

**Jesus is Atonement, part 2**  
**Isa 53:4-5; 9-10, Rom 3:25-26**

Well brothers and sisters, Good Friday and Easter are coming up this week and today it is Palm Sunday. And as you know Palm Sunday focuses on Jesus arriving at Jerusalem riding on a donkey with crowds of people gathering to welcome him. As Jesus makes his way towards the city people were laying palm branches down and spreading their cloaks on the road in front of him and shouting "*Hosanna!*" Which means save us.

And the people were shouting "*save us*" because they realized Jesus' arrival in this manner meant that He was a King and a King's job is to save his people from their oppressors and their enemies, and the Jews of Jesus day had plenty of those.

So as we continue to explore Jesus is Atonement this morning, let me connect it to Palm Sunday and Jesus as King, by reminding us that Jesus saves us from our enemies of sin and death and the devil and as we learned last week - this is one of the results of the atonement.

And additionally, we learned last week was that its not just sin and death and the devil who are our enemies, but because of our sin... God Himself is set against us as our enemy as well.

However, the Good news is that Jesus' atonement saves us from God's wrath and its important that we realize this.

It's also very important that we understand the deliverance of the salvation that is worked upon us is not complete if we are only delivering from sin and the devil and death, it must include our deliverance from God, from His wrath as well.

If Jesus set us free from the power of sin on our lives so that we no longer desire to disobey God, if Jesus delivered us from the power of the devil so that we are no longer captive to his lies and deceived by his influence... if Jesus overcomes death so that death now become the means by which we leave this life to be in the His presence...

If Jesus did all these things brothers and sisters but did not deliver us from God's wrath what good would it be?

There's no one greater than God right? So ultimately for all that we had been freed from, God would still destroy us in judgement if there was nothing to mitigate his wrath.

It's like a dead-beat dad who has been absent for all these years in a child's life suddenly is able to kick his addictions, overcome his depression, and learn skills to be a good father. He shows up in his kid's life and wants to have a relationship now that he's free from the things which have prevented him from doing so in the past.

Which is all fine, except its not because there's still the guilt of the offense against his child over these past year. If the dad is going to go forward, something has to be done to atone for what has happened in the past.

So what's the point of being spiritually freed from your enemies but still remain an enemy of God because of what you've committed against Him.

Fortunately for us that is not how Christ's atonement works, as we learned last week, Christ's blood sacrifice appeases God's wrath, turns away His anger and changes His enmity to friendship and we are restored into God's good graces.

The reason this is so important brothers and sisters is because our sinful nature is so devious that even as we are being saved from it, it makes us think our salvation is all about us. Being freed from the power and influence and especially the consequences of what we typically understand and experience as sin... is wonderful for us.

It feels so much better to be freed from anger, to not be proud, to break away from addiction and bad habits, no worries about getting caught in a lie and so on – it really lines up with our current focus on what can help us live our best lives and be the best version of ourselves.

Our sin is so subtle and sneaky and seductive that it warps the gospel to become a very human-centered appeal to embrace Jesus' salvation and deliverance because of what it does for us

and how it affirms us. And this makes us think that the ultimate criteria and evaluation and standard by which the Christian faith, scripture, and even of God Himself rests on us and what it does for us – because we believe its all about us.

So, its important for us to hear and be reminded that we're not just in trouble because of sin and death and the devil and how they oppress us, as terrible as those things are - but ultimately we're in trouble because God is Holy and can not tolerate any sin or rebellion against Himself. This shifts the necessity for deliverance and atonement off of us, and rightfully centers it back on God.

The point in all this is that for as much as we will celebrate Easter and Good Friday with a focus on being washed clean from our sins, death being defeated in the Resurrection and Satan's power being broken...

and for as much as we proclaim the gospel telling people they need to be saved from their sins...

For as much as we share the good news that all the pain and suffering and evil and brokenness in the world will one day be eliminated and Christ will return and bring in the New Creation, and for as much as we tell people to trust in Jesus, have faith in Him to be a part of that...

In spite of doing all of that brothers and sisters - we usually avoid telling people that they need the atoning blood of Jesus to cover them so that they are saved from the wrath of God and His anger against Sin and punishment that is required for it – I know I tend to avoid it... yes I believe its true, but I don't usually include it when I'm doing a gospel presentation.

In part because we have this idea that presenting God's wrath and anger to people was overused and abused at some point in the past, and everyone was turned off by this negativity and seeing God as angry all the time, so we're trying to present God as more loving and positive. The old catch more flies with honey than vinegar trick - fair enough.

Additionally, as I've already mentioned, since our culture is pre-occupied with self-improvement and living our best lives and being our best selves, we need to be able to speak into that mind-set and connect with it if we are going to be able to get a hearing with them and present the gospel. Be a Greek to the Greeks and a Jew to the Jews – fair enough.

But more likely the truth is that since we avoid talking about this aspect of the atonement we're not well versed in how to speak about it accurately and succinctly and to back it up biblically, and so we don't say much of anything about it and we neglect it.

But if we look at the scriptures brothers and sisters, there's every reason to say that this aspect of the atonement forms the heart of the gospel. So, the good news is that we can study this and meditate on it, learn it and become fluent in how to speak about it to others, to present in ways that engage their perspectives and correctly present and represent God as He reveals Himself to us in scripture.

That's what we did last week with our Romans 3 passage, learning about God presented Jesus as atonement, propitiation through the shedding of his blood.

But let me give you a few more scripture passages which reveal God in this way as well. Going back to the first chapter of Romans 1:18 *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people."*

Rom 5:9-10 *"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."*

Gal 3:10 uses a different word to describe God's wrath and anger towards sin quoting from the Old Testament, it says *"For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

Eph 2:3 *"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."*

1 John 2:2 *"Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

1 John 4:10 *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

So you can see there is ample scriptural evidence available to us that God's wrath and anger is set against us as sinners and that there needs to be an atoning sacrifice to placate that.

And its not just N.T. references, this morning we read from Isaiah 53 in the O.T. and it is very plainly stated in those verses that there is punishment that is required for our sin, that God punishes, and that the completion of this punishment settles things with God.

Vs. 10 is very blunt on this matter *"it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.. and make his life as an offering for sin"* And going back up to vs. 5 we read *"the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."* This is Jesus as the atonement.

Now this begs the question; what peace do we have brothers and sisters? Well, we have peace with God. Christ bore the punishment so that we can have peace with God.

But this is not about us feeling peace about God, its about God going being our enemy to making peace with us.

This is reflected in the Christmas story of all places as well. In Luke 2:14 the angels proclaim *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

We hear this when is Christmas and we think it's referring to world peace, or at least the prospect of things becoming peaceful on earth. But the angels are actually announcing that with the birth of Jesus, God is making peace with us.

And notice how the angel's statement begins with the Glory of God. This peace plan is about God's glory and exaltation and praise. It is to His credit that He has found a way to make peace with us, and He can show us favor instead of His wrath.

And last but not least, because today is Palm Sunday and Jesus is arriving at Jerusalem - let me draw your attention to the fact that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem - at Passover.

Jesus deliberately arrives to offer His life as a sacrifice when it will coincide with the festival remembering the sacrificial lamb whose blood was painted on the doorframes so that God's judgement would pass over Israel while He was bringing His wrath upon on the Egyptians.

Brothers and sisters, God's wrath and judgement, and the need for atonement to turn that wrath aside, is revealed all throughout the scriptures, this is the heart of the gospel, it's the bad news but there's good news combo.

It's is the reality of where we stand before God, the reality of His orientation and stance towards us, and that reality shows we are not able to do anything about it – but God Himself reveals He will do something about it and He has done so through offering Jesus as an atoning sacrifice.

Brothers and sisters Jesus is atonement. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest. We are saved! And God gets all the glory...

Will you receive this as good news, as gospel? As actual good news? As Christians, as followers and believers in Jesus Christ you would think that we would right?

However, most of the opposition to this doctrine of Jesus as atonement comes from within the church, from believers.

In spite of the fact that scripture clearly teaches it, there is a reluctance and a hesitance to embrace it... there are even those who would deny it! Why is this?!

Well, let me offer you three factors that I think contribute to this, Ignorance, Insult and Indignance... and in doing so perhaps the Holy Spirit might nudge you about something He wants to change in you this morning.

So, Ignorance... Many Christians are just ignorant of this aspect of Jesus' atonement. Since we don't like to talk about God's wrath and anger, since we avoid bringing it up and preaching on it, we just don't know a lot about it and we miss the emphasis on it in the scriptures. So, helping to remedy this ignorance is largely what this message has been focused on thus far.

Additionally, Jesus' atonement is grounded in the reality of the Covenant relationship we have with God. If you don't know what a Covenant relationship with God is all about, and why we have one the atonement doesn't make as much sense as it could – if we were more familiar with Covenant.

So, we're going to look this atonement – covenant connection coming up on Good Friday, make sure you don't miss it!

And we also tend to be rather ignorant about who God is. About who He reveals Himself to be through the scriptures and how He is defined by His attributes. There's so much more to understanding God and His nature and His character than just saying He's omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and has no beginning and end.

If you've really delved into what it means that God is Holy, Righteous, Perfect, Unified and One then the necessity of making atonement to God for our sin just naturally flows out of that.

So let me give you an example of how this works... and simultaneously deal with the next factor - Insult.

The doctrine of Christ's atonement has been criticized as being insulting to God because it allegedly characterizes God as, or equates Him with some primitive pagan god who has to be bribed by offerings in order to do what is beneficial for us.

Now I kind of see where people might think this... but only

as a badly butchered understanding of it. Like one of those “explain a movie plot badly” memes you see on social media. Lord of the Rings trilogy – 9 hours where group attempts to return jewelry. Seriously though, if you really know God you’ll see how this criticism is way off base.

First off, why is atonement necessary? Well the pagan answer is because the gods are foul tempered, moody, ill-behaved, and subject to their own changing and capricious whims. You can read all about this in ancient legends and myths, Greek, Roman, Persian, its all the same – only the names change.

In contrast atonement is necessary because Yahweh’s character is holy, He is set against evil and rebellion and disobedience. There is nothing unprincipled, unpredictable, or uncontrolled about God’s anger, He is unchangeable – it is aroused by evil and evil alone. This is actually good.

And who is it that must make atonement? The pagan answer is that we do, we have somehow offended the gods and earned their displeasure and so we must appease them. In

contrast scripture reveals to us this is complete nonsense – there is nothing we can offer to God Almighty to atone for the evil we commit against Him. But lest we despair, God being a loving, and merciful and gracious God reveals that **He** will make atonement for us.

That’s why 1 John 4:10 states the definition of love is “*not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atonement sacrifice for our sins.*”

In contrast to pagan atonement, the motivating love, the idea of doing so, the purpose, the initiative, the action and the gift offered for atonement are all God’s.

And what is it that was given to make atonement? The pagan answer is to sacrifice whatever and see what works; vegetable or sweet offerings... treasures... blood sacrifices – animal or human even children... Try and find whatever you can use to bribe the gods, and do it often because it’s effectiveness doesn’t last, it has to be repeated.

In contrast, even though Israel offered a variety of sacrifices to God – the difference was that they were clearly instructed by Yahweh to offer these in the Law of Moses, AND Israel recognized they were offering sacrifices from what had been given to them by God. What God requires God gives.

Additionally, these O.T. sacrifices pointed ahead to what God would eventually offer to make atonement that was effective once and for all – His Son Jesus Christ. John 3:16, who sent His Son? God sent Him. Rom 3:25, who presented the sacrifice? God presented Christ as an atoning sacrifice.

In contrast there is ultimately only one atoning sacrifice that is offered by God, one time for all – it is Jesus Christ.

So you see how knowing God's character and attributes deflects this criticism! And it deflects any other criticism which sees the atonement as an excuse to project our human imperfections and failings on to God. Human notions of atonement are flawed – but God's implementation of atonement is perfect.

God Himself gave Himself - to save us from Himself.

But in spite of this grace brothers and sisters, it still makes our sinful nature Indignant and we want to reject this. While we can God is upset about our sins, truthfully we're don't think He should be THAT angry about it!

We're not so bad that His wrath should be set against us, that He should require punishment and atonement. We're not perfect, but its not like we are serial killers or child abusers or something really despicable. We're indignant that God's wrath is against us when we don't think we fully deserve it.

Well... I'm not sure how to respond to that except to offer the words of Jesus spoken to the Pharisees, who were often indignant with Jesus... He says to them *"truly the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you!"* (Matt 21:31)

Nothing pricks our human pride brothers and sisters like learning that God's wrath is set against us, it shows we don't

realize the sinfulness of our sinfulness, we are so blind and wretched in this respect.

We have not seen the Holy and righteous living Triune God revealed through scripture if we think we are something.. If we think we can stand before God and be indignant that He is rightly and justly prosecuting us!

Brothers and sisters let us humble ourselves before God, let us exalt Him and see ourselves in contrast to His holiness and righteousness and perfections!

Let us turn away from our indignance, put away any pride or pretence and accept that He provides atonement for us, confessing and admitting that we rightly need it because He rightly deserves it.

And let me close off with one last encouragement brothers and sisters. God does not need atonement to be completed in order to be able to show His love to us or be gracious to us.

Yes it is true His wrath is set against us outside of Jesus Christ, but at the same time He has set His Love upon us.

We are not able to operate like this. We are conflicted and self-contradicting, capricious and fickle and unable to show sacrificial love if there is an outstanding debt to be paid.

But our Heavenly Father is perfect - holy and righteous and gracious and merciful and there is no contradiction between His Love and His wrath. Were it not for His wrath we would not know His love in Christ.

Romans 5:8 *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died – atoned - for us.”*

This is good news! It is the gospel message! Don't be indignant about it, its not an insult, and you are no longer ignorant about it. Believe it, trust it, rejoice because of it.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is atonement!

Amen.