

“The Big Words of the Bible: Propitiation”

1 John 1.8-2.2

Good Friday 2006

The Word of God for our sermon message this Good Friday is recorded in St. John's 1st Epistle, the 2nd chapter beginning with this 1st verse. "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

Good Friday is always a two-edged sword. It is, of all the days on the Church Calendar, the most gloomy and sorrowful because it was on this day that Jesus Christ our Savior suffered and died that ignominious death on the cross for us and for our sins. There is a somewhat muted joy since we know that this death occurred for us and our salvation but it is very muted because the sight of Jesus in our mind's eye beaten, blooded, and battered on the cross drives us to look away in shame and sorrow over our sin.

Anyone who has seen Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" knows of what I speak. No one can look upon Jesus as He endures God's wrath at the hands of the Sanhedrin, the Roman soldiers, and on the cross without wanting to turn away and shout out to God to stop it for we think we are not worth such a bloody life and sacrifice. Truly we are not but that does not stop the Father from sending forth His Son Jesus to be the Propitiation for our sins as well as the whole world.

For the world and you and I needed propitiation for our sins because God's wrath and anger burned greatly against the sinner. God's wrath, the Bible teaches, is God's justice. It is not a "meanness" or God just picking on the sinner. God is wrathful, angry with the sinner, with you and me, precisely because He is holy and just. Our sins are a personal offense and affront to God, not just mistakes.

So God's wrath must be answered and it must be satisfied; it must be propitiated or we are lost for God must pour out His wrath on Law breakers since we are not in a right relationship with Him on our own. God cannot deny Himself and therefore propitiation must be obtained for the sinner in order for the sinner to escape the wrath and anger of God.

This is not a popular message in American religion today and even in many Lutheran churches. Many are the times when members have commented and asked why must the Pastor speak so much about sin, death, judgment, and God's wrath? Why doesn't Pastor spend more time talking God's love? After all, I mean, are we really deserving of all that wrath and judgment talk? If we listen to run-of-the-mill Christianity today we are hard pressed to hear of sin as an offense against God and not watered down talk of sin as a mistake. It is tough to hear of God's wrath stored up like water behind a dam ready to be poured out on the sinner.

Many pastors and scholars believe that Christianity and the Gospel of Jesus spread so quickly in the 1st century because the people were bothered by their sins and were hungry and starving for the good news of salvation in the crucified and risen Christ. Yet, many modern worship songs and messages avoid any mention of sin and the wrath of God and have no use for tonight's word and all it teaches the sinner who has sinned against the holy and just God of heaven and earth.

For the word propitiation means a sacrifice that is made to turn away the wrath of God on the sinner. It is a sacrifice that involves a bloody death in order to turn aside the judgment of God upon the sinner. Of the words we have examined this Lenten Season, this is the one word that speaks the harshest and the sweetest to the sinner. It is harsh because the word "propitiation" tells us in no uncertain terms we deserve God's wrath, and every bit of it, for our sins. It informs us that we should be crushed and judged having all of God's anger poured out on us. It announces that our sin warrants death and damnation.

It's the truth and a truth we must face. We are dirty, no good, rotten despicable sinners who deserve nothing but sin and death. We have offended God so often, so frequently, and so horribly, that it is impossible for us even to recall a fraction of our transgressions against Him. We must admit to that sin and acknowledge that we deserve that wrath and that the anger and justice of God must be satisfied and turned away for us or we are lost. Even more, as St. John relates in our text, we are liars if we

fail to confess this about ourselves. We are sinners should rightly receive that wrathful judgment of God for our sin.

And yet, as St. John relates to us this Good Friday, the holy and just God is also patient and loving toward the sinner since He caused Jesus to bear the wrath for the sinner and to shed His blood in order to turn aside His anger on us all. The word "propitiation" is actually used to speak of Christ Himself. He is our Propitiation, with a capital "P". He is the sacrifice, the One who gives up His life in a bloody death on the tree of Calvary bearing the whole weight and force of judgment for the sinner, for you and for me.

It is Jesus, God's own Son, His Only-Begotten, the Apple of His eye, if you will, on whom the entirety of God's wrath and anger for mankind is poured out. Think on that for a moment – every person ever conceived from Adam and Eve, every man, woman, and child, excepting Christ our Savior, deserved God's wrathful judgment on him and her for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God as the Scriptures teach. It is that wrath and that judgment that Jesus bore and endured because of our sins.

It is no wonder that Jesus cries out as He does from the cross saying "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" because Jesus knows the depths and the breadth and the height of God's holy justice on the sinner. He knows because He not only decreed it in His holiness and righteousness but He also experiences it on our behalf, in the stead of the whole world.

It is not a coincidence that there is darkness over the land as Jesus utters those words for during those hours He suffers the very judgment and agonies of Hell for you and for me. There He hangs as God's answer to God's anger and wrath. There He hangs as the Propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world. There He hangs cursed by the Law since the Law announces that cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. As our opening hymn taught us – "Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load; 'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God."

So Jesus hangs on the tree as the Propitiation for our sins. He bears the anger of God as He is betrayed by one of His own for so had we all turned against God. He endures God's wrath as the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish Council mocks and derides Him for so have they done to God all those years. He experiences God's justice as the Gentiles scorn Him and reject Him as has the entire world done in their sin.

The blows on the face, the plucking out of the beard, the scourging and the stripes on His back, the crown of thorns pressed on His head, the purple robe placed on Him and then stripped away reopening His wounds are the beginnings of the judgment He underwent as the Propitiation for our sins. In all those events God lets loose with all His justice and all His holiness on the Just and Holy Son of God, exacting satisfaction for our sins.

Then Jesus our Savior had placed on His lacerated and wounded back the cross to which He would be nailed and sacrificed. On His way to Golgotha, the Mount of Calvary, He is jeered and ridiculed in our place and for our salvation. At Calvary He is fastened to the cross as the rings of the mallets echo through the air announcing judgment is being served and Jesus is the victim. He is hoisted up and hangs there for nearly 6 hours bearing God's wrath on us all as He bleeds and dies.

Then, finally, the sacrifice is complete. God's wrath and justice have been satisfied. His anger is now turned away by the sufferings and the bloody sacrifice for our sin. "It is finished!" Jesus announces. That which He had come into the world on Christmas is now finally secured for you, me, and the world. "Peace on earth, good will toward men" is now accomplished. God's anger and wrath have been satisfied and turned aside since Christ bore it all in our place. As Jesus turns His head downward and says "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit" the gavel has fallen on the bench of Divine justice. Propitiation has been made for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

As a result St. John tells us that whenever we sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. By this he means that Christ is ever before the Father interceding for us with His sacrifice, as our Propitiation for our sins so that we may know

that we have forgiveness for our sins and that the favor of God is ours on account of His sufferings and death on Calvary's cross. He stands before the bench of Divine Justice and states "I died for him" and "I died for her" as the Propitiation for their sins and we stand there, not before a wrath-filled God, but before our God with whom we have peace through the blood of Jesus' cross.

The crowd has gone away now and the judgment has been rendered in heaven and on earth. The Son of God hangs there dead having been "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, [for] the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." He is slowly lowered to the ground, He whose grave they made with the wicked and Joseph of Arimathea and others wrap Him and lay Him in a tomb making His grave with the rich at His death.

The stone grinds as it is rolled across the face of the tomb. Silence fills the air for Jesus has answered God's holy justice for us once and for all. The Author of Life lies dead having sacrificed Himself in a bloody death on the cross as He bore the entirety of God's wrath. He has turned aside God's wrath on you and me and on our sins because He was and is and ever will be the Propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+