accomplished reconciliation; the restoration of fellowship with the Father. As Christ has been set before you in the Word and is now set before you in the Sacrament ... rest, knowing that you were ransomed, released, redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ*. It is Christ and all that He accomplished for us that is set before us in the bread and cup of the Sacrament. *Come unto Him ... and rest.*

The One who invites us to rest is the same One who invites us to commune with Him at His table. This table is for those who have received Christ as He is offered in the gospel. It is for those who have received Christian baptism. It is for those who, through membership in this or another evangelical church, have been admitted to the table.

All others we invite to remain among us and consider the invitation of Jesus to come to Him for salvation.

**Luke 22:19-20** ... *And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."*

Almighty and Everlasting God, we heartily thank You that in Your great love You feed us at Your table with spiritual food which satisfies our souls eternally. Here at this table we are assured of Your goodness toward us in Christ – of expiation, of propitiation, of reconciliation, of redemption. We rejoice in all that Christ accomplished for us. With gratitude we commune with our Savior at His table and in His name. Amen.