

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW
LESSON 8 – GOD THE SON: HIS SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH – ATONEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Review: Last week we looked at the Incarnation. God became a man in the Person of Jesus Christ. He was 100% God and 100% man. We said that this was the supreme example of humility. Jesus Christ left His place in heaven, laid aside His privileges as God, became a man and experienced a painful and humiliating death – the death of a criminal. We said that *men must die; only God can choose to die*. Now, why did He do it? He died to pay the penalty for our sin according to 2 Corinthians 8:9 (read). We also said that we would explore more fully the meaning and significance of His death in our lesson for next week.

Next week is **now!**

[TEACHERS: Needless to say this is a crucial lesson; as always, pray that you will be crystal clear as I pray the same for myself as I write this lesson. Because the topic is so important I strongly urge you to include a handout with your lesson which includes all scripture references]

The statement from *The Baptist Faith and Message* reads, “...in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin.”(page 8).

The Apostle’s Creed (late 2nd Century A.D.) states of Jesus Christ: “...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;...”

The Nicene Creed (4th Century A.D.): “...and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried...”.

In this lesson we will follow this outline...

- I. The Meaning of Crucifixion
 - History
 - Prophecy – Isaiah 53, Psalm 22

- II. Scriptural References
 - Matthew 1:21
 - 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - 1 Peter 2: 24

- III. The Meaning of Atonement
 - The meaning of the word
 - The Day of Atonement
 - The New Testament words

I. THE MEANING OF CRUCIFIXION

There are very few details in the NT regarding crucifixion. The reason is that most people in the 1st Century knew about crucifixions and many had witnessed them.

[TEACHERS: I am walking a fine line here. Our people need to know that crucifixion was a very painful form of execution; that Jesus went through physical agony for us. And yet, some of the details of a crucifixion are so gruesome that we need not dwell on the most hideous aspects.]

- A. Brief History (details based on Driscoll's book Doctrine, pages 245 & following). The Persians practiced it as far back as 518 B.C. Alexander the Great used it and in 71 B.C. the former gladiator Spartacus and 120,000 of his men were crucified by the Romans for leading a rebellion. By the time of Jesus, the Romans were using crucifixion for the worst criminals and most despised people: slaves, the poor, and Roman citizens convicted of high treason.
- B. Method. The Romans are believed to be the first to crucify on an actual cross. The vertical post was called the *stipe*, the horizontal or crosspiece was the *patibulum*. When someone carried his cross, he carried the *patibulum*. He was paraded through the streets as part of the humiliation. The Romans did this with Jesus until He was too weak from loss of blood to carry the crosspiece. He had lost blood because of the beating and whipping He took before He started the journey to the place of execution. They got a man out of the crowd, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross for Jesus (Matthew 27:32). The victim was attached to the cross using either ropes or nails. The Romans used nails with Jesus. The pain of crucifixion was so horrendous that a word was invented to describe it: *excruciating*, which literally means "from the cross". Death was slow and painful. Crucified people could hang on a cross for anywhere from several hours to several days. The pain was due in part because the victim slowly suffocated – they could not support their body weight and struggled to breathe. To hasten death, the Romans would sometimes break the persons' legs and/or puncture his chest cavity with a spear. All of this was done in a public atmosphere in which people gathered around and mocked the person as he died.

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus called crucifixion "the most wretched of deaths." The Roman philosopher Cicero asked that decent Roman citizens not even speak of the cross because it was too disgraceful a subject for the ears of decent people.(from Driscoll, page 247)

APPLICATION: It is ironic that in our day we have crosses on our lapels or jewelry and think nothing of it. This would have been unheard of and shocking in the 1st Century. The cross was a scandal reserved only for the worst criminals. And yet, God used it to change peoples' lives for eternity! The cross was agony for Jesus Christ but good news for us. Because of the significance of the cross of Jesus, it became a positive symbol for Christians.

C. Prophecy. In Isaiah 53 there is an amazing prophecy which relates to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Book of Isaiah was written about 700 years before Christ. Chapter 53 talks about the suffering Servant and His sacrifice for us. Isaiah 53:12 says that "...He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors..." Matthew 27:38 says, "At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left."

Psalm 22:16 is also a prophecy which could only be interpreted as a crucifixion. It says, "A band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet."

"Jesus was crucified in the usual Roman manner – the hands and feet were pierced by large dull spikes which attached the body to the wooden cross." [from *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972, page 169]

David wrote Psalm 22 approximately 1000 years before Christ. The form of execution known as crucifixion was unheard of at this time and did not come into practice until hundreds of years later. This verse in Psalms also describes the scene at a crucifixion in which people would gather and mock the person as he died: "A band of evildoers has encompassed me..."

II. WHERE DO WE GET THIS IDEA THAT JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS?

Scriptural References...

Matthew 1:21(read) – Before He was even born, an angel told His earthly father, Joseph, that He was to name the baby Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins." The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew which means "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah is salvation".

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (read) –This is arguably the best passage on the gospel (good news). The gospel includes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notice verse 3 which says that Jesus Christ "died for our sins according to the Scriptures".

2 Corinthians 5:21 (read) – "He" is God the Father; "Him who knew no sin" is Jesus Christ, that is, He was sinless. He became sin on our behalf; He took our sin on Himself. Isaiah 53:5 says that "He was pierced through *for our transgressions*, He was crushed *for our iniquities* (italics mine). Isaiah 53:6 says that "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." The words "transgressions" and "iniquities" are synonymous with sins. Notice that Isaiah predicted that our sins would fall on Him.

1 Peter 2:24 (read) – This is as crystal clear as it gets. The context of the verse tells us that "He Himself" refers to Christ. He bore our sins in His body. It has been called "the exchanged life" – Jesus Christ exchanged His righteousness for our sin and took our sin on Himself. What a deal!

ILLUSTRATION: [TEACHERS: Your class probably needs an object lesson right now and a break from the heavy theological truths – and this is a great illustration]

My left hand represents me (palm up); this book represents my sin (put on your hand). My right hand represents Jesus Christ; notice – no sin. Now, here’s what happened on the cross: (transfer the book to your right hand) Jesus Christ took my sin on Himself and freed me up to be forgiven and to go to heaven!

[TEACHERS: other scriptures for further study for your class: Romans 5:8; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 13:11-12; 1 Peter 3:18 and 1 John 2:2. I suggest you include these on a handout.]

III. THE MEANING OF ATONEMENT

A. The meaning of the Word.

Definitions from *The American Heritage College Dictionary...*

“atone (verb) – to make amends, as for a sin or fault.

Atonement – Reconciliation between God and human beings, brought about by the life and death of Jesus.”(page 87)

“Jesus our God became a man to restore a relationship between God and humanity. Scripture repeatedly and clearly declares that Jesus died as our substitute paying our penalty ‘for’ our sins.”(Driscoll, page 253)

B. The Day of Atonement

Many aspects of the death of Jesus Christ for our sin are foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The most important of these is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) described in the Book of Leviticus, Chapter 16. Yom Kippur is still observed by Jews today although no animals are sacrificed because the Temple in Jerusalem does not exist. This year, Yom Kippur started at sundown on October 7.

On Yom Kippur, 2 healthy goats without defect were chosen. The first goat was the propitiating sin offering. The word propitiation means “satisfaction” – God’s wrath against sin was satisfied or appeased by the sin offering. The high priest slaughtered the innocent goat which acted as a substitute for sinners. He then took some of its blood and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Its blood represented life given in payment for sin.

The High Priest took the second goat, laid his hands on the animal while confessing the sins of the people, and then sent the goat into the wilderness. This was symbolic of taking our sins away. This second goat was called the “scapegoat” which is a word we still use today. The sins of the people were symbolically transferred to the scapegoat.

Again to borrow a statement from Mark Driscoll, “These great images of the priest, slaughter, and scapegoat are all given by God to help us more fully comprehend Jesus’ work for us on the cross...”(page 254)

C. New Testament Words

Romans 5:10-11 – the word is “reconcile” and “reconciliation”. As verse 10 says, because of our sin we were enemies of God; we needed to be reconciled or brought back into right relationship. That happened thru the death of God’s Son.

Romans 3:24 – the word here is “redemption”, which means “to deliver by paying a price”. This concept comes from 3 Greek words...

- “to buy in the market”
- “to buy out of the market”
- “to set free”

All of these Greek words picture the slave market. In the Greco-Roman world of the 1st century, slavery was a common practice. Slaves were bought, sold and set free all of the time. The sinner is said to be a slave of sin (John 8:34); he needs to be set free, redeemed. The purchase price is none other than the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Read 1 Peter 1:17-19.

This is a demanding lesson with several concepts and many scriptural references. However, poor teaching/learning can result if we only look at part of the picture. It is impossible to study the significance of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross by only looking at one or two verses. I encourage you to review these truths and scriptures regularly. Let them seep down deep in your soul. It is a difficult study but one which is richly rewarding!

CLOSING ILLUSTRATION

Let’s say that I recently received a traffic citation and had to appear in municipal court. I was guilty and I wasn’t going to argue the point before the judge. The judge pronounced me guilty and said the fine was \$200. Then, to my astonishment the judge takes off his robe, comes down from the bench, takes out his wallet, pays the fine and tells me that I can go free!

Now – was I guilty? Yes.

Did a fine need to be paid? Yes.

Was it paid? Yes.

What do I need to do in order to go free? Other than believe the whole thing was real, absolutely nothing! Just thank the judge and walk out a free man!

That is exactly what Jesus Christ did for you & me on the cross. God the Father is the Judge; we are guilty; God came down off the bench in the Person of Jesus Christ and paid the penalty (fine) for our sin. What do we do? Simply believe that He did it for us and walk out of here free from guilt and part of God’s family!

