

We Would See Jesus: The Son of God

“We Have Redemption Through His Blood”

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Blood. It’s messy, isn’t it? Normally we don’t think of shedding blood as a very positive thing. When blood is shed, someone is hurt or dying. That can’t be good. But Scripture looks at the shedding of blood very differently than we normally do in today’s culture. In fact, the Bible barely begins before there is mention of a sacrificial offering made. Not only is God pleased with it, He indicates that it is His expectation for offerings brought to Him (Gen. 4:3-7). [All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.]

As the record of man’s interaction with God unfolds, we see blood offerings continue as a part of worship. In one of the more interesting stories, God even calls upon Abraham to bring his own son as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:1-14). The point at which Abraham’s faith was confirmed was when he drew the knife to shed his son’s blood (22:10-11). While God did not allow Abraham to follow through with his intentions, Abraham’s understanding of what he had been called to do is clear—a proper offering required blood to be shed.

When God instituted the Mosaic covenant with Israel, He placed the shedding of blood in a very prominent role. In addition to the various offerings that were to be made for certain situations (Lev. 1-7), one sacrifice was particularly significant. Once each year, on

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Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, a sacrificial offering was to be made for the sins of the people of Israel (Lev. 16). The concept of "atonement" is inextricably tied to the shedding of blood. Not only is the sacrificial animal to be killed, but its blood is to be taken within the veil of the Tabernacle—into the Holy of Holies—where it is sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, illustrating that the mercy of God is appropriated by the shedding of blood. This idea is so central to Scripture that the Hebrews writer summarized, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22).

THE PROBLEM

What could possibly cause this strange fixation on blood sacrifices? The answer, of course, is found not in God's desire for sacrifice, but in man's sin, which had damaged his relationship with his Creator. Sin had erected a barrier which no amount of good behavior could tear down. God had warned Adam and Eve in the Garden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would "surely die" (Gen. 2:17). He was trying to tell them that the cost of sin would be great, and indeed it was. When sin entered the world, death became a reality. Rather than immediately destroying all humanity in response to their sin, however, God began to reveal His plan to use the "seed of woman," in order to make right that which man had made wrong (Gen. 3:15). In the meantime, animal sacrifices and the shedding of blood would be an ongoing reminder that sin brings death. However, those sacrifices would not—could not—pay the cost for man's sin (Heb. 10:4). God had something even more profound in mind. He Himself would pay the cost for man's sin.

THE PROPITIATION

God's sense of justice and holiness were deeply offended by man's choice to rebel against Him. This offense was an affront not only to God's will but to His very essence. God's promise must be kept; justice must be served. Yet, God's love for His human creation prompted Him to enact a solution to the sin problem that did not destroy man. Death would still be the penalty for sin, but it need not be Adam's death, or yours or mine. The somewhat cryptic language of Genesis 3:15 contains a Messianic prophecy. As God continued to reveal Himself to mankind through the prophets and inspired writers, He shared more and more information about His scheme for the redemption of man. Clearly, He had devised a plan whereby His justice could be preserved while showing His love to man. A substitute would accept the punishment that was due us. Isaiah 53 is one of the best and clearest prophecies of God's intentions found in the Old Testament. One who was deserving of no punishment for His own actions would stand in our place and God would "[lay] on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:7). The imagery in this passage makes it clear that this would be a sacrificial offering but one of a very different character. The "Lamb" which would be "led to the slaughter" would not be an animal but a man.

The term "propitiation" is used by three of the writers of the New Testament to describe the work of Jesus as He suffered for our sins. It is a word well-suited to this task. The concept brings together the "kindness and the severity of God" (Rom. 11:22), which are seemingly at odds with one another, by allowing Him to bless the sinner while remaining true to His character and judgment. This is not a case of man's actions appeasing the wrath of God,

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as some pagan religions might view their offerings. God strongly desires to show mercy but must do so in ways that are consistent with His righteousness. "The propitiation does not procure his love or make him loving; it only renders it consistent for him to exercise his love towards sinners" (Easton).

The idea of propitiation is actually quite common in the Old Testament and is perhaps best seen in the decision of the translators of the Septuagint (LXX) to use the Greek word *hilasterion* (one of the words which is rendered "propitiation" in English) to translate the term for the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, or the Mercy-seat. This word later on came to represent not only the Mercy-seat but also the reconciliation by blood (Easton). Thus, on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest took the blood from the sacrificial goat and sprinkled it on the Mercy-seat, he was making propitiation. This imagery indicates the central proposition of Old Testament sacrificial offerings. They were a means by which God might properly be petitioned to extend Himself to man's aid. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews uses this same terminology to describe what Jesus did, "entering once for all into the holy place..." (Heb. 9:12), "to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

In 1 John 2:2, a different (though related) word is used. Here the word is *hilasmos* and is a direct reference not merely to the *work* of our High Priest, Jesus, but to *Jesus Himself*. He did not merely enact our propitiation. He did not simply procure our propitiation. He *is* our propitiation! Unlike every other sacrificial offering ever made, here the High Priest *becomes* the sacrificial lamb (Heb. 9:11-14). In the greatest possible gesture of love, God solved the sin problem by sending His innocent Son to "**be** the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:4, emp. added). When

Jesus became our substitute and accepted the guilt for our wrong-doing, He reconciled us to the Father (2 Cor. 5:18-21), something which no animal sacrifice could ever do (Heb. 10:4).

THE PROMISE

God always keeps His promises. Just as He has kept His promise that sin must bring death, so also He will always make good on His promise of salvation. The promises of God related to propitiation are at least three. First, our salvation is assured by sufficiency of the sacrifice. The term "propitiation" suggests that God is fully satisfied, and how could this not be true, since the offering was the Son of God Himself. Paul informs us that "since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9). This was for Paul, and is for us, a cause for great rejoicing because of our reconciliation (Rom. 5:11).

Second, God promises to not merely spare us from punishment but to offer us eternal life. Hebrews 9:11-12 assures us that when Jesus entered into the holy place on our behalf, He secured for us "an eternal redemption." Unlike every other priest, whose atonement offering was sufficient only until the coming year (Heb. 10:3), our High Priest offered a sacrifice which will last (Heb. 10:11-14). As Paul told the Ephesians, Christ's work has "made us alive...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:5-7).

Third, God promises to make the reconciled into ministers of reconciliation. Paul describes both his motivation for ministry and his permission to serve as a minister by pointing to the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. He cannot help but conclude that since "he died for

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all...those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:15). He goes on to say that "God reconciled us unto himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (5:18-20). As is always the case, when God calls, He calls not to privilege but to service. Paul sums it up by saying that "...he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21).

CONCLUSION

Man in his selfishness and ignorance has continued to distance himself from God, making choices that destroy the relationship of intimacy that God initiated in the Garden of Eden. No act of man could ever undo the consequences of that course. Even the animal sacrifices mandated by God Himself as a part of the Mosaic covenant fell short of providing what we need to come once again into the presence of our Heavenly Father. Only one thing could possibly repair our relationship with Him. The conciliatory work of Jesus has accomplished that which could be done by neither man nor beast. Thank God that we have redemption through His blood!

WORKS CITED

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