

IN MY PLACE CONDEMNED HE STOOD - The Biblical Pattern of the Atonement - Part nine - Sunday, July 24th, 2022

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DID JESUS DIE TO SHOW GOD SUFFERS *WITH* US, OR DID HE DIE TO SHOW GOD SUFFERS *FOR* US?

IPAD TEXT - Romans 4:22-25 - "That is why his faith [Abraham's] was "counted to him as righteousness." [23] But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, [24] but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him [Father God] who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who was delivered up [Jesus] for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

Before we get into examining in detail the ideas assembled in this text, I want to take a few minutes flying over the title I chose for this teaching - ***"Did Jesus die to show God suffers with us, or die He did to show God suffers for us?"***

The point here is no one drains much emotional energy over the fact that a person named Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by Roman order during Passover. Atheists, agnostics and professing Christians of all stripes pretty much agree on that.

It's the **meaning** attached to that crucifixion that divides the world. And far more people are far more comfortable with the idea that Jesus died to suffer **with** us than that He suffered **for** us. And what I want to say first of all is it really, really **matters** which way you answer. The two answers are **different** answers, not the **same** answer. And you only have to study the **vehemence** with which evangelicals are starting to pick their camp to realize that virtually **everyone knows** there's a lot at stake in which answer he or she gives.

For example, against the "**Jesus died for us**" view, consider the caustic words of **Poly Toynbee**, leader of the British Humanist Society, when she reviewed the movie, "**The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe**" in the **Guardian**, in 2005. The article is subtly entitled, "**Narnia Represents Everything That Is Most Hateful About Religion.**"

Apparently she didn't get the tolerance memo. In the article she writes, "**Of all the elements of Christianity** (Notice how we've now shifted from "**religion**" in general to **Christianity** in particular - not **Islam**, **Judaism**, or **Hinduism**) - "**Of all the elements of Christianity, the most repugnant is the notion of the Christ who took our sins upon himself and sacrificed his body in agony to save our souls.....Who asked him to?**"

Or consider the words of **Pastor Alan Jones** in his book, **“Re-imagining Christianity.”** He writes of a **“thread of just criticism”** that **“addresses the suggestion implicit in the cross that Jesus’ sacrifice was to appease an angry God. Penal substitution was the name of this vile doctrine. I don’t doubt for one minute the power of sin and evil in the world or the power of sacrificial love as their antidote [Antidote? What exactly does that mean and how has it been working so far?] “....but making God vengeful, all in the name of justice, has left thousands of souls deeply wounded and lost to the Church forever.”**

Rob Bell, who has by now almost faded in memory, was much more careful and guarded in one of his first books, **“Velvet Elvis.”** In it he argues more generally that the important thing in Christianity **“is not doctrines”** but **“living like Jesus lived.”**

Precisely **why** it’s important to live like Jesus lived, or the **solution** if we **can’t** live like Jesus lived, or the **result** if we **refuse** to live like Jesus lived, isn’t clear once some of those key doctrines are removed. **Bell** continues by saying that thinking certain doctrines are essential **“diminishes God,”** as though He were somehow **“limited and reliant on them.”**

So there it is. The important thing isn’t **doctrine**, but **“living like Jesus lived.”** We have a wonderful model of Jesus as the patient, innocent loving, sufferer on the cross. We should be like Him. The idea that He is paying for our sins, at best, recedes into the background.

So again, our opening question is the one we need to bring to our text. Did Jesus enter suffering and death **with** us providing a wonderful example of love and forgiveness in the face of tragic mistreatment, or did He suffer and die **for** us as our substitute and atonement?

1) **THERE IS AN IMPORTANT, UNBREAKABLE LINK BETWEEN THIS WEEK'S TEXT AND LAST WEEK'S TEXT**

Here's last week's text - **Romans 3:21-26** - "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and *are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*" - IPAD TEXT

So the righteousness we **need** and the righteousness we **receive** we receive by **faith(22)**, as a **gift(24)**. That means Paul is emphatic that the righteousness we receive, we receive **apart** from what we **deserve**. That's what that word "**grace**" means (**24**). In fact, the righteousness we receive, we receive **contrary** to what we deserve.

In other words, no one scores any points by following an **example** from Christ. That would be **meriting** what we receive. And then it wouldn't be a gift at all.

Finally, Paul says the righteousness we receive through faith (**22**) comes as a direct result of Christ bearing God's just wrath against our sin through Christ as the **propitiation(25)**. And when God did this great work in God the Son He was revealing, not just His love, but, even more importantly, His **justice(26)**. He was just because, in His **love for sinners** He still **judged our sin**.

I know what some of you are thinking. How come I could restate the main points of last week's teaching in under three minutes **this** week, but needed 45 minutes **last** week. Great question.

Now, to see the link between these texts, take another look at today's text from the very next chapter of Romans - **Romans 4:22-25** - "That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." [23] But the words "it was counted to him" *were not written for his sake alone, [24] but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*"

- IPAD TEXT

Verses 23 and 24 speak directly about Abraham. And Paul's whole point is Abraham was justified by his *faith* rather than by his *works*. In other words, this idea of *not* establishing our righteousness by our own efforts or following a great example (which is just another manifestation of good works) isn't a *new* idea. Abraham was justified by freely imputed **Romans 3** righteousness.

So if you want to erase or revamp or edit the substitutionary atonement you have to do more than just redo Paul's theology, or Jesus' words in the gospels. You actually have to go back and redo the whole Old Testament as well. This is the *pattern* of Biblical atonement.

So maybe we should be looking for another answer to our title question. Did Jesus die to show God suffers *with* us or *for* us? Paul states **four facts** about Christ's death. They're all in **Romans 4:25** - "**....who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**"

2) **JESUS DIDN'T JUST HAPPEN TO DIE - HE WAS KILLED**

The actual words "**died,**" or "**killed,**" or even "**death**" aren't used at all in the Greek text. But we all know what Paul means when he says Jesus was "**delivered up.**" We know he means physical death because of the way he contrasts being "**delivered up**" with being "**raised**" from the dead.

In the wisdom of Father God Jesus' death is a non-contested truth to this day. He didn't die quietly in some hospital ward. He wasn't hit by a bus on some deserted country road. He was publicly executed. Witnesses were present. Records were kept.

We **know** the details of our Lord's crucifixion but somehow aren't shocked by it. That anyone should end up worshiping someone who died so disgracefully is nothing short of astounding. Honestly, would you send your little son or daughter alone to visit convicts on death row? And we all know **why** we wouldn't. There are some disgusting situations there. We don't trust those people. We don't want our children around them unprotected.

Yet Christianity is **noted** for the execution of its visible founder. Consider this. No other world religion would **allow** its leader to be portrayed in such terms. Buddha was in his 80's when he peacefully died. Confucius was in his 70's. And Mohammed was in his 60's. And there would be nothing but bloodshed and terror if it was even insinuated these people were executed as criminals.

Muslims even think they're doing Christianity a favor by saying Jesus didn't actually die on the cross. Somehow, a body switch was made. Someone **else** died and the prophet Jesus thus escapes the disgrace of execution by crucifixion.

So no, if you were trying to make up a good religion, you'd certainly portray your leader in a better light than the gospels reveal. Jesus died a brutal, dirty death, executed in his early 30's. He never saw middle-age before His criminal execution.

3) **WHILE JESUS WAS EXECUTED BY HUMAN HANDS, HE WAS
KILLED FOR A DIVINE PURPOSE**

IPAD TEXT - Romans 4:25 - "...who was delivered up *for our trespasses...*"

The fact that Jesus died is not much disputed. There is simply too much historical weight to close our eyes and pretend His crucifixion didn't happen. We know the date within days. We know the place. We know too much to ignore the event.

It's *why* Jesus died that divides the crowd. Many people will grant the power of love displayed in Christ's death. He was self-less. He was innocent. Perhaps He was misunderstood. But we have a great example of how beautiful self-giving can be. People can be blind and wicked. And God knows what it's like to encounter mankind at its worst. Let's all live and love like Jesus.

Fine. But that's not what our text says. Honest people have to deal with actual words. Paul clearly says Jesus died **for** our trespasses. Note my next sentence as I highlight a key distinction. ***Jesus didn't just die as a result of trespasses (Jewish, Roman, or otherwise), but for them.*** He died to **cover** them - to **atone** for them - to **forgive** them - and to **bear God's just wrath for them.** All of that is what Paul means when he concisely says Jesus died "***for our trespasses.***"

The truth is, it's very hard to see how the cross can be a model of **love** if Jesus **didn't** die for our sins in the fashion Paul describes. A great theologian of a generation ago, **James Denney**, wrote of the atonement and used the example of a man sitting on the end of the Brighton Pier. Imagine him falling off into dangerous waters. A second man comes along, hears the screams for help, and jumps in to save the first man, but in dragging the first man to safety, drowns himself.

Now, Denney said, this would be an example of selfless, heroic, genuine love. The second swimmer's self-sacrifice **accomplished** the rescue of the first. So Christians believe the cross **was indeed** an act of selfless love because it **accomplished** something.

But it's very hard to see how the cross is either ***selfless or loving*** if it is disconnected from rescuing us from God's just wrath against our sins. Look at Denney's simple illustration again. Imagine the same first man sitting at the end of the pier. He's fishing. He's eating an egg salad sandwich. Suddenly a second man races by screaming, "I'll save you! I'll save you!" And, much to the fisherman's horror, jumps off the end of the pier. And he drowns.

What we all want to know is, ***why*** did this man jump off the pier? What did this death accomplish? Why did this death happen? And, most importantly, is there any honest way in which this man's tragic death could honestly be called an act of ***love***, or even ***sacrifice?*** What kind of example of love or deluded sacrifice can this possibly be?

And the whole point in Denney's great illustration is the death of Christ Jesus on the cross, once removed from its atoning, wrath-bearing mission, turns into a rather ***unfortunate*** at best or ***confused*** (a la Jesus Christ Superstar) action at worst.

The whole Bible, however, and the New Testament in particular, insist on attaching specific divine accomplishment and atoning meaning in God the Son's death on the cross. This is why, in the same consistent language of ***Exodus chapter 12, Leviticus chapter 16, and Isaiah 52 and 53***, - all of which we've studied - Paul tells us Jesus died ***for*** our trespasses.

4) **GOD THE FATHER WAS INVOLVED IN THE DEATH OF GOD THE SON**

IPAD TEXT - Romans 4:25 - "...who was *delivered up* for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

Now we press deeper into the text. And we start to see what wasn't as obvious at the first glance. We start to see why Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, ***didn't*** just say Jesus ***died***. There was something more going on, just behind the curtain of the human stage of events. The One who rules all the events of history "***delivered Him up***" for our trespasses.

And the depth of our pride is revealed in the way our proud culture chafes against the revealed beauty of that truth. People twist the story line of the Triune God as revealed in the Bible. They choose not to behold the love of Father God. They paint Jesus as the victim who must somehow try His best to hold back a mean, disgruntled Deity who would rather fry us all than give us even one more chance.

Listen to these words from **Doug Pagitt**, in his book ***“A Christianity Worth Believing”***: ***“...I’m not sure I would have been interested in the Christian faith if the story on the stage had been about a removed God who needed to be placated with a blood offering before he was willing to cross the chasm and participate with humanity....In this view, God is not a softy but rather a hard-nosed, immovable, infallible judge who cannot abide defiance of the law. And boy, did we defy it!”***

“When Adam and Eve broke God’s law in the garden, they offended and angered God. So heinous was their crime that their punishment extended to all of humanity for all time. The antidote to this situation is the crucifixion of the Incarnate Son of God because only the suffering and death of an equally infinite and infallible being could ever satisfy the infinite offense of the infinitely dishonored God and assuage his wrath. Yikes!....” (Doug Pagitt, ***A Christianity Worth Believing***, 2008, pp. 154-155).

As misguided as they are, those are the words of a very, very clever writer. He sets the stage for his argument with a background idea. And he does it so quickly you can easily allow it to stand in your mind. We're paying so much attention to the rabbit that's about to come out of the magician's hat that we miss what he's doing behind his back. And it's this quickly stated ***assumption in the background*** that makes the rest of his remarks sound viable.

Did you see the background - the set Pagitt paints to make the rest of the play look good? It's right there in the opening few sentences. Read them again - ***“....I'm not sure I would have been interested in the Christian faith if the story on the stage had been about a removed God who needed to be placated with a blood offering before he was willing to cross the chasm and participate with humanity....”***

Wait a minute. It's done so fast you almost miss it. Is this the God we believe in? Does the New Testament really describe Him as a ***“removed deity?”*** Is He really unwilling to ***“cross the chasm and participate with humanity?”***

How much of the New Testament do you have to un-write to say such things? ***“Unwilling to cross the chasm?”*** This God who comes all the way down in human flesh to take upon Himself all the pain and tangles and guilt of human flesh and nature? Is ***that*** the God Pagitt says is unwilling to ***“cross the chasm and participate with humanity?”***

Can Pagitt possibly be describing the same God (or the same Christianity) that Paul describes in **Philippians 2:5-8? - “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” - IPAD TEXT**

There is a horrible confusion right at this point. The only reason I’m taking more time with it is because it’s becoming the ***rabbit out of the hat view*** of much of the progressive church. Our own fellowship is carries examples of the pollution of this warped theology. So let me describe ***two kinds of pictures of the atonement:***

First, there are those who see the cross with no appreciation of the Trinity at work. They will ***never*** get the cross right. They see - like Pagitt - a poor good fellow trying to spill blood to placate a distant, primitive deity - like some poor uncivilized primitive man throwing his first-born into the mouth of the volcano to calm down his god.

Then there is Christianity - the revelation of a God who does all the redeeming work ***Himself***. ***He*** is the one who comes all the way down. ***He*** is the one who enters lovingly into our fallen mess. The New Testament insists we get this right - **God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself!**

Listen to these great words by ***John Stott***. They're brilliant and right to the point: ***"It would be hard to exaggerate the differences between the pagan and the Christian views of propitiation. In the pagan perspective, human beings try to placate their bad-tempered deities with their own paltry offerings. According to Christian revelation, God's own great love propitiated his own holy wrath through the gift of His own dear Son, who took our place, bore our sin and died our death. Thus God himself gives himself to save us from himself."***

5) **JESUS WAS RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION**

IPAD TEXT - Romans 4:25 - "...who was delivered up for our trespasses and *raised for our justification.*"

Note those words - "*...raised for our justification....*" This is the only place in the New Testament where this phrase is used. It's unique, and very powerful. But it does require a bit of thought because we usually, and correctly, think of Christ's **death** and our justification, not His **resurrection** and our justification. So what is in Paul's mind?

Very quickly, here's what I think we're being prodded into remembering. If all of this is true - if the deep meaning of the cross goes right to the root of God's just wrath against my sin and His loving **removal** of that wrath through the substitutionary atoning death of God the Son, then there's a lot at stake for everyone in this room today.

We need not only to be **told** about God's great loving rescue mission. We need **assurance** that God's just wrath against my sin is **terminated** completely and forever through His own work in Christ Jesus.

But how can I know this? Where does my peace and rest and confidence put down anchor. Where does my faith go for certainty?

That's where Paul's precious words come into play. "**Jesus,**" says Paul, "**was raised for our justification!**" And he means for all of us to track through the steps of logic with him. The wages of sin is **death**. If Jesus stayed **dead** then I would never know that my justification was finished accomplishment. I mean, **we** all die because we're sinners. And when Jesus **died** He truly identified with my sin. We know this because He surely didn't die for **His own** sin.

But, and this is the point of this whole message, I need something infinitely more than someone to **carry the guilt of my sin**. I need someone to **atone** for my sin so successfully that the **divine visible penalty** for that sin is **terminated**. I need to see the wrath of God so removed that the penalty **no longer applies**. Not to **Jesus**. And eventually, not to **me**. There is deep glory to ponder here indeed.

So yes, it's easy and common to make the atonement **smaller**. You can take all the stunning, shocking elements out. But you will never be saved by an example. And the best example - the highest example ever - will be even more unattainable for me than a lesser.

Stay close to the Biblical atonement, church. That the only place to find forgiveness - and more - assurance of resurrection with Christ Jesus when He comes again. The debt has been paid in full.