

### **ROMANS 3:21-26.**

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned all fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

It was about 45 inches long and 27 inches wide, comparable to the surface of your altar. It was made out of pure gold, the most precious metal known to man. Two majestic cherubim, also hammered out of gold, stood on each end. Their wings spread out upward, overshadowing the golden surface. Their bodies were facing each other, but their faces were bowed in reverence. This beautiful metal piece was placed atop the ark of the covenant. Upon it God himself would take his seat in his glory, the pillar of cloud. This metal piece was all that separated him from the contents of the ark, the Testimony of God's holy law.

In Hebrew God simply called it the "atonery" - the place where atonement for people would be made, the place where they would regain their favor with God. In the King James it was called the "mercy seat." In modern English we call it the "atonement cover."

On one day every year, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would slaughter a bull for his own sin offering. He would then take some of the bull's blood and sprinkle it once on the atonement cover, and then seven more times in front of the atonement cover. He would then slaughter a goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood and do the same - once on the cover, and seven times in front of it. And God would see. He would look down from the pillar of cloud and see - *not* the precious gold of the cover, *not* the beautiful golden cherubim. No, he would look down and see blood. Lots of blood. And he would be appeased. Their sin would be atoned for.

Why? Why so much blood? Why animals slaughtered? Why Christ *crucified*? Why did atonement have to be by blood?

#### **1.**

Paul tells us, "All have sinned." First Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed the One Commandment and ate from the tree God commanded them not to eat from.

Their descendants, the Israelites, sinned by disobeying God's Ten Commandments.

And we too, also descended from Adam and Eve, have sinned by breaking those same commandments, summed up in the command to love. We need only take a passing glance at the Passion History for tonight to see a sampling of those sins:

Even when facing death, Jesus asked for God's will to be done. In the face of much more tame circumstances, we get frustrated with God when *our* will is not done.

Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. But they slept. Too often we find ourselves finding every excuse to put off prayer and private meditation on the Word of God. Like the disciples we think, "Jesus is with us. We're fine."

When Jesus was arrested, Peter rashly drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. In dire circumstances we too find it easy to abandon our faith in God and think that everything falls upon our shoulders, that if we don't remedy the situation, no one will. And

in taking matters into our hands, we often end up doing harm to our neighbor instead of helping him.

After it became clear that Jesus was going to go quietly, the disciples deserted him and fled. One was even in such a rush that he didn't even care when he lost all his clothes. When it becomes clear to us that we are in a situation where our Christianity is not going to help us, do we stand and boldly confess our Christ? Or are we all too eager to say as few words as possible and flee the situation?

Yes, in Adam all sinned. There is no difference. And as a result of that universal sin, we daily sin much, falling short of the glory of God. And God's glory doesn't just consist in his austere face and impossibly high standards and demands. Otherwise he would be no different than Allah or the god of Roman Catholic dogma with which Martin Luther could not find any peace. No, God's glory consists in his goodness to mankind. We fall short of that.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the worst thing wasn't the act of disobedience itself. The worst thing was that when God came to confront them, they ran and hid. They no longer thought of God as the highest good. He was out to get them.

When Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, the worst thing wasn't depriving his neighbor of a God-given part of his body. The worst thing was that Peter thought that God was not going to protect him and care for him.

When we fall short of God's glory, the worst thing isn't that we disobey this or that commandment in and of itself, the worst thing is that, in so doing, we think that God does not want what is best for us, that he is not good. And he is so jealous for his glory, he is so jealous that people would see him as he is - pure grace and goodness and love - that he will not stand by and watch as people spurn it by their disobedience of his law.

When people fall short of God's glory, he demands their very life. Separation of their life from his life. And, as he says in Leviticus 17:14, the life of every creature is its blood. That's why. That's why animals were slaughtered. That's why Christ was *crucified*.

## 2.

There is no difference, Christians. No difference between us gathered here. No difference between us and every last person you will ever see or encounter out there. But there *is* a difference between the blood offered for the Israelites and the blood offered for us.

You see, the blood of the bull and the blood of the goat could not provide real atonement. The Sons of Korah acknowledged in the Psalms that "no man can give his life for another." And if a *man* cannot give his life for another, how much less an amoral, senseless *animal*. Paul himself, a Hebrew of Hebrews, says in our text that God "left the sins committed beforehand **unpunished**." The blood of the animals running over the atonement cover essentially did nothing.

No, their blood was only a picture - a picture that preached a message. And it was a good message: The precious gold of the atonement cover could not guard God's sight from the tablets of the law. The beautiful golden cherubim could not shield his eyes from the commands his people had broken. No, God would only be appeased when he saw blood covering his people's wicked deeds. And (!) - he would only be appeased when the blood that he saw was *not* the blood of his people. He would only be appeased when the life that was taken because of his people's sin was *not* the life of his people.

But that was only part of the picture. The full picture, as Paul fills in the details here, was this: God, the holy Judge, took his seat to convene and reconvene his heavenly court year after year. Year after year the prosecuting attorney, Satan, would bring forward his accusations, *valid* accusations, based on the factual record of humanity's sin.

But year after year, humanity's defense attorney, the second person of the Triune God, would have animals slaughtered and blood sprinkled for their sin and he would say, "Father, let this be enough for now!" And God's gavel would fall and he would say, "This court will adjourn and reconvene next year." And Satan would shout as he was carried from God's court, "That's *not* enough, God! You *know* that's not enough!" Year after year.

And then, one year, about 30 AD, our defense attorney decided to switch spots. And he finally had the real sentence passed.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement by *his* blood." Man's blood could not pay for sin. But God's blood could and did.

"Here, Father," Jesus said, driving us from the defendant's chair and taking our place. "This is enough."

Blood was spilled at his circumcision, as he began a life under God's law in our place. As he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, his sweat was as drops of blood falling to the ground, as the prospect of the sentence he was about to suffer confronted him in all of its divine seriousness. And his prayer in the Garden shows that this wasn't just his plan, some plot to trick the Judge. No, this was the Judge's plan too.

Blood came forth in earnest as his back was shredded by the Roman whip. But best of all, his holy precious blood, more precious than any amount of gold or silver, was shed on the cross. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, and so his life was taken instead of ours. And God did not exact this punishment from his Son in a temple behind a curtain. No, Christ is crucified and his blood is poured out to cover our sins *publicly*, for the whole world to see, for you to see, for me to see. Do you see it, friends?

Do you see God, in his glory, in his absolute goodness, not being able to stand by in that glory to watch such absolute wretchedness? Do you see him withdrawing his glory from his own Son? Do you see his Son falling short of his glory? When that happened, it was done. The sentence of blood, the sentence of separation of human life from God's life was fully served. In that separation, we have the assurance that God will never, can never, separate his glory and goodness from us.

Satan tried to object, "What about your justice, God? What about your righteousness?" And God's gavel fell. "This *is* my justice, you scoundrel. This *is* my righteousness. This court find the defendants not guilty."

As the famed Christian C. S. Lewis once wrote, Satan's "knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time when he was created. If he could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, he would have read something much different there." He would have read there what we now know and read here. What God has revealed to us in his Word. That the very thing that would have destroyed us, the glory of God, is the very reason why God *could not* destroy us, but had to, was *compelled* to save us. His glory is his eternally burning desire that his grace and goodness have humanity as its recipient. And he fulfilled that desire in Christ crucified.

And so, Christians, this blood, this precious blood of Christ is not blood at which we faint. We rather grow stronger and stand up straighter at the sight of it. We are not grossed out by it; we run to it. As the Israelites had to accept the work of their high priest in front of the atonement cover in faith, because they could not see him working behind the temple curtain, so we in faith run to our high priest, *the* high priest, on the cross and say, "Bleed on me, Lord Jesus Christ. Bleed on me and all my works today and every day. Bleed on my disobedience. Bleed all

over your broken commands in my life. Pour out your life on me, that God may count your life as my life. Then I will know for certain that my sin is atoned for, that God is appeased, that I no longer lack his glory.

We *gladly* preach Christ crucified, friends. Crucified *because of* us. Crucified *for* us. It is a historical reality. It is a spiritual certainty. Your sin *is* atoned for. You *are* justified. Believe it. Amen.