

IN MY PLACE CONDEMNED HE STOOD - The Biblical Pattern of the Atonement - Part three - Sunday, May 15th, 2022

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THE *TWO* ACTS OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE IN THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT

As precious and life-changing as the gospel is, we need to resist the growing and very deadly tendency to define the Christian faith by the ***religious experience it provides*** rather than by the ***doctrinal truth claims defining it in God's Word***. We want better lives. We want improved situations. We want better marriages. We want improved health and finances. Perhaps we want sobriety, or a bright future for our children. These are the points where we ***feel*** life and ***assess the effects*** of our religion. This is where we tend to measure whether or not God ***works***. We put our own experience at the center and measure outward from that point.

The problem with this process is it's hard to measure the value of the New Testament doctrine of the atonement this way. We ***know*** the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement ***is*** important. But it centers in on our sin and guilt before God. And most of the people we rub shoulders with don't even ***believe*** in their own guilt before God. So the atonement doesn't ***feel*** like a necessity.

I can **see** my career and my wealth and my marriage and my children. But our Savior's "**canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands**"(Colossians 2:14) - who has ever seen that? That record is invisible. Lots of people don't even believe it exists. And many Evangelical Christians increasingly don't worry as much about it. My "**record of debt that stands against me**" doesn't cause me as much loss of sleep as my Visa bill, my troubled marriage, or my losses on the financial markets.

What I'm saying is all of this effects the way Christians come to assess the importance of the atonement. The atonement through Christ Jesus is a **doctrine**. It is something, first of all, that we **believe**. It's an **event** in history. It doesn't make anyone rich or successful. It's not an **experience** in the same sense that a fever or a cold or a shopping trip is an experience, or a bonus check.

This is very important. Evangelicals are starting to question and negotiate on the viability of the old views on the atonement. How do we know what we are to consider **relevant** and **important** about the atoning work of Christ? Certainly you can change your view of the meaning of the atonement and not **feel** any different. You can live life the same way as you did before.

I'm probably not making the simple point I'm wanting to leave with you. Here it is. Sooner or later **every** Christian will need to know **why** correct beliefs matter. Why is clear thinking on something like the atonement important when we can't measure any immediate **outward** difference in the lives to two people who hold totally differing views?

In a brilliant article written for the *Christian Century*, **William Placher** writes on the relationship between our **doctrines** and our **lives**. He touches on a great thought that not many Christians take the time to carefully process. But it's spiritually deadly not to know this truth:

"It is probably true that when the dogmatic principle [our doctrine and teaching of beliefs] in religion is slighted, religion goes along for awhile on generalized emotion and ethical intention - morality touched by emotion - but then it loses the force of its impulse and even the essence of its being....Even if I have a warm personal relationship with Jesus, I also need an account of what's so special about Jesus to understand why my relationship with him is so important. If I think about dedicating my life to following him, I need an idea about why he's worth following. Without such accounts and ideas, Christian feeling and Christian behavior start to fade into generalized fuzziness and social conventions."

The degenerating power of a false view on something like the substitutionary atoning death of God the Son isn't something that manifests itself overnight. But solid Christian life and hope can't be sustained over the long haul without it. That's William Placher's brilliant and urgent argument.

The truth is we need the Bible to set our minds straight on the atonement. We need divine revelation because, without it, we won't know very much or think very accurately about the most important things pertaining to our eternal destiny. We'll measure the ultimate realities of life by our own concepts of fairness and appropriateness and relevance. Divine revelation is needed to show us how we are to frame our thinking around subjects we don't, in this present fallen world, automatically think of as important. Without Biblical revelation there are a million other voices telling you what you should **think** about and what you should **care** about.

The Biblical teaching on the atonement doesn't begin in the New Testament. Today we turn our attention to one of the foundational accounts on the meaning of the atonement. And it takes place centuries before Jesus ever breathed a breath on this earth:

IPAD TEXT - Exodus 12:1-12 “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, [2] ‘This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. [3] Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. [4] And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. [5] Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, [6] and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. [7] Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. [8] They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. [9] Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. [10] And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. [11] In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. [12] For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.’”

You know this story. This is one of the best known accounts of God’s delivering power on behalf of His people in the whole Bible. But if the story is well known, it is also less carefully studied. We can **assume** its meaning without digging deeply into important details. And there are details in this account that launch a chain of teaching in the Scriptures about the nature and method of God’s atoning work.

From the time and perspective of the Exodus it would probably be difficult for Moses to even imagine the way Father God would use the account of the Exodus and the “*Passover*” that took place there to prepare the world for an understanding of His *greatest* delivering work yet to be accomplished centuries later through the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

We’re going to be in this rich account for a couple of weeks. Today I want to press home just two key thoughts:

- 1) **THE POWER AND BLESSING OF THE ATONEMENT ARE FIRST OF ALL PICTURED IN TERMS OF AN ACTUAL DELIVERANCE FROM TERRIBLE BONDAGE**

That is the most obvious point of God’s delivering work for Israel in the exodus. They aren’t a free people. True, they may, especially the younger generations, have gotten *used* to living under the authority and domination of Egypt. For some, this life was all they had known. But the truth is, they weren’t free. They weren’t their own people. They weren’t living out their God-given destiny. They *served* a dominating power.

And they couldn't free themselves. They couldn't overpower the domination of Egypt by mere resolve and effort. Unless God freed them, they would never be free. In the exodus model God ***makes visible*** the ***kind*** of deliverance that takes place today ***invisibly in the realm of His kingdom*** through the blood of the cross of Christ.

IPAD TEXT - Colossians 2:13-15 - "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. [15] *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*"

IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 2:14-15 - "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*"

This is the New Testament's answer to the question we asked earlier. What's so important about the **doctrine** of the atonement? We want a faith that is about **life**. And the New Testament answer to that is to frame the cross of Christ in the same terms as the exodus from Egypt. There's a **deliverance** at stake - a deliverance without which there is no possibility of a secure future.

The writer of Hebrews couldn't be more direct and precise in his words when he tells us that Jesus came and died - like that Passover lamb - to **"....deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Hebrews 2:15)**. And we're meant to take note of those words **"*deliver*"** and **"*slavery*."** They sound exactly like the Israel/Egypt account. And they're meant to.

So the cross isn't just a message about how God understands our suffering - "So, you're having a bad day. Don't worry. Jesus had one too." And it isn't just God telling us that He'd like us to join His cause. It's about the defeat of an enemy - **"....He [Father God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [Christ Jesus]"(Colossians 2:15),** and, **"that through death [Christ's death on the cross] he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...."(Hebrews 2:14).** - IPAD TEXT

That's all the time I can take with this first point, as precious as it is. There is something else - a ***second deliverance*** - that is being, I believe, intentionally edited and marginalized in the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement through Jesus Christ:

2) **IT IS THROUGH THE CROSS OF CHRIST - AND ONLY THROUGH HIS CROSS - THAT WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THE WRATH OF A HOLY AND JUST GOD AGAINST SIN AND SINNERS**

This truth is so important that it is fully previewed in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It's all there in the details of the Exodus account. We pick up the story at the very next verse from where we stopped reading our opening text:

Exodus 12:13-27 - "The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. [14] This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. [15] Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

[16] “On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. [17] And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. [18] In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. [19] For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. [20] You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.’ [21] Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. [22] Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. [23] For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.”

I know we’ve read a lot of text today, but stay alert. Now we’re given some very special words. God, through Moses, tells the people how they are to *interpret* the events of the exodus. He tells the people how they are to permanently establish the *observance* of the Passover and how they are to explain its *meaning* to their children. In other words, we know that the meaning of this event isn’t the cultural evolution of some religious ritual. This is **God’s** interpretation:

Exodus 12:24-27 - "You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. [25] And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. [26] And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' [27] you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped."

The death of the first-born was the tenth plague sent by God to bring Pharaoh to let Israel go free. And there is something absolutely unique about this last plague. If you miss this you will miss a key element God was trying to teach about the atonement through the exodus event.

All of the first nine plagues (as far as the text specifically mentions) were no threat to Israel. The text is dutiful to repeat that the first nine plagues fell **only** on the Egyptians - not Israel:

IPAD TEXT - Exodus 8:20-23 - "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. [21] Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. [22] *But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. [23] Thus I will put a division between my people and your people."*

IPAD TEXT - Exodus 9:1-4 - "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. [2] For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, [3] behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. [4] *But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die."*

IPAD TEXT - Exodus 9:23-26 - “Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. [24] There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. [25] The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. [26] *Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.*”

I could site more examples, but I think you can get the point. Israel was protected from the first nine plagues *automatically*. There was nothing she specifically had to do. But such is *not* the case with the tenth plague. I took all the time to read the account of God’s judgment in the tenth plague intentionally so we could all see the *process* - the *tedious, detailed, prolonged process* - that *everyone* had to observe to escape the judgment of God.

But why is this so? Why the sudden change? What’s going on here? Can’t God just destroy the first-born of the Egyptians and automatically spare those from Israel? That’s what He did with the other nine plagues.

Wouldn't Pharaoh's heart have been bent to let Israel go just by the death of the first-born in every Egyptian household? I'm sure that would have been enough to induce him to want to be rid forever of the Israelites. What difference could it make to Pharaoh that Israel was going through the process of killing lambs and painting houses with blood? That had no effect whatsoever on the Egyptian households.

And the answer gives one of the most profound explanations of what is going on when Jesus - our Passover Lamb - shed His blood on the cross. Clearly, there are ***two different rescues*** going on in the exodus account. And we need to appreciate them both and understand them both if we're to have a fully developed understanding of the atonement.

First, by means of the judgment of God there is deliverance from the tyranny of Egypt. That much is obvious to all readers. But ***second, by means of the Passover sacrifice, there is deliverance from the wrath of God.***

And here's where we will wrap up today. Unlike the first nine plagues, there is no ***automatic*** deliverance from the just wrath of God. Blood must be shed. Israel was as vulnerable to God's judgment as Egypt. The Passover lamb wasn't slain to protect Israel from ***Egypt***. It was slain to protect Israel from the wrath of ***God***.

The biggest problem for Israel wasn't ***Egypt*** anymore than the biggest problem you face is the economy or your low self-esteem. The biggest problem for Israel was the ***wrath and judgment of a just God***. The tenth plague and its remedy prepare us all for a deliverance from an even greater threat than Egypt. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the lamb killed and the first-born spared. And everyone needed a Passover lamb.

They still do. More on this great text next week.