

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

There is one word I want us to remember from this sermon. I will say the word and please say it after me. "Atonement." You can turn that one word into three words.

At-One-Ment. The easiest definition I can give to the word atonement is "at-one-ment with God." The only reason you and I can have a relationship with God is the "atonement."

Sin is the great separator. Sin is the greatest of dividers. Sin separates, sin divides, sin turns us against one another. Worse than that, sin separates us from God. God is incapable of putting up with sin. God is not tolerant of sin. God hates sin. There is a chasm between God and people, a huge separation. The separation, due to sin, is so wide there is nothing we can do to bridge the chasm between you and God. I have not been to the Grand Canyon, but I know it is absolutely foolish to think that on your own you could run fast enough to jump from one side to the other. No human can jump that far. With a motorcycle, a rocket, or maybe with a kite that carries you, you could make it across, but never on your own.

I think the term atonement may be one of the most important terms ever. At-one-ment, being one with God. We would be eternally separated from God if it were not for the atonement.

Before Jesus was born, the angel spoke these words to Joseph. **Matthew 1:20-21(ESV)** *Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* Those few words give a marvelous description and definition of the atonement. Joseph died before the ministry of Jesus began but Joseph knew what the ministry of Jesus would accomplish for God told him through the message of the angel. These were some of the most important words ever spoken. This is what I am trying to say all in one sentence. "The work Jesus did in living and dying to earn our salvation is called the atonement (Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, pg. 72).

1. The atonement originated in God's love, mercy, and justice (ibid pg.72). In our reading today, found in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The atonement is born out of God's perfect love. Paul writes this about God's justice. God put forward Jesus "as a propitiation" (Romans 3:25), that is, a sacrifice that bears God's wrath so that God looks favorably toward us (ibid. pg. 72). Paul says this was done "to show God's righteousness" and also "so that he might be just" (Romans 3:25-26). To put it bluntly, the sins God passed over or did not punish before Christ came to earth had to be punished somehow if God was to be just. God cannot go against Himself, so God's justice had to be satisfied. God is always consistent with Himself. This is why the more you know God, the greater the understanding you have of God's actions. It all makes sense when you interpret God and His actions rightly. God is always right. Someone had to take the punishment for all those sins, and that person was Jesus. Dr Grudem writes, "In Jesus' life and death, we find full expression of God's justice (sin is punished) and faithful love (God gave his own Son to bear the punishment)" (ibid. pg. 72).

2. Once the council of God made the decision to accomplish salvation for us, God's justice made it necessary for Christ to live the life he lived and die the death he died. Jesus spoke these words after the resurrection. **Luke 24:26(ESV)** *Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"* Jesus had full knowledge that there was no other way for God to save us than for him to die in our place. Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins. All of the sacrifices in the Old Testament, and yes there were an awful lot of them, quite a bloody business. None of those sacrifices had any lasting value other than pointing to the only sacrifice which truly counted, Jesus' death on the cross. **Hebrews 10:4(ESV)** *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* **Hebrews 9:12(ESV)** *He [Jesus] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.* **Hebrews**

9:26(ESV) *But as it is, he [Jesus] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

3. For the atonement to be complete, more work had to be done by Jesus than that of dying on the cross. If Jesus stepped out of heaven and went directly to the cross, the atonement would only be partially accomplished. If all Jesus did was die on the cross, we would only be partly saved. Yes, our guilt would have been removed but we would then be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We would be guilt-free but also capable of sinning and having no lifelong record of obedience. If the only work Jesus did was die on the cross, it would be compared to being cleansed in a shower one day, but you would begin to stink again without taking a shower again because you ate of the fruit of the tree over and over, you chose to sin, and your stink is unavoidable. In order to have fellowship with God you would need to live a perfect life of obedience (ibid pg. 73).

This is why Jesus had to live a perfect life, without sin, so that the righteous life he lived could be counted for us. Jesus earned all the merits one can earn with God and now those merits are ours because of Jesus' perfect life and death on the cross. Paul writes, "by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. None of us are righteous on our own. The Bible says, **Romans 3:10(ESV)** *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one."* We can never count on our own righteousness. The Bible says our righteousness is as good as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). The Good News is when we put our faith into Jesus Christ, the righteousness God requires is given to us. **Philippians 3:9(NASB)** *but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.* Christ, through the sinless life he lived, became "our righteousness" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Please do not think Jesus' life on this earth was a long vacation like going to Hawaii. Jesus suffered in all ways. Isaiah tells us, "*he was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*" (Isaiah 53:3). If any of you have experienced spiritual

warfare you know how absolutely exhausting it can be, making you question your own sanity. Jesus suffered direct attacks and was tempted in all ways far beyond any way you and I have been tempted (Matthew 4:1-11). The Bible says, **Hebrews 12:3(NASB)** *For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*” It broke the heart of Jesus when his friend Lazarus died (John 11:35). **Hebrews 5:8-9(NLT)** *Even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him.*

The closer Jesus came to the cross, the more his suffering intensified. He told the disciples, **Matthew 26:38(NLT)** *“My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”* The stress on Jesus was so severe that he sweat droplets of blood.

Death by Crucifixion was one of the most horrible forms of torture invented by men. You die an agonizing death by suffocation. Jesus was pierced, nailed to the cross. His arms supported most of his weight. I quote, “His chest cavity was pulled upward and outward, making it difficult to exhale and then draw in fresh breath.” “To breathe, he had to push up with his legs, putting all the weight on the nails through his feet and pull up on the nails through his hands, sending fiery pain through the nerves of his arms and legs.” “His back was already whipped raw, scraped against the rough, splinter-filled wooden cross with each breath he took.”

The worse pain was yet to be, a pain no one has ever felt before or will ever feel again. Jesus never sinned. Jesus hated sin. Jesus took upon himself all of our sins, your sins and my sins all the way back to Adam and Eve and all of the sins of those who would be saved until Jesus comes again. That which Jesus hated was poured onto him. **1 Peter 2:24(NLT)** *“He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.”*

And Jesus did this all alone. The disciples deserted him. The Father abandoned him when our sins were placed upon him. That sweet fellowship from eternity past was broken for the first time. **Matthew 27:46(NLT)** *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* And now the worst part. Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross. “Jesus descended into hell.” Jesus bore the guilt of our sins and God unleashed on him all the wrath and punishment our sins deserved. I quote, “Jesus became the object of the intense hatred of sin, and vengeance against sin that God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world” (ibid. pg. 75). God’s justice was met through Christ.

Jesus’ work was complete and perfect in every way. Jesus’ sinless life and horrific death for our sins saves us from our sins. He paid the penalty we deserved (ibid 75). He bore the wrath we deserved. Jesus never stopped trusting in the Father even during the worst part of the cross. Jesus knew the joy that was set before him and willingly endured it all. The atonement is the work of Jesus’ perfect life and death on the cross bridging that impossible gap between you and God. We will thank and praise Jesus for the atonement for all eternity, and we will be one with God and one with each other. The separation caused by sin will be no more. Amen and Amen.