

## ***“The Big Words of the Bible: Atonement”***

### ***Romans 4.1-8***

Lenten Midweek 6, 2006

The Word of God for our sermon meditation was quoted in the Epistle to the Romans, the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, beginning with this 7<sup>th</sup> verse "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

In the days before computers and word processors when typewriters ruled the desktop there came along this most handy invention and tool for all typists who made mistakes. It was called "white-out" a handy liquid, paper, or tape that one could use to cover up and remove mistakes that had been made in the process of typing. For some of us prone to many errors it made for some interesting art work, but most of all it allowed us to make corrections without having to retype an entire page, perhaps an entire paper.

This handy invention allowed the typist to make atonement, to cover up and remove typos and mistakes on a piece of paper. Such typos and mistakes could have resulted in other marks on our paper, marks that showed our typing was errant and therefore punishable by points taken off our final grade.

Likewise, as transgressors, those who have done lawless deeds, you and I as God's people are in need of atonement for our sins so that we may escape the punishment to come for sin. The word "atonement" as you have gathered simply means to cover up and to remove sin and guilt by means of the blood of Christ. This atonement is needed by all of us for the removal of our sins because our guilt and offenses before God are great.

We see the place and outworking of atonement among God's people in the Old Testament. In fact, as many of you know, the nation of Israel had a special day on their religious calendar called "The Day of Atonement." On this day and only on this day, the high priest of the people would enter into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice to pour out on the mercy seat in order to atone for the sins of the nation.

This blood of the sacrifice cleansed the sin of the people before God. It removed their sin and guilt so that they would not receive the punishment of God upon their transgressions. The offering, the sacrifice of the lamb was made as a substitute for their own

lives since the wages of sin is death. The sacrificial animal took their place and its blood spilled on their behalf made atonement with God covering their sins and removing their guilt before Him.

One is tempted to think that it was easier for the Old Testament people of God to sin and transgress His commands than it is for us today. Perhaps and perhaps not. One thing is clear from the Scriptures, there were many provisions for offerings and sacrifices to make atonement for sin so that their sin would be covered and passed over by the mercy of God.

But was it easier for them to sin than us? Were their offenses greater than our transgressions and offenses against God? A quick perusal of the Scriptures reveals that it is quite easy for you and me to break God's commandments and bring on ourselves His punishment and judgment.

For remember how our Lord taught the complete meaning of the Ten Commandments. "Thou shalt not murder" just does not involve physically harming someone but it also involves harboring a grudge and harmful thoughts toward another also. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" just does not involve physical sexual immorality and unfaithfulness, but also the lusting and desiring of one's heart and mind. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" just does not mean that we should not lie about another, but it also includes saying hurtful, disparaging, mean, and unkind things about another person and this commandment further teaches us that we are to go to those who sin against us.

As you and I honestly take a look at our lives, we can see that it is quite easy to transgress God's commands and, in fact, we do it constantly in our lives from day to day, sometimes not even knowing that we have done so. So corrupted are we by the Old Man of sin in our lives, that we unwittingly commit sins against God and our neighbor, transgressions that we are unaware of and yet are guilty of committing.

In truth, we are really in no different a position than the Old Testament people of God. Just as they needed the removal of their sins, so do we for our transgressions and our offenses against God and heaven are great. The punishment for these is also great for the wages of sin is death. Unless atonement was made for our sin, unless our transgressions were covered and our

guilt removed, we stood to be cursed for eternity for our lawless deeds, for our violations of the Law and commands of God.

Yet, as our Scripture text reveals to us this night, this is not what the believer in Jesus Christ receives through faith. "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin." This is true of you and me, even though our sins are great and our transgressions against God and each other innumerable.

This is true of us because we do have atonement provided for all our sins in Christ Jesus our Lord. Christ Jesus, the Scriptures teach, is our atoning sacrifice, the Lamb of God who took away our sin and the sin of the whole world. He is the Substitutionary sacrifice slain on the altar whose blood was poured forth on the mercy seat in Heaven to atone for our transgressions, to cover our iniquity and to remove our guilt before God on high. Jesus is the One who with His blood and with His righteousness has clothed us so that our sins are seen no more.

Jesus, the Great High Priest of mankind, came forth into the world from Mary's womb as the offerer and the offering for our sins. Entering into the tabernacle not made with hands, crucified on the cross of Calvary, Jesus sacrificed His life and died in our stead so that we through faith in Him would not die and perish eternally at the hands of Divine Judge. He came into the world, the very Lamb of God, whose blood availed for us more than all the blood of bulls and goats.

His atoning work removed our sin and guilt, covering them with His blood and righteousness so that they are no longer seen and remembered by God. As one contemporary Christian song puts it, God looks at us through rose colored glasses, as it were. When the Holy Lord of Heaven and earth looks on us who believe on Christ, who cling to His atoning sacrifice on the altar of Calvary for the forgiveness of sins and our salvation, He cannot see past the blood that purifies us and covers our sin.

This, the Scriptures teach, is an accomplished fact, one whose history we will once again read and hear during Holy Week next week. For notice the language of our text. Our lawless deeds are forgiven. Our sins are covered. Our iniquity is not imputed or

charged to us because Christ bore them as our Lamb, as the atoning, substitutionary sacrifice for us all. As our sermon hymn put it “Jesus Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress.” Why? The hymnist continues “The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb, who from the Father’s bosom came, who died for me, e’en me t’atone, now for my Lord and God I own.”

So teaches the Scriptures which emphasizes unequivocally that our sins are removed and our guilt is taken away. From the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm we hear “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” From Jeremiah 31 we hear “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Micah 7 we also learn “Who *is* a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights *in* mercy. He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.“

In the New Testament we hear these words of our Gospel reading “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” From St. Paul we learn “This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” “He died for all.” “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” In the Book of Revelation we hear “To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

The point is plain. On account of the sacrifice rendered by Christ for the atonement for our sins, we are blessed, as King David wrote in the Psalm quoted by St. Paul in our sermon reading for tonight. We are blessed because all our lawless deeds have been forgiven. We are blessed because each and every sin we have ever committed or will ever commit, even unwittingly and unawares, has been covered by the blood of the Lamb. We are blessed because God has not imputed and charged our sins to us because of Jesus Christ, the Atonement for our sins. Amen.