

Exalting Jesus Christ

"The Cross – Part 2"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. I've often wondered what first century Christians would think of our society if they could somehow be transported into the twenty-first century.
 - A. I would be especially curious to know what they would think of how our society uses the symbol of the cross.
 1. During the first century the cross was not a popular symbol at all.
 - a. In those days people associated the cross with suffering and shame. It was an instrument of death reserved for the worse criminals.
 - b. Although the Persians, Carthaginians, and the Greeks used various forms of impaling criminals on wooden stakes, it was the Romans who refined this form of execution to ensure the victim would endure unimaginable pain and suffering for hours, and sometimes even days, before dying.
 2. Most artist depictions of crucifixion actually sanitize the scene. They don't depict the shame associated with this form of execution.
 - a. Victims were not provided with loin cloths with which to cover their nakedness.

- b. They were actually stripped of all clothing – a degrading act that was specifically designed to add to their public shame and humiliation.
 3. Those living in the first century were well aware of the unimaginable suffering, the shame and the public humiliation every crucifixion victim endured – including Jesus.
 4. And so, to them the cross was hated and despised – which also makes me think they would probably be puzzled by how some today seem to revere and worship the cross.
- II. Last week in our ongoing series entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ" we took some time to briefly examine the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - A. Since most of us are familiar with the details of the crucifixion, we took a slightly different approach to this subject.
 1. The purpose of that study was to learn what the crucifixion actually tells us about Jesus Himself.
 2. And so, this morning in part two of "The Cross of Christ" we want to return to the scene of the cross and consider what Jesus actually did for us by willingly allowing Himself to be crucified.
 - B. Actually, we could devote an entire series of lessons just dealing with that subject alone.

1. But for brevity sake, I want to focus on the two most important things Jesus did for us on the cross.
2. So, let's return one last time to the hill of Calvary and give all our attention to the Savior as He is dying on a Roman cross.

BODY:

- I. Perhaps the most important thing we need to understand about the cross is that this is where Jesus Christ became our sacrifice.
 - A. There are two key New Testament passages that speak of this indescribable act of love and mercy.
 1. When the apostle Paul penned his letter to the church at Ephesus, he wrote:
 - a. **Ephesians 5:1-2** – *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*
 2. The writer of the book of Hebrews, as he is describing what Jesus did by coming into the world, wrote this:
 - a. **Hebrews 9:26-28** – *now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.*

- B. Do we really understand what it means when we say Jesus *sacrificed* Himself, or was *offered* for our sins?
1. Do we even understand what the words *offering* and *sacrifice* actually mean, and what role they play in cleansing us of our sins?
 - a. The most simple definition of the word *offering* is "a gift, or the act of giving something." In this case, an *offering* is "a gift given to God."
 - b. The word *sacrifice*, as it is used in the two verses we just read, refers to the actual gift itself – in other words it describes "the actual gift that is given to God for some specific purpose." In this case, the gift given to God is none other than Jesus Christ.
 2. The purpose of a sacrifice is best described by the word *reconcile* – a word that means "to bring together again, or to bring unity and harmony where there had once been disunity and discord."
 3. So, when we put these thoughts together, a sacrifice is a gift, or an offering to God for the purpose of reconciling us to God.
 - a. It is a gift given to God to restore unity, harmony and fellowship between us and God where there had once been separation and a loss of fellowship.

- b. In other words the sacrifice makes reconciliation possible, because without the sacrifice there would be no reconciliation – there would be no fellowship between us and God.
- C. To really understand the concept of sacrifice and reconciliation, we need to understand the purpose of sacrifices under the Old Testament Law of Moses.
 - 1. In the days of Moses, when the children of Israel were freed from their slavery in Egypt, God led them through the wilderness to the foot of a mountain known as Mount Sinai.
 - 2. It was here that God made a covenant or a contract with the children of Israel. The terms of this particular contract were very simple.
 - a. God promised to bless them and protect them, and lead them into a land of promise where they would subdue their enemies, take the land as their own, and grow into a great nation.
 - b. In exchange for doing all this, God required only one thing of the children of Israel – faithfulness. He expected them to be faithful to the law He gave Moses, and to keep that law out of a deep reverential respect for Him.
 - 3. **Exodus 24:3-4a; 7-8** – *So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people*

answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do." 4 And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord... 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." 8 And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

- a. Even though the people pledged to be obedient to all the Lord commanded, they did not keep their end of the agreement.
 - b. One by one the children of Israel broke the commandments they swore to keep.
 - c. They sinned by breaking the terms of the covenant or contract between themselves and the God of heaven.
 - d. If the matter had simply been left there, the relationship between God and the people of Israel would have been irreversibly severed – there would never again be fellowship between God and the Israelites.
4. But God, in a gracious act of loving-kindness and mercy, provided a solution.
- a. God instituted a system of sacrifices that would restore that broken relationship and reestablish that fellowship between God and the people He loved.

- b. When a worshipper offered the gift of his sacrifice to God, that act of worship did several things.
 - (1). First, it showed God that the worshipper was not only keenly aware of his sins, but that he also accepted full responsibility for those sins.
 - (2). And second, offering that sacrifice to God was the worshipper's way of showing God his repentant heart and his desire to be forgiven.
 - c. When God accepted that sacrifice and forgave the worshipper of his sins, the fellowship that had been lost was once again restored.
 - d. The worshipper and his God enjoyed unity and harmony where there had once been disunity and discord.
6. However, God would accept only one kind of sacrifice to atone for sin.
- a. It had to be a sacrifice that required taking an animal's life and shedding its blood.
7. Why was an animal sacrifice the only kind God would accept to atone for sin?
- a. God wanted the person offering a sacrifice to understand that sin is serious, and that the just punishment for sin is death.

- (1). Those who sin against God, rightly and justly deserve to be put to death for their disobedience.
 - (2). God had every right to strike them dead on the spot!
 - b. But, in an act of grace and mercy, God allowed the children of Israel to take the life of an animal in exchange for their own life.
 - c. And so, every time a man looked down at his sacrifice and watched the life-giving blood draining away, he needed to see himself
 - (1). He needed to understand that the sacrifice took his place – the place of the sinner who justly deserved to die.
8. If you were a Jew living under the Old Testament Law of Moses, every time you offered a sacrifice every year – year after year – on the Day of Atonement, you were reminded of the seriousness of your own sins.
- a. The Hebrew writer said: **Hebrews 10:3** – *But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.*
 - b. It wasn't God who remembered your sins every year, it was you – the one making the sacrifice.
 - c. Every year when you killed your sacrifice, you were vividly reminded that the punishment for sin is death, and the price of being ransomed or redeemed from that punishment is the

shedding of the life-sustaining blood of your sacrifice – an innocent victim.

9. But, there was a problem with those sacrifices.
 - a. The blood of a sacrificial animal could not make you whole or complete in the eyes of God.
 - b. **Hebrews 10:4** – *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.*
 - c. That sacrificed animal would certainly remind you of the seriousness of sin and the high price you must pay for your sins, but an animal sacrifice simply wasn't enough to take away sins once and for all.
 - d. To achieve permanent and complete forgiveness of sins would require a sacrifice far greater than the blood of a mere animal.
 - e. And, just in case you're thinking you will offer your own life to atone for your sins, that won't work either.
 - (1). Why? Because you're a sinner.
 - (2). Your sacrifice would be flawed and imperfect – stained with sin.
 - (3). Your sacrifice would not be the sacrifice of an innocent victim.

- f. And no matter how good you might be from this point on, you'll never be good enough to make up for the sins you've already committed against God.
- D. This is where Jesus enters the scene. Jesus came to be that innocent, pure, perfect, sinless sacrifice – the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of mankind once and for all.
- 1. Jesus would accomplish this by offering His own blood.
 - a. He would offer Himself as a sacrifice, thereby providing eternal redemption for all mankind.
 - 2. Therefore, the Son of God willingly left all the glory of heaven, was born as an infant, grew up to be a man, lived as a man among men, and died as a man on the cross of Calvary to become the only sacrifice that was great enough to forgive sins permanently.
 - 3. This is why Jesus is portrayed in the book of Hebrews as our High Priest.
 - a. **Hebrews 9:11-15** – *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

- b. Jesus offered Himself as the only sacrifice – the only gift, the only offering – that could restore fellowship between God and mankind forever.
- c. Jesus Christ became the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

- II. Have you ever wondered why Jesus had to die on the cross – have you ever wondered why God didn't simply forgive us of our sins to keep Jesus from having to experience all the anguish and humiliation of the cross. The answer to those questions is found in the odd-sounding word *propitiation*.
 - A. There are four New Testament passages that speak of Jesus coming to make propitiation for our sins. I want us to look at three of those passages right now.

1. Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrew writer wrote this:
 - a. **Hebrews 2:17** – *Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*
 2. The apostle John also had some things to say about Jesus being the propitiation for our sins.
 - a. **1 John 2:1-2** – *My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*
 - b. **1 John 4:9-10** – *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*
- B. But what does this word *propitiation* mean, and what does it mean when the Bible says Jesus became the propitiation for our sins – and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world?
1. The most simple way to define *propitiation* is with the words appeasement or satisfaction.

- a. In other words, Jesus offered Himself on the cross to appease God – to satisfy God's anger, and to keep God from pouring out His wrath on all of us rebellious sinners.
2. Think of it this way. When we sin, we offend God's honor – we dishonor His glory and His holiness. We belittle and injure God's grace and mercy.
 - a. Since we are the creation of God we owe God honor and glory. We owe Him total and complete reverence and respect.
 - b. But when we sin, we offend and dishonor God. We deny Him the reverence and respect He deserves.
 - c. Therefore, when we offend, belittle and dishonor God through our sins He would be completely justified if He chose to strike us dead on the spot.
 - d. By the way, there were times in both the Old and the New Testament when a sin was so blatant, and so grievous that God did strike sinners dead on the spot – remember Nadab and Abihu in the Old Testament, and Ananias and Sapphira in the New?
3. But even though we deserve to die, God has withheld His wrath.
 - a. Why?
 - b. Because Jesus appeased the wrath of God by dying for us.
 - c. Jesus became the propitiation or satisfaction for our sins.

- C. In the days when dueling was popular – when men would solve insults and disputes by dueling to the death with swords or pistols – the concept of satisfaction or propitiation was understood a little better.
1. When someone did or said something that offended the honor of another, the offended party would demand that his honor be satisfied or appeased through a duel. He would attempt to kill the person who offended his honor.
 - a. If he won the duel and killed the man who offended his honor, he would feel satisfied or appeased.
 - b. But, if the offending party killed the man whose honor he had defamed, it didn't end there. Some other member of the family would step forward to demand satisfaction for the honor of the slain man.
 - c. The offense could never be appeased or satisfied until the offending party was dead.
 2. Now, think of the role Jesus played in appeasing the honor and glory of God.
 - a. When we sinned, we offended the honor and glory of God.
 - b. Therefore, the only way God's honor could be appeased or satisfied, would be for God to kill us – to strike us dead.

- c. But, because God loves us and doesn't want to harm us, Jesus voluntarily offered His life in exchange for ours. Jesus died in our place.
 - d. And in doing so, Jesus became the *propitiation* – the satisfaction, the appeasement – for our sins, and not only ours, but the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.
- D. Now, listen to the passage from 1st John chapter 4 once more, and then let's consider one more passage in Romans chapter 3.
1. **1 John 4:9-10** – *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*
 2. **Romans 3:22-26** – *For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

3. When criminals escape the punishment they rightly deserve, and are somehow acquitted of all wrongdoing, we cry out that justice has not been served.
 - a. There is no justice in freeing a guilty man – there is no justice in allowing the guilty to go unpunished.
 - b. Justice demands punishment.
4. There was simply no way God could be just in simply forgiving us of our sins and acquitting us of our wrongdoing – that's not justice! Someone had to pay the price for our sins.
5. Therefore, because God's love for us is so great – as an act of God's grace and mercy toward us – He allowed Jesus to die in our place and fulfill the demands of justice.
6. This is why Paul says God is, "*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*" (**Romans 3:26**)
 - a. Jesus paid the price. He suffered the punishment. He satisfied the demands of justice. He became the propitiation, or satisfaction, for our sins – and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world.
 - b. Now that Jesus satisfied the demands of justice for us, no one can say God is unjust when He frees guilty sinners like us.
 - c. Jesus died in our place because we could not be forgiven any other way.

7. That is something the blood of an animal sacrifice could never do.
 - a. The blood of an animal sacrifice could never completely and permanently appease and satisfy the wrath of God.
 - b. But the blood of Jesus could, and did!

CONCLUSION:

- I. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus died in your place?
 - A. Your sins condemned you to death because your sins offended the honor and holiness of your Creator.
 1. But Jesus died so that you could live. He satisfied the demands of justice for you, and He suffered the punishment you deserved.
 2. So, how do you feel when you look at Jesus hanging on the cross, and realize that's where you should be?
 3. Because of your sins, you should be the one dying on the cross with no hope of ever being reconciled to God.
 4. Now do you understand what John meant when he wrote:
 - a. **1 John 4:9** – *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*
 - B. If Jesus experiencing that horrible and shameful death for you doesn't somehow move you, then I'm not sure anything will.

1. If you can look at the cross of Calvary and not be moved by the Savior dying in your place, then there's simply nothing more God can do to demonstrate His love for you.
 - a. We often think of the cross of Christ as a portrait of suffering for sin.
 - b. But maybe a better way of thinking of the cross is to see it as the greatest demonstration of God's love!
 2. This is why Jesus said:
 - a. **John 3:16-17** – *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*
 3. God loved you enough to send Jesus, and Jesus loved you enough to die in your place. That's why we say the cross of Christ is really the greatest demonstration of God's love.
- C. Now it's time for you to show God how much you love Him, and to show Jesus how much His death on the cross has moved you.
1. The only way you can demonstrated your love and reverence for God is to come to Him through Jesus Christ.

- a. Come to Him by believing in Jesus with a heart softened by godly sorrow – a godly sorrow that has moved you to repent of your past sins.
 - b. And then, after you confess your faith in Jesus Christ, let the blood of Christ cleanse you from every sin you've ever committed by being baptized into Christ for the remission of all those past sins.
2. But maybe you've done all that in the past, but since that time you've either turned back to the world, or you're slowly drifting in that direction.
- a. If I've just described you, then you also need to come to God with a heart softened by godly sorrow – a godly sorrow that has moved you to repent of your past sins, and confess those sins to God.
 - b. If you will do that, then the blood of Jesus Christ – the blood He shed on the cross for you – will once again cleanse you from all sin.