



Last week we were introduced to the idea of The Cross as the great jewel of our faith. It is like a stunningly glorious cut diamond with many facets: each one an entry point into a different truth about the wonder and the mystery of what Jesus was accomplishing for us there. The word for today is 'ATONEMENT': a word which is more easily understood if you split it up. Jesus is securing our at-one-ment with God on the cross. **Read Leviticus 16: 2-14; Romans 3: 21-26.**

1. Atonement in the Old Testament.

- The OT reading might have left us with the feeling that the once-a-year highly important and solemn Day of Atonement was somehow to do with appeasing a God who is angry with human sin and demands animals to be slaughtered instead of people. It can make us retreat from the uncomfortable idea of a blood-thirsty God.
- Looked at more closely, God lives in the innermost recess of the tabernacle and on the Day of Atonement Aaron is to sacrifice for himself, for the priests, for the people and for the Tabernacle and its Most Holy Place because the sins of the Hebrews have been accumulating throughout the year. Thus God's anger is satisfied.
- **Hebrews 9: 9f.** Sacrifices never cleared the consciences of the Hebrews: they hint at Someone to come - Jesus.

2. Why do we still need to think about Atonement?

- Because sin and injustice exist and can't be ignored without making us complicit. Something has to be done.
- We think of sinfulness in binary terms: bad people (Pol Pot, Hitler); good people (Mother Theresa, William Wilberforce). But even if we blur the line between good & bad, we get into questions of degrees of sin and end up with the unsatisfactory conclusion that either everyone is good, or everyone is bad.
- Or we think justice is a matter of balance: as long as we have more 'good white stones' on our scales than bad 'black stones' we'll be OK. But our injustice infects others and also affects our world and its peoples.
- **Romans 3:10, 23** tells us no-one is righteous, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **Ps. 51: 3-5:** Sin is part of the human condition, from birth. Sin separates us from a perfect God and makes Him angry.

3. The Wrath of God.

- This is an uncomfortable concept. We're OK with feeling 'righteous indignation'; OK with being angry at other peoples' apathy; we're OK about our own wrath, but not God's – because we're on the wrong end of it! We dislike the idea of God's wrath, because know we deserve it and can't achieve righteousness ourselves.
- However- there is a righteousness that we can receive from God, whoever we are: **Romans 3: 22-5.**
- God has achieved righteousness for us by cleansing us from our sins by sacrificial atonement. Our salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. We are justified and declared righteous by Christ's death on the Cross.
- Jesus is publically presented as The Sacrificial Atonement, bringing estranged humanity into a unity with God.
- The Greek word for 'Sacrificial Atonement' is *Hilastēriōn* which means 'propitiation' – the removal of wrath towards a person by the offering of a gift. In **Leviticus 16: 15** the equivalent is the 'Atonement Cover' or 'Mercy Seat' which is the nearest to the place where God was thought to reside in the tabernacle. It was there, on the Day of Atonement, that Aaron had to sprinkle the blood of the goat which was a sin-offering - a kind of gift to God for the removal of a year's worth of sin by the whole nation of Israel.
- Jesus is this Place of God's merciful justice and His death deals with our unrighteousness. Jesus is both the Just One and the one who Justifies, His gift to us is eternal life.

4. Our response.

- Tell people the 'Good News!' God's wrath is not to be feared because of the death of Jesus on the Cross.
- Live in the light of the fact that God's wrath has been satisfied.
- Be a people of prayer: learn how to speak to God by just doing it! (cf learning to ride a bike: fall off/persevere)
- Live Christ-like lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. Colossians 3: 3 – 17.

Points to Ponder

The seriousness of sin. God took it so seriously he sent His Son to die for us

The wonder of God's mercy.

The way God's justice and mercy can exist together because of Jesus – who is now living and interceding for us.

Peter recommended reading Colossians 3: 3-17 every day this week. It is a great summary of how to live as God's redeemed people.