

The Cross of Christ



Santa Barbara Community Church • Fall 2010



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About This Study

This study was written by Reed Jolley and proofread by Nikki Knott, Bonnie Fearer, Susi Lamoutte and Steve Jolley. Thanks to all, but credit where credit is due. In large part, this study is but a book report on several sections of Derek Tidball's book, *The Message of the Cross*, IVP, 2001, hereafter referred to as *Tidball* in the various citations. The other book that was most helpful in preparing this study is John Stott's magisterial *The Cross of Christ*, IVP, 1986, hereafter referred to as *Stott* in the various citations.

The purpose of this study is to guide us into the Scriptures. As we move ahead together as a church community, let us make sure that first, we study the Scriptures. The Bible is God's word and, as the Apostle said, it is for our encouragement and correction. Accordingly, let us make sure we study the Bible, eagerly and expectantly. The pages of this study guide are not an end in itself, but are intended to prompt us to look into the Book of all books so that we may worship the King of all kings.



Study One

The Lamb Who Was Slain

Revelation 4–5

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2



It is no stretch to say that Christianity is a religion of the cross. A cross usually adorns the place of Christian worship. We wear crosses of gold as jewelry and tattoo them into our skin. Preachers teach about the cross and the congregation sings about the same instrument of death.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it Lord, that I should boast
Save in the cross of Christ my God
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

The cross of Christ is at the center of everything. The cross is the fulcrum of history, the supreme demonstration of the justice and glory of God. The cross of Christ is the center of gravity for the whole universe. As William Dembski writes, *God's goodness in creation begins and ends with the cross of Christ.*¹ The cross is God's answer to the problem of suffering and evil even as it is the supreme demonstration of God's love. The cross was planned by God before time began (1 Corinthians 2:7) and will be celebrated when earthly history has come to an end (Revelation 5:13). Indeed, the place of the cross in the understanding of the believer cannot be overestimated. The cynic George Bernard Shaw was not far off the mark when he quipped that Christians should rename themselves *Crosstians*.

The witness of various theologians and Christian leaders bears witness to the centrality of the cross in the Christian faith.

¹ *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World*, 2009, p. 14.

Eighteenth-century Cambridge pastor Charles Simeon called Christianity *the religion of a sinner at the foot of the cross*.

J. C. Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool said that without the cross *your religion is a heaven without a sun, an arch without a keystone, a compass without a needle, a clock without a spring or weights, a lamp without oil*.

Charles Spurgeon, eminent 19th century preacher in London said, *The cross is the centre of our system*.

G. Campbell Morgan, 20th century pastor of Westminster Chapel, said that *every living experience of Christianity begins at the cross*.¹

As British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge observed regarding the death of Jesus,

It was manifestly the most famous death in history. No other death has aroused one-hundredth part of the interest, or been remembered with one-hundredth part of the intensity and concern.

Over the next nine weeks we are going to study the cross of Christ. We are going to ponder the meaning of a particular death on a particular tree at a particular moment in history. We will tip-toe around the cross, realizing that we walk on holy ground. We will probe the meaning of the cross, realizing that we will never come close to plumbing the depths of its significance. And we will begin at the end. Our first look at the cross comes from the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of John.

In Revelation 4-5 the scene is in heaven, the setting is the climax of the whole story of the Bible. The problem in this brief section is finding someone worthy to *open the seals of the scroll*. No one, it seems, is able to open the scroll! The situation is so calamitous that John weeps loudly.

Before going on in this study, read Revelation 4-5. Note, this study will concentrate on chapter 5 but chapter 4 sets the stage for our study. Don't let the imagery of this short section (25 verses in all) throw you. The apostle John is recording a vision given to him by God. As such, the reader is invited to look over John's shoulder and see what John saw. At the outset, don't worry about interpreting John's vision. Read and observe with him. Make notes of what stands out, of what is clear and un-clear. Keep the following questions in mind as you read.

- The Apostle John is the author of Revelation. What do you think he is trying to communicate with the reader in these verses?

¹ These quotes and others are found in Tidball, p. 22.



- If you were to paint these verses on a canvas, what would the painting look like? Either draw Revelation 4-5 or describe the same section of John's vision.

Notes on your reading:

Clear

Unclear

When we begin reading Revelation 5, the immediate problem is that no one is *worthy to open the scroll and break its seals*. As is the case in virtually every verse of Revelation, interpretations of what the *scroll* signifies differ. Nevertheless, most would agree with the note in the ESV Study Bible which says,

In a broader sense, the scroll contains God's purposes for history, but its seven seals prevent the full disclosure and enactment of its contents.

As one commentator on Revelation put it, the scroll contains

God's redemptive plan, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, by which he means to assert his sovereignty over a sinful world and so achieve the purpose of his creation.¹

With the above quotation in mind, look over Revelation 5 once again. What is the crucial event in all history that gives the rest of the parts their meaning?

¹ George Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 1966, p. 72.

The Lamb (5:1-14)

At the center of John's vision in Revelation 5 is a lamb. This is, perhaps, John's favorite image of the Messiah in this book. *There are 29 references to 'the Lamb' in the book and all but one refer to Jesus.*¹ (Tidball, p. 305) The drama of the whole book leads the reader to the *triumph of the Lamb and the consummation of history.*

While the Lamb is shown to manifest wrath and mete out judgment (6:16; 14:10; 17:14), he is usually seen as the focus of the worship of the believing community. Standing in the control centre of the universe, worshippers rejoice in the salvation he has won for them (7:9-19; 15:3), look to him for protection and guidance (7:17; 14:4), keenly anticipate his wedding supper as he is joined for ever to his bride, the church (19:7-9), and confidently predict his future reign at the center of the new creation (21:1-22:6). (Tidball, p. 306)

Revelation 5:6 is the first reference to *the Lamb* in John's book. Consider what we learn about the Lamb in these verses. Look for the following:

5:5 His titles: What two titles does John apply to the Lamb? For the Old Testament background see Genesis 49:9-10 and Isaiah 11:1.

5:6 His countenance: What does the Lamb *look like*?

5:6 His posture: What is the Lamb's posture? What is the significance of this?

5:6 His features: This is no ordinary lamb. What do you think this description means?

5:8-10 His achievement: Read over these verses carefully. Much is being made of this Lamb in this section of Revelation. Why? What did the Lamb accomplish? And how was this accomplished?

¹ Revelation 13:11 contains the exception where *the beast of the earth* has lamb-like horns.



Notice especially the universality of the Lamb's achievement. For whom was the Lamb's blood shed? For what purpose (5:10) was his blood shed?

Describe what this looks like in your life. What has Jesus ransomed you from? Where has he taken you? What has he made you? Be specific.

Compare Paul's words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28. See also 1 Peter 1:18-20 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. The message in each of these verses is that our relation with God is blood-bought. How should this truth affect us? How should this truth affect our understanding of the church?

4:1-5:14 His Worship Look over both of these chapters again. Refer back to your drawing (if you made one) of the chapters. What we find is the whole universe, sitting in a circle, worshipping the Lamb! Everyone is there: the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, the myriads of angels, and, finally, *every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them*. Everyone and everything is focused on the Lamb. What are the multitudes saying? See 5:13.

Tidball points out the obvious!

The ever-widening circles of worshippers tell us that at the heart of our universe the achievement of the cross is celebrated by all that is best, all that is angelic and all that is human; no part of our created universe fails to join in the new song declaring the worthiness of the Lamb who was slain. (Tidball, p. 316)

Spend time as a homegroup declaring the worthiness of the Lamb. Add your voices to this chorus of eternal praise. Practice now doing what you will be doing for eternity if you are saved by his cross.

As we conclude our study, we should not fail to note the supreme contradiction in John's vision. Here we meet Jesus who is both the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5) and the Lamb who was slain. In the 18th century the famous preacher Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon on Revelation 5 titled, *The Excellency of Christ*. His words on this supreme contradiction are timeless.

In Jesus Christ meet infinite highness and infinite condescension; infinite justice and infinite grace; infinite glory and lowest humility; infinite majesty and transcendent meekness; deepest reverence toward God and equality with God; worthiness of good and the greatest patience under the suffering of evil; a great spirit of obedience and supreme dominion over heaven and earth; absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation; self-sufficiency and an entire trust and reliance on God. He is the lion who is the lamb.¹

Sermon Notes

¹ This quotation is paraphrased somewhat and comes from various parts of Edwards' sermon. The entire sermon is readily available on the internet.



Study Two

The Cross Anticipated: The Suffering Servant

Isaiah 53

If I were asked the secret of the attractive power of the crucified Savior, I should answer that it is invincible love. The only crime that could be laid to Jesus' charge was that of loving beyond all reason and beyond all bound—loving as none ever loved before.

Charles Spurgeon

Sin is a biblical code-word for crud. It refers to our failure to be perfect. Literally the word sin means, *to miss the mark*. It is not too much to say that sin is the fundamental problem of

every thing and every one. Sin affects our environment, our politics, our economics, and our social relations. At the top of the list is the truth that sin alienates each one of us from our creator.

[Y]our iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Isaiah 59:2

The breach between sinful men and women and their God is profound. God's majestic holiness coupled with his divine righteousness make fellowship with sin-infected creatures impossible. If we find ourselves thinking, *Why can't God simply forgive me the way I forgive my spouse from time to time?* we fail to appreciate either the gravity of our own sinfulness or the purity of God's being. As Carnegie Simpson writes,

Forgiveness is to man the plainest of duties; to God it is the profoundest of problems.¹

The cross of Christ is God's final solution to the problem of sin. But the cross wasn't an idea first heard of in the time of Jesus. The pages of the Bible anticipate the cross almost from the beginning.

- When Adam and Eve sin in the Garden, God curses the serpent, the tempter, saying that one day he (the serpent) will be destroyed by a coming messiah (Genesis 3:15²).

¹ Cited in Stott, p. 88.

² This promise is very vague and disguised, but it looks forward to the cross.

- Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, Isaac, anticipates the time when God the father will sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1-19).
- The Passover in Egypt clearly looks forward to a slain lamb which is substituted for the people's sins (Exodus 12:1-51).
- The Day of Atonement, observed annually by the priests of Israel, looked forward to a coming redeemer and substitute (Leviticus 16:1-34).

While these passages, among many others, anticipate the cross of Christ, none is more graphic and pointed as what we find in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. This chapter offers what Derek Tidball calls something *daringly new*. (Tidball, p. 101) This is the first passage in the Bible that speaks of a sacrifice of a human being for our sins!

The prophet Isaiah lived some eight centuries before the time of Jesus. The book bearing his name is essentially a collection of sermons, oracles, poems and prophecies to the Jews living in Israel during his time. Isaiah is, in the final analysis, a book about the resolution of the profound problem of sin. The prophet decries the sins of Israel, foretells God's wrath that is coming from the Babylonians, and then repeatedly speaks of a future glory for the faithful people of God. In the second half of Isaiah, the prophet gives the reader a glimpse of both the goodness and the vastness of God's coming kingdom.

But how will the people be delivered from God's judgment and saved into a glorious kingdom? In the latter chapters of his book, the prophet introduces us to a character called *the servant*. Isaiah's book has four *servant songs*, and our passage is one of those songs.

As we read these songs, we learn of the broad plans of God for this servant.¹ Through the servant God will bless the whole world!

And now the LORD says. . . It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:5-6 (NIV)

But how? How can Messiah accomplish such a grand purpose?

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 gives us the answer. Barry Webb, a commentator on Isaiah, exclaims, *[Isaiah 51-55] reveal the riches of God's grace more brilliantly than any other part of the book. They bring us to the very heart of Isaiah's gospel.*²

¹ *The Message of Isaiah*, IVP, 1996. Who is this servant? At times the servant seems to be Isaiah himself, or the faithful remnant within Israel. But eventually we realize that the servant is none other than the Lord's messiah.

² Webb, p. 204. Speaking of our passage, the last of the servant songs, Webb writes, *This fourth Song is the most elaborate and poignant of them all. It is the jewel in the crown of Isaiah's theology, the focal point of his vision.* (Webb, p. 209)

Before going on in this study read these 15 verses. Read them slowly. Draw some preliminary conclusions as you ponder this rich section of Scripture. As you read consider the pronouns in the passage.

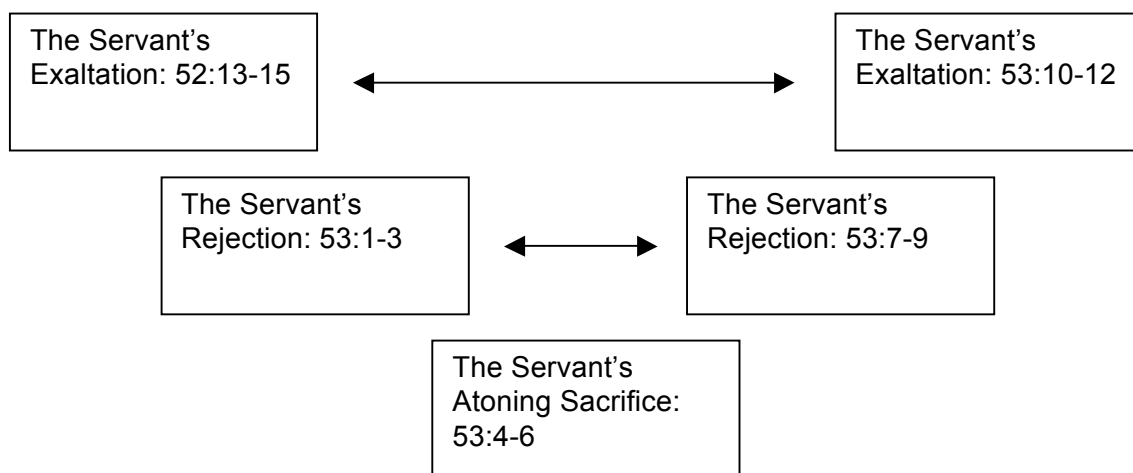
I in this passage typically refers to the Lord God.

He refers to the servant.

We refers to the servant's disciples, who themselves need the servant to bear their guilt (53:4–6).

As you read, see if you can identify the speaker in the various sections of this passage.

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner points out that this poem [song] is *unusually symmetrical*. [It] is in five paragraphs of three verses each. Consider the following structure as you read through this beautiful Servant Song one more time.



It is probable that Isaiah 53 sounds very familiar even to those who have never read Isaiah. The reason for this is that the New Testament quotes these verses often. Jesus himself sees his mission as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53!

Consider the following verses. What insight do they lend to the meaning of our passage?

Matthew 8:16-17

Luke 22:37

John 12:38

Acts 8:30-35

Romans 15:21

53:4-6 are the center of this chapter (see the chart above). They speak of the servant being *stricken by God*. The verb used here has the same root as the Hebrew word for leprosy. The similarity is such that a Jewish tradition arose holding that the Messiah would be a leper.

Notice the objective and subjective sides of the servant's suffering in this verse (*stricken by God* and *afflicted*).

Think about these verses. They are highly personal. The Hebrew text literally reads, *Surely, it was our infirmities he took up, our sorrows he bore*. How do they inform your understanding of the cross?

Sit with this for a moment. Jesus went through an excruciatingly painful death to bear your infirmities and sorrows. What is your emotional response?



53:7 We might see the phrase *He was led like a lamb to the slaughter* as the centerpiece of this song. The idea, for the Jewish mind, is the substitutionary sacrifice of an unblemished lamb at Passover (Exodus 12).

Find seven statements regarding this sacrifice from the reader's viewpoint (53:1-6) and from God's viewpoint (53:8-12).

Human Viewpoint 53:1-6

1. vs. 4 he took *our* infirmities
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Divine Viewpoint 53:8-12

1. vs. 8 he was stricken for *my* people
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

53:10 is one of the most stunning verses in all the Bible. In the ESV the passage reads, *Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief.*

Consider other translations:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him (KJV).

But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting (Him) to grief. (NASB)

The verb *to please* is the same Hebrew verb used in Isaiah 1:11.

"The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?" says the LORD. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

What profound truth do we learn about the cross of Christ by comparing Isaiah 1:11 with Isaiah 53:10?

In our time we don't sacrifice animals to God on an altar. What are some equivalent offerings we might make to God which God might view as meaningless due to the attitude of our hearts? Consider your offerings. How is the attitude of your heart?

53:10 speaks of the cross of Christ. What death in *burnt offerings* couldn't accomplish (Isaiah 1:11), the death of Jesus on the cross did accomplish. Notice the force of 53:10. The death of Jesus was not the result of an accident of history, a misunderstanding by the Jews or hostility by the Romans. It was *the Lord* who sent Jesus to the cross. It was the Father who *was pleased* to bruise Jesus.

Compare the following verses with this stunning truth.

John 10:17-18

Romans 3:23-26

Ephesians 5:2

Philippians 2:8-9

Hebrews 2:9

53:11 Alec Motyer, an Old Testament scholar who is the author of a massive and excellent commentary on Isaiah, says this verse is the *fullest statement of atonement theology ever penned*.¹ See if you can find all that Motyer finds in 53:11.

- The Servant knows the needs to be met and what must be done.
- The righteous one, the Servant, is both fully acceptable to the God our sins have offended and he has been appointed to the task.

¹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 1993, p. 442.



- As the righteous one he is free from the contamination of sin.
- The Servant identified himself fully with our sin and need.
- The emphatic pronoun *he* in the last stanza of the verse shows his personal commitment to his role.
- He accomplished his task fully.

1 Peter 2:21-25 is the New Testament equivalent of Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Read these verses. How do they illuminate Isaiah's prophecy?

Envision explaining this to a curious non-believer. What are the main points you would present? What is the most important?

Pray Isaiah 53:4-6 together as a homegroup. *Surely you took our infirmities. . . and carried our sorrows. . .* Allow these verses to take you into a time of both confession and celebration.

Sermon Notes



Study Three

The Crucified Messiah

Matthew 26–27

Brethren, when you are troubled, rest with us by looking to Calvary. And if the first glance does not quiet you, look, and look, and look again, for every grief will die where Jesus died. Not to Bethlehem, where the stars of Christmas burn, do we look for our greatest comfort, but to that place where the sun was darkened at midday and the face of eternal love was veiled.

Charles Spurgeon

At the outset of this study we read Malcolm Muggeridge's comment that Jesus' death is *the most famous death in history*. The Gospel writers bear witness to Jesus' death as not only the most famous in history, but as the most important. Each of the Gospel writers devotes ample time to the *Passion Week* of Jesus and each describes the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death of the hero in their story. Each Gospel writer tells the story of the cross from a slightly different perspective.

By the very way in which they tell the story they offer us an interpretation of the cross of Christ. They do so implicitly – in their choice of words and details, and in the emphases they each bring to the writing of their accounts. All four report, with an eye to historical accuracy, the occurrences of the one, same event. They have a great deal in common with each other, and the differences between them should not be overstated. It is easy to harmonize the accounts even where they differ in detail. Yet each brings a distinctive perspective to bear. (Tidball, p. 118)

During the next four weeks / studies we will examine each of these perspectives on the cross.

Before going on in this study read Matthew 26–27. Matthew takes his time in these chapters. Together they comprise 141 verses! The reading of these chapters is more important than anything that follows in this study. Read and make a note or two of the points which stand out and the questions which come to your mind using the space on the next page.

Questions

Points which stand out

In many ways the whole of Matthew's Gospel prepares the reader for the crucifixion of Jesus. King Herod, threatened by the birth of Jesus, kills innocent boys in Bethlehem (2:16-18). This sets the stage for the conflict of two kingdoms. In the end, Pilate will complete what Herod attempted, he will sentence to death the only innocent man ever to live.

But the cross comes as no surprise to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. All along he is in complete control as we will see. Three times before the Passion Week Jesus predicts all that happens in the final week of his life.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (16:21)

When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." (17:22-23)

"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (20:18-19)

Matt. 26:2 "As you know, the Passover is two days away — and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

Our look at these chapters is necessarily brief.¹ Let us focus on five themes of Jesus' cross that Matthew wants his readers to see.²

¹ When we studied Matthew's Gospel as a church we spent seven weeks on this section of Scripture.

² See Tidball, pp. 117-134.



Fulfilled Prophecy

Ten times in this Gospel the reader learns that something happens so *that* the Scriptures might be fulfilled.¹ He also alludes to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in a number of ways. His point is clear: the yearnings of the prophets are coming to fruition in Jesus of Nazareth. History is reaching its climax; Messiah has come!

Notice the explicit references to fulfilled prophecy in these chapters:

26:31

26:54

26:56²

There are also many allusions to the Psalms in Matthew's account.

- Wine is mixing with gall draws from Psalm 69:21
- The casting of lots for Jesus' clothes looks back to Psalm 22:18
- The mocking of Jesus alludes to Psalm 22:7

And, the darkness which covers the land as Jesus dies draws from Amos 8:9.

What lessons can and should you draw from his emphasis on fulfilled prophecy in the cross of Christ?

Blood

It is often pointed out that the gold jewelry we wear depicting the cross would be quite startling to a 1st century believer. As Mel Gibson's 2004 movie, *The Passion of the Christ* graphically portrayed, the cross was a bloody affair. And Matthew draws attention to the *blood* of Jesus far more than the other Gospel writers.

¹ Mathew 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 21:4-5; 27:9-10.

² It is interesting that there are no explicit references to fulfilled prophecy during the crucifixion itself. John Carroll and Joel Green write, *Although the crucifixion scene lacks any explicit Scripture citations, it is replete with biblical echoes and allusions. The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*, 1995, cited in Tidball, p. 122.

Find the various references to blood in these chapters.

26:28

27:4

27:6

27:8

27:24

27:25

Tidball points out that Matthew's references to blood are both *factual* and *symbolic*.

First, Jesus shed *innocent blood*. The words of Judas are correct in 27:4 when he says he has betrayed *innocent blood*.

Second, Jesus' blood is the blood of the covenant.

26:27-29 What are we to make of the communion cup?

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (26:28).

Jesus' words look back to Exodus 24:8 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. In Exodus, Moses ratifies God's covenant (agreement, contract) with the nation Israel with blood. In our culture we *sign* a contract. In Semitic culture a covenant was *cut*, or made with the shedding of blood.

Centuries later the prophet Jeremiah looked forward to a *new covenant* which would replace the old.

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:31-34



With the communion cup the new covenant has come! In the blood of thousands upon thousands of Passover lambs through the centuries not a single sin was truly forgiven (Hebrews 10:3-4). In the blood of Christ our sins are finally and truly paid for. God will *remember our sins no more!*

What is your personal experience of this *new covenant*? How has it impacted your life?

Santa Barbara Community Church celebrates the Lord's Supper almost every Sunday. What are the benefits and possible dangers of such frequency?

How do you prepare to take the Lord's Supper? Share your answers with one another in order to glean ideas to enrich your practice of taking the Lord's Supper.

Innocence

Matthew makes much of the innocence of Jesus. His trial is fraught with illegalities.

No trial should have been held at night, or during a festival. No sentence of death should have been reached in a single day, and a counsel for the defense should have been provided. (Tidball, pp. 126-127)

Furthermore, Matthew makes it clear that *the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward* (26:59-60).

Only in Matthew's Gospel:

- We read of the suicide of Judas. He has betrayed *innocent blood* (27:4).
- We learn of the dream of Pilate's wife (27:19). She calls him an *innocent man* (NIV).
- The Jews take explicit responsibility for the crucifixion saying, *His blood be on us and on our children!* (27:25).

Matthew, more than any other Gospel writer, stresses the innocence of Jesus.

[He] points to the deeper reasons that underlay his death. The servant songs of Isaiah bring the vacation and passion of Jesus into focus. Jesus died, like the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, not for his own sins but because the sins of others were laid on him. It is as he bore their guilt and the weight of their sin, by suffering the death they deserved, that their oppression and judgment are taken away and healing can come. (Tidball, p. 130)

As Carroll and Green point out:

[The] death of Jesus—precisely because it is the shedding of innocent, sacrificial blood—creates the possibility of forgiveness even for the persons who bear responsibility for putting him to death.¹

Ultimately it was not the Jews or the Romans who put innocent Jesus on the cross, it was our sins that compelled Jesus to die (Matthew 20:28). What Matthew is teaching us is that an innocent man died in our place. What are some words or phrases that express your gratitude for this incalculable gift of grace? Share these with your homegroup.

Potency

When Jesus dies in Matthew's Gospel we find what one writer calls, *apocalyptic fireworks*. Jesus utters what has been called his *cry of dereliction*, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (27:46). In the first Gospel his cry is answered very loudly.

First, the sky is darkened (27:45). This appears to fulfill the prophecy of Amos who said that when the Day of the Lord arrived,

I [the Lord God] will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight (Amos 8:9).

With the death of Jesus, ironically, the Day of the Lord has finally arrived!

Second, the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom.

One prominent feature of Jewish worship through the centuries was that of distance. God was holy, the worshipper was not. Thus, it was a fearful event to be in the presence of God.

¹ John Carroll and Joel Green eds., *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*, Hendrickson, 1995, p. 48.



The people were separated from God even in their liturgy of worship. In the Jerusalem Temple only the high priest would enter the *Holy of Holies*, and that was only once a year to make a blood sacrifice for the sins of the nation. This inner sanctuary was shielded by a veil, a curtain. But here the curtain is torn supernaturally, from top to bottom. A later biblical writer will un-pack the meaning of this rending of the curtain.¹ Because of the work of Jesus we have access to God! Now we are invited to *draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith* (Hebrews 10:22).

With the death of Jesus the curtain was miraculously torn. Those who are *in Christ* have access to God himself. What does this access mean to you?

What are the implications of the torn curtain for your Christian life?

How would it be possible to take this access for granted, or to be too casual with the access we have been granted?

Third, the dead are raised (27:51b-53). Only in Matthew do we read of the dead rising from their tombs. Matthew doesn't answer any of our questions such as, Who were these dead people? How long did they live after their resurrection? Et cetera. No, Matthew wants the reader to see that Ezekiel's prophecy of God opening graves and giving life to the dead is fulfilled in Christ (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

The raising of these holy ones is a foretaste of the resurrection to which all believers can look forward. Through the death of Jesus a new day has arrived, a day when death has been defeated by death, and resurrection to life eternal has been made possible. (Tidball, p. 133)

This last emphasis of Matthew regarding the death of Jesus comes to its climax when the gentile centurion stands at the foot of the cross and says, *Truly this was the Son of God*.

Describe the potency of the cross in your life? In what ways are you different because of the death of Jesus?

¹ See Hebrews 9:25-28; 10:19-25.

Indeed, because Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) we are men and women who are made new in him! Spend time praying that the resurrection life Jesus gives will be a present reality in our lives even as we look forward to his coming.

Sermon Notes



Study Four

Suffering Servant / Triumphant King

Mark 14-15

Oh, I pray you, lend your ears to such faint words as I can write on a subject all too high for me, the march of the world's Maker along the way of His great sorrow! Your Redeemer traverses the rugged path of suffering, along which He went with heaving heart and heavy footsteps, that He might pave a royal road of mercy for His enemies.

Charles Spurgeon

At the close of Study One, we read a quotation from the 17th century preacher Jonathan Edwards. This pastor-theologian captured what he called *the conjunction of such really diverse excellencies* in the person and work of Jesus. Read and ponder this following quotation a second time.

[In Jesus Christ] meet infinite highness and infinite condescension; infinite justice and infinite grace; infinite glory and lowest humility; infinite majesty and transcendent meekness; deepest reverence toward God and equality with God; worthiness of good and the greatest patience under the suffering of evil; a great spirit of obedience and supreme dominion over heaven and earth; absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation; self-sufficiency and an entire trust and reliance on God. He is the lion who is the lamb.¹

Indeed, Jesus is *the lion who is the lamb*, and we see this clearly in the way in which the Gospel of Mark presents the cross. On the one hand, Jesus goes to the cross as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. On the other hand, Jesus goes in triumphant victory.

¹ From Edwards' sermon, *The Excellency of Christ*.

In the 1990s Robert Gundry wrote a massive commentary on the Gospel of Mark consisting of over one million words! The title of his commentary is telling, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*. In Mark, Gundry writes, *the death of Jesus broods over the entire Gospel*.¹ Another New Testament scholar describes Mark as a *passion narrative with a long introduction*.² In fact, from the moment Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah (Mark 8:29), Mark's gospel is consumed with the cross. Three times Jesus makes a statement to the effect that his destiny is crucifixion in Jerusalem (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:45).

Derek Tidball points out that each of these predictions of the cross carries a *note of inevitability*, the Son of Man *must* suffer and die. The third of these predictions is remarkably detailed and comprehensive. Jesus is marching toward Jerusalem to be crucified!

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

Mark 10:32-34

Read Mark 14:1–15:39 before going on in this study. Make a note of the details that Mark includes in his telling of this story. Reading and interacting with the text itself is the most important part of our study. As you read, remember, Mark is the Gospel in a hurry. It is action-packed and moves quickly from one thing to the next (11 times Mark uses the word *immediately* to move the reader on quickly). But here Mark slows down to a crawl. Read and ponder this darkest night in the world's history.

Questions

Details

1 Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*, 1993, p. 15.

2 M. Kahler, cited in Tidball, p. 135. William Wessel, a commentator on Mark, adds,

The importance of the passion [suffering and death] and resurrection of our Lord for the early church is evidenced by the relatively large amount of space the narrative takes in each of the Gospels and especially in Mark. Out of Mark's 661 verses, 128 are devoted to the passion and resurrection story, and a total of 242 are devoted to the last week (from the triumphal entry to the resurrection) of our Lord's life. (Wessel, *Mark*, 1984, p. 754)

Now let us consider two major themes that Mark presents in his passion story.

Jesus as the Suffering Servant

Mark 10:45 sets up the reader to think of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Just as the suffering servant bore the sin of *many* (Isaiah 53:12), so also Jesus will give his life as a ransom for *many* (Mark 10:45). The cup of the Lord's Supper in Mark is *poured out for many* (Mark 14:24).

Consider three areas where Jesus fulfills the suffering servant prophecy of Isaiah 53.¹

He suffers as a servant

William Lane, a New Testament scholar and commentator on Mark, points out:

The reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank was achieved when Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve. He voluntarily veiled his glory as the Son of Man . . . and assumed the form of a slave who performed his service unto death because this was the will of God (cf. Phil. 2:6-8).²

In Jesus' kingdom the first will be last and the last will be first. Tidball points out,

Significantly, each time Jesus predicts his death it is, in fact, in the context of arguing about power, leadership, glory and greatness. (Tidball, p. 138)

But Jesus insists both with his words, and in the final hours of his life that the way to greatness and glory is in servitude and submission.

What are the practical lessons we should take from Jesus' example in suffering as a servant?

How have you put these lessons into practice? To put it differently, how would your life be different if Jesus wasn't your model for life?

¹ Based on Tidball, pp. 137-141.

² William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 1974, p. 383.

He suffers silently

Compare Isaiah 53:7 with Mark 14:61. Notice the parallel.

In Mark 14-15 Jesus is treated like a helpless lamb. He is *handed over* several times to be crucified. Judas hands Jesus over to the chief priests. The chief priests *led Jesus* (14:53) to the high priest. Jesus is then *delivered over* to Pilate (15:1). Pilate *delivered him to be crucified* (15:15).

The strong impression given is that the action appears to lie with others. Jesus is portrayed as somewhat passive, allowing events to unfold around him. (Tidball, p. 138)

Again, how should Jesus' silence inform the way we react or don't react when we are wronged? What is the place of *speaking up* for our rights when we are wronged? How should Christian disciples be different in this area of life? Compare 1 Peter 2:13-15 as you think about your answer.

He suffers in order to save

Recall again, Mark 10:45. Jesus came to give his life *as a ransom for many*.

It is in Mark's Gospel that we learn that Jesus is the Passover lamb that was sacrificed to spare Israel of her sin (Mark 14:12, 22).

Compare Isaiah 53:6-7 with Mark 14:12. What similarities do you see?

In Mark 15:31 we find what might be the supreme irony of the gospel. The religious authorities mock, *He saved others; he cannot save himself*. As Tidball points out, *The irony is that by refusing to save himself, he did save others. His mission was accomplished*. (Tidball, p. 141)

Consider Jesus as the Suffering Servant. How does this theme affect your wonder over the cross?

How does this theme impact the way in which you live?



If you are a Christian, consider your life. What words would you use to characterize your response (thoughts, words, actions) to Christ's act on the cross as the Suffering Servant? Appropriate, adequate, stellar, lacking, or ??? What could you change?

Jesus as Conquering King

At the same time Mark presents Jesus as a suffering servant, he goes to great lengths to show the cross as the moment of Jesus' triumph. His coronation is on the cross. The cross is the supreme achievement of Jesus and the fulfillment of his mission.

The Jesus of Mark is identified as *the Son of God* in the very first verse of the Gospel. But we never hear those words from a human voice until the moment of Jesus' death when the Roman centurion agrees with Mark and says, *Truly this man was the Son of God* (Mark 15:39). This is his moment of triumph!

There are many ways in which Mark wants to make sure we don't miss the point.

Jesus is referred to as *king* no fewer than six times in these chapters, sometimes with breathtaking irony. Consider the following verses:

15:2

15:9

15:12

15:18

15:26

15:32

The Triumphant King

New Testament scholar Thomas Schmidt has shown persuasively that Mark's Gospel is written to show Jesus in triumphant procession much in the same way Nero was coroneted in triumphal procession.¹

¹ Schmidt takes the very popular view that Mark wrote his Gospel to gentile believers living in Rome.

What details does Mark include along the way to show us Jesus as the conquering king?

At a couple of points, it is obvious that Mark employs double meaning in the crucifixion narrative. No audience, then or now, could miss the point of putting a robe and crown on Jesus and of the inscription proclaiming him simply “King of the Jews” —obviously things meant to mock him, but the audience knows what the soldiers don’t, that he really is the King.¹

But there is much more that might not be so obvious to readers separated from Mark by almost two thousand years. Consider two other possible double meanings in Mark’s account of Jesus’ death.

15:16 The gathering of the guard

Schmidt points out that the Praetorian guard made or broke the power of Roman emperors. This guard was invariably present on the occasion of a triumph; and it was called together at dawn to begin the festivities. Schmidt writes,

It would be highly unusual for the entire soldiery (at least two hundred men) to be called together early in the morning to mock and beat a single prisoner. For someone who lived in Rome, this and the details to follow would evoke a familiar scene, the preparation for a triumph.

15:16-17 The robe and the crown

Schmidt draws our attention to the fact that there are many Roman accounts of an emperor or military victor being honored while clad in a ceremonial purple robe with a crown on his head.

Both the combination and the very presence of these symbols is striking. The wearing of purple was outlawed for anyone below equestrian rank. The only available robe of this kind would be that of the procurator Pontius Pilate, but it is inconceivable that he would lend such a precious garment to be struck and spat upon by common soldiers. Along similarly practical lines, one wonders where in the courtyard of a palace thorns would be available to form a crown.

The Hidden King

The kingship of Jesus is hidden at every turn. Instead of riding into Jerusalem on a warrior’s horse he rides on a colt (Mark 11:7ff.).

¹ This and other quotations from Thomas Schmidt are from an unpublished paper, *Mark 15:16-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession*.



Jesus is seen to be a fraud by the religious authorities, but an unnamed woman at the bottom of the social strata, recognizes him in his regal greatness and anoints Jesus with expensive perfume.

Jesus said that she was preparing him for his burial. But equally she was anointing him as king, for it is through his death and burial, as well as his resurrection, that he is recognized as king of Israel. (Tidball, p. 143)

The Unexpected King

Everything about the kingship of Jesus is unexpected. He suffers to save, he dies so that others might have life. Jesus is glorified in his shame, he is triumphant in his tragedy. His kingship is, indeed, unexpected. N.T. Wright points out how unusual, how unexpected this kingship is.

We know of about fifteen other messianic movements in Judea in the two centuries surrounding Jesus' day, from 50 BC to about AD 150. They were all without exception nationalist movements, based on a groundswell of popular expectation and zeal. None of these would-be Messiahs, so far as we have any indication at all, had any thought that their cause would come to fruition through his own death.¹

Jesus inaugurated his kingdom by dying. During his ministry he told his disciples that they should do the same. Read and respond to the teaching of Jesus. What do these verses mean to you personally? Pray for one another in this regard.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Mark 8:34-36

¹ N.T. Wright, *The Crown and the Fire: Meditations on the Cross and the Life of the Spirit*, 1992, p. 121, cited in Tidball, p. 144.

Sermon Notes

Study Five

The Compassionate Savior

Luke 22:1–23:56

We see in Simon's carrying the cross a picture of what the Church is to do throughout all generations. Mark then, Christian, Jesus does not suffer so as to exclude your suffering. He bears a cross, not that you may escape it but that you may endure it. Christ does exempt you from sin but not from sorrow. He takes the curse of the cross, but He does not take the cross of the curse away from you.

Charles Spurgeon



In Luke 19 Jesus announces his mission clearly:

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10

As Luke, the longest of the four Gospels, moves toward the climactic moment of the death of Jesus, the author weaves the details of his story to show Jesus doing just this, saving the lost.

The first thing we notice about Luke's account of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus is that it is so different from Matthew's and Mark's. Luke leaves out much the other Gospel writers include, but he gives us a number of details and sayings that we don't find in the other Gospels. Consider the following:¹

Luke leaves out:

- The anointing of Jesus in Bethany.
- The sorrow of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- The desertion of the disciples at Jesus' arrest.
- The false witnesses at his trial.
- The mockery of the Roman soldiers and the crowds.
- The frustration of Pilate over Jesus' silence.
- The *cry of dereliction* from the mouth of Jesus on the cross.²

¹ See Tidball, pp. 152-153.

² *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*, (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

On the other hand, only Luke includes:

- The comfort given to Jesus by an angel in Gethsemane (22:43).
- The healing of Malchus' ear which was cut off by Peter (22:51).
- Pilate's three declarations of Jesus' innocence (23:4, 14, 22).
- The trial before Herod (23:6-16).
- The company of weeping women who mourn the crucifixion (23:27-32).
- The conversion of the dying thief (23:39-43).
- Jesus' plea to the Father for his captor's forgiveness (23:34).
- Jesus' promise to the thief that he will be in Paradise (23:43).
- Jesus' committing of his *spirit* to the Father (23:46).

Clearly Luke has his own intentions in the way in which he tells the story of the death of Christ.

Before going any further in this study, read Luke 22:1–23:56. Again, make notes of any details which stand out and any questions which arise.

Questions

Details



Derek Tidball comments on the overall presentation Luke makes in these verses:

Luke throws open the window, high above the scene of Calvary, and presents us with a third description of the death of Jesus. Choosing new colours, he depicts the events (skilled artist that he is) in a startling fresh light, picking out features others have omitted. Gone are both the brooding darkness of Mark and the triumphant supernaturalism of Matthew. Present is a very human Christ who is, above all, both a trusting Son and a compassionate Saviour. That is just what we would expect from Luke, whose theme throughout the Gospel is the good news of a broad and deep salvation; salvation 'in all its fullness to all persons.' (Tidball, p. 151, quoting J.B. Green)

The Deliberate Victim

Luke draws out, uniquely, the divine inevitability of the cross of Christ. From the beginning of the Gospel in the songs / prophecies of Mary (1:46-55) and Zechariah (1:67-79) Jesus has a destiny to fulfill. Luke continues to sharpen this focus as his story is developed.

Compare the following verses and notice that the death of Christ happens according to God's plan and determination.

9:22

9:51

18:31

22:22

22:37 Notice what passage in the Old Testament Jesus quotes.

23:9 See Isaiah 53:7

23:33-34 See Isaiah 53:12

Notice Jesus' interpretation of his own crucifixion and suffering with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? (24:26)

The point of all this is that nothing happened to Jesus by *accident*. The passion of Jesus was according to the plan of God to accomplish the salvation of sinners.

What difference should this make in our understanding of and appreciation for the cross? In other words, why do you think Luke went to such lengths to put this in his Gospel?

While Luke wants us to know that the crucifixion took place according to God's plan, he also draws attention to other forces and people who were at work and responsible for Jesus' death.

Satan

Notice 22:3 and 22:31. Satan is at work on this dark night.

Compare 22:53. When Jesus is arrested the power of darkness has been unleashed. Considering the difficulty in understanding this event in history, respond to Tidball's explanation:

Here was a battle of cosmic proportions, far greater than anything that could be explained by the events on earth. Satan though, was unaware that in playing his dangerous game he was paradoxically fulfilling God's plan and simultaneously overreaching himself and spelling his own defeat. But for the moment, evil seemed to triumph. (Tidball, p. 154)

Pilate and Herod

Notice 23:12 (again, only in Luke). The secular authorities unite to destroy the teacher from Galilee. Unlikely alliances are made in the darkness of evil.

Judas (22:3-6, 22)

Neither Luke nor the other Gospel writers probe Judas' motives, but they agree that this disciple bears responsibility for Jesus' arrest. Notice the sheer darkness of 22:5. The NIV says the chief priests and officers *were delighted* when Judas offered to betray Jesus. Judas, in Luke, is in it for the money.



Notice 22:22. How is it that Judas can be acting according to God's plan and yet still be held accountable for his actions? What does this teach us about God? What does it teach us about our own responsibility for sin?

Peter

Peter's denials of Jesus are vigorous and sharp (see 22:54-62). Respond to the following comment on Peter's failure.

[S]ince the cross is the place where God's love embraces failure and tragedy, there was no better place to fail than on the way to the cross. Peter's failure was precisely God's opportunity.¹

The Council (22:66-71)

What is the central issue in this dialogue (?) between Jesus and the chief priest / scribes? Why is this the central issue in our dialogue about Jesus?

It is clear that the council's religion got in the way of their understanding of Jesus. How might our religion do the same? How might Christians as individuals and SBCC as a body of believers guard against being molded and driven by *religion* not by Jesus?

1 Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hard *At the Cross: Meditations on People Who Were There*, 1999, p. 30.

Pilate (23:1-5, 13-25)

As we saw above, in various ways Pilate declares Jesus' innocence three times. Pilate is a governor looking for a third way with Jesus, but there is none.

How should the example of Pilate inform our response / reaction to Jesus?

Herod (23:8-12)

Herod had had, at the very least, a testy relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. In 13:31 the Pharisees tell Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. Here Herod simply passes Jesus, the savior of the world, back to Pilate. His cowardice is confirmed.

The Compassionate Savior

The most outstanding feature of Luke's portrait of the death of Jesus is the care and compassion [Jesus] showed to people as he wended his way to the cross at a time when, surely, he had every right to be preoccupied with his own suffering. (Tidball, p. 159)

Notice this compassion in Jesus' care for four people or groups of people.

- The healing of Malchus (22:49-51)
- The women of Jerusalem (23:27-28)
- The forgiveness of executioners (23:34)
- The dying criminal (23:40-43)

Notice the comprehensive compassion of Jesus even as he is being arrested, tried, and crucified.



Read and respond to the following. Let it lead you into the worship of our savior.

Jesus, who had been a compassionate Saviour throughout his life—healing, releasing, forgiving—continues to be a compassionate Saviour in his passion and death. Indeed, it was through his death that he fully entered into his vocation, since it was only by his accepting the weight of sin and death in place of others that he could release them from their debts and free them from the burdens that oppressed them. (Tidball, p. 163)

sermon notes

Study Six

Majestic King, Glorious Substitute

John 18:1–19:42

Thank God the cross is a hiding place. It furnishes for guilty men a shelter from the all-seeing eye so that justice need not see and strike. When God lifts up His Son and makes Him visible, He hides the sin of men.

Charles Spurgeon

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

John 10:17-18a



John's portrait of the cross is so different! It is almost nothing like that of the earlier Gospel writers.¹ John's description of the events of Golgotha has been called *nothing short of breath-taking*. Tidball calls it a *glory narrative*.

Matthew sees Jesus' death as a violent and bloody one that led to his supernatural vindication. Mark sees it as the dark suffering of a servant through which he became a ransom. Luke sees it as the act of a loving and trusting Son, through which he became the Saviour. (Tidball, p. 168)

But in John, Jesus is the meek and majestic king. The cross is the *hour* of Jesus' glory, the moment of his supreme exaltation. From start to finish Jesus is in control. Jesus makes the first move to meet his adversaries (14:31). The authorities fall down when they come to arrest Jesus. Jesus tells Peter to put away his sword and he makes provision for his disciples even as he is being arrested. We almost feel sorry for Pilate as Jesus exerts his authority over the Roman governor.

¹ John wrote his Gospel late, perhaps 90ad. Most scholars believe he was familiar with Matthew, Mark and Luke and wrote, at least in part, to compliment their Gospels.

As was the case with Luke, John might be noticed for what he leaves out of the story. In the Fourth Gospel the reader looks in vain for:

- The Lord's Supper
- The agony in the Garden of Gethsemane
- The trial before the Sanhedrin
- Simon's help in carrying Jesus' cross
- The cry of dereliction from the cross
- Darkness to descend over Jerusalem
- An earthquake accompanying the death of Jesus

But before thinking about what we don't find in John, let's see what we do find. Before continuing on in this study guide, read John 18:1–19:42. By now we are becoming quite familiar with how the Gospel writers present the cross of Christ. Make notes on how John shows Jesus in control of his arrest and crucifixion. Notice how he goes out of his way to fulfill prophecy (either his own or biblical prophecy). Compare these notes with one another in your homegroup. What questions does your reading bring to mind?

Jesus in Control

Questions

Jesus the Majestic King

John composes his Gospel to present Jesus as the majestic king who is dying on purpose and for a purpose. He is the king, he is in control.

As the trial and crucifixion unfold, Jesus 'remains in the director's chair throughout.' It was not just that he seemed to anticipate everything (13:1; 18:4), but that he planned everything. His hand was never forced. He never seemed to act under duress. His life was not taken from him, but voluntarily laid down by him (10:17-18), in his own time and in the way he chose. Every detail John includes lends weight to both his regal dignity and his royal authority. (Tidball, p. 170)



Consider the ways John shows Jesus' kingship to the reader:

Jesus' Timetable

Jesus will not be rushed. Read the following verses in John and notice the *hour* or the *time* (NIV) of Jesus. He is in control.

2:4

4:21, 23

7:30

8:20

12:23

12:27

13:1

17:1

Jesus' arrest

It is Jesus who begins his own arrest by sending Judas to betray him. It is Jesus who ushers the disciples and himself to the Garden of Gethsemane in order to be captured (14:31). When Judas and his band of soldiers come to find Jesus, the king *came forward* and makes the first move by asking, *Whom do you seek?* (18:4).

Jesus' trials

When Jesus is before Annas (18:12-14, 19-24) our Lord is not silent as in other accounts. Instead, Jesus does most of the talking! He puts Annas on the defensive and Jesus is sent to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin.

John doesn't record that conversation, but eventually Jesus ends up before Pilate.

What does Jesus say to Pilate with regard to his kingship? What kind of king is Jesus? What is his kingdom like?

18:37-38 It has been said that Jesus puts Pilate on trial. How does he do this? In what way does Jesus put each of us on trial in this verse? Do you say Jesus is king? What is the evidence of that in your life?

Jesus' crucifixion (19:1-37)

Pilate caves in to political pressure and *delivered him over to be crucified*. What elements of John's description of the crucifixion point to Jesus as king? Share these together as a homegroup.

Jesus the Glorious Substitute

There is no question that John builds his story to the climax of the cross. His Gospel has been full of *signs* which point the reader toward faith in Jesus. With the cross we encounter God's supreme sign to his children. Think about it. All of Jesus' other signs were temporary. The water which was turned into wine was either consumed or it soured and was dumped out on the ground. The food received by the 5000 was eaten, digested and eliminated. Lazarus, though raised from the dead, ended up in a grave for a second time. But the cross produced results for all eternity. Here we come to the core of biblical history: the offering of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world.

Notice how the whole gospel is framed with the theme of Jesus as the Lamb of God. Read John 1:29.

19:14 The timing of the crucifixion during what we call Holy Week differs a bit from Gospel to Gospel.¹ In John we learn the exact moment Jesus' trial is ending. This is the *day of Preparation of the Passover*, and it is *the sixth hour*. The timing is pregnant with meaning. This is the moment when observant Jews quit working to observe the Passover. This is the hour when they remove the leaven (yeast) from their homes according to the instructions given to Moses. Most important, this is the time when the lambs are slaughtered for the Passover meal.

¹ This does not mean the Gospels are at odds with one another. For a good harmonization see Craig Bloomberg, *the Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 1987, pp. 175-180.



Why do you think John includes these details of timing in his account? What did they mean then? What difference do they make to the non-Jewish believer today? Do they affect your faith?

The last words of Jesus on the cross in John are loaded with meaning. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus cries out with a loud voice and we are not told what he said. In Luke, Jesus says, *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!* (Luke 23:46). But what are the last words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel? *It is finished!* (19:30).

What is finished? Jesus has fulfilled the work that the Father has sent him to accomplish (17:4). Two more details, unique to the Fourth Gospel, need to be examined before we leave this study.

Jesus' Thirst

Only in John does Jesus say *I thirst* (19:28). He is offered wine to quench his thirst.¹ The detail we should notice is that this wine was offered on a *hyssop branch*. This is the same plant-like branch that was used in Exodus 12:22 on the night of the Passover. Then the blood of the Passover lamb was used to mark the door-frames of the Israelites' homes so that God's wrath would be averted. Here the one John the Baptist called *the lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world* is offering his blood to avert God's wrath against our sins once and for all. Jesus is our substitute.

Jesus' bones

Only in John do we learn that Jesus was already dead when the soldiers came to hasten the deaths of the three condemned men. What do we see in 19:33? They did not break his bones. Again, a deliberate connection to the Passover is made. In Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 instructions were given that the Passover lamb's bones must not be broken. Jesus is the perfect substitute. Caiaphas' prophecy has come to pass, *It is better . . . that one man should die for the people, [than] that the whole nation should perish* (11:50).

¹ This is different from the sedative offered in Mark 15:23 which Jesus refused.

Think through what you have just studied. What happened? Write down some specifics. Carefully walk through this great event as a group, deliberately adding details as you go along. Help those newer to the faith to understand better and the rest to be reminded why they live as Christians.

Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away our sins. Read, respond to, relish and rejoice over this truth!

The only way for God's holy love to be satisfied is for his holiness to be directed in judgment upon his appointed substitute, in order that his love may be directed towards us in forgiveness. . . . For in order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself, God, through Christ substituted himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice. The cross was an act simultaneously of punishment and amnesty, severity and grace, justice and mercy. (Stott, pp. 158-159)

Sermon Notes



Study Seven

Adopted and Blood Bought

Ephesians 1:3-14

If our Master said, "I thirst," do we expect every day to drink of streams from Lebanon? He was innocent, and yet He thirsted. Shall we marvel if guilty ones are now and then chastened?

Charles Spurgeon

After a brief and somewhat typical greeting (Ephesians 1:1-2), Paul begins one of the loftiest sentences of the New Testament. In the Greek text, verses 3 through 14 are a single, glorious, run-on sentence. One commentator says Paul is writing in a *state of controlled ecstasy*.¹ Even a casual reading of a re-

punctuated English Bible gives the reader the unmistakable sense that Paul is grasping for words to express his sheer delight in what God has done for the believer in Christ.

These verses contain much to ponder. They are loaded with significance and will shape our understanding of both God and the salvation he provided in Christ. Before going on in this study guide take a few minutes to read Ephesians 1:3-14 and pray over this short section of Ephesians. Catch a glimpse of the whole. Marvel at what God has done for you! Find the words *adoption* and *redemption*. Notice how they fit into Paul's glorious sentence. Discuss as a homegroup what you take from this paragraph.

¹ Marcus Barth calls this section of Ephesians, *one infinitely long, heavy, and clumsy sentence, replete with dependent clauses, excurses, specifications, repetitions, and the like*. He goes on to point out *the distinctiveness, the beauty and the sense of the several limbs of the 'monster.'* (From Leon Morris, *Ephesians*, 1994, p. 13)

Adoption

Adoption. The word is loaded with significance. In our context would-be parents open their lives and their homes to a child who is available for adoption. When the paperwork is complete, the waiting periods are over and the legal requirements are satisfied, a husband and wife have complete custody and responsibility for a child that is not their own by way of biology. The child has become a part of a new family, and the happy couple is now referred to as this child's parents. This is not a *natural* child, but an *adopted* child. This child is subject to all the liabilities and benefits of being a member of his new family. The child has been *adopted*.

Paul uses this word to describe what God has done for us through Jesus on the cross. In Christ we have been *adopted as sons*¹ into the family of God.

Are you, or do you know someone who is adopted? What has that experience been like? Do you know any parents of adopted children? What do you see as you observe their love for and care of these children?

In Ephesians 1:4-5 we learn we were *predestined* for *adoption*.

The Greek word Paul uses here is *proorizo* (προορίζω). It means *to decide beforehand, to preordain, to determine, or to predestine*. The KJV translates this word *predestinated*, while the NEB uses the English word *destined*. Some translators use the word *foreordained* to translate *proorizo*. The point is strong, and clear. God decided to adopt us and his decision was not based on anything we did to earn his favor.

Look at a few other passages that speak of our being *adopted* into the family of God. What do they add to Ephesians 1?

Romans 8:15-16

Galatians 4:4-7

¹ How we should translate Ephesians 1:5 in light of our time and place is an interesting question. Should we fill in for Paul, *as sons and daughters*? Paul, writing in a Middle-Eastern context specifically says *sons*. In first-century society sons were favored over daughters. They received the family inheritance and they had the responsibility for the family business when their father died. By using the word *sons*, as opposed to *sons and daughters*, Paul is highlighting our special relationship with the father. We have been adopted *as sons*! *The inheritance is ours!*



But let's look a bit deeper. The language applied to our relation to God is personalized in the New Testament. Only 14 times in the Old Testament is God referred to as *Father*, and those are always with reference to God as the Father of Israel, not as the Father of individuals. But in the New Testament, beginning with Jesus, we are invited to refer to the first person of the Trinity as *Father*. He has adopted us into his own family!

But let's go deeper still. How is being adopted by God similar and different from being adopted into a human family? Respond to the following quotation:

To be saved is to have the very life of God in our souls, His own Spirit enlivening our spirits. Human parents can adopt children and come to love them every bit as much as they love their natural children. They can give an adopted child complete equality in the family life, resources, and inheritance. But no human parent can impart his own distinct nature to an adopted child. Yet that is what God miraculously does to every person whom He has elected and who has trusted in Christ. He makes them sons just like His divine Son. Christians not only have all of the Son's riches and blessings but all of the Son's nature.¹

When you consider that God has adopted you, how does that register? Is it intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual? What is that like for you? As best you can, put this into words.

Blood

1:7 What does Paul say in this cascade of potent words describing the blessings we have in Christ? We have redemption in Christ *through his blood*.

Thus far in our study we haven't spoken too much about the *blood* of Jesus shed on the cross. What does Paul have in mind by speaking of Christ's *blood*?

¹ John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 1986, p. 15.

Compare Leviticus 17:11-14 and Deuteronomy 12:23. What is the significance of blood in these passages?

Compare several New Testament passages which speak of the *blood* of Jesus. What do you find?

Hebrews 9:11-14

Hebrews 10:19

1 Peter 1:18-19

Revelation 1:5

Revelation 5:9

Think of these verses in light of biblical history. For roughly 1000 years, Jews had been offering sacrifices in the temple and, before that, in the tabernacle. While these sacrifices symbolized redemption from sin, they didn't really work. *It is impossible*, we learn in Hebrews, *for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*. (Hebrews 10:4) The sacrifices were merely *shadows* (Colossians 2:17) which looked forward to reality of the cross.

How does Paul describe our redemption in 1:7? Diagram this part of his sentence.



Consider what blood signified to the people who were originally addressed by the Gospels and other letters we have studied so far. Then think about what Jesus physically and emotionally experienced in his death, in the shedding of his blood. Select one word that best expresses your response to this information and be ready to share that and a brief explanation with your homegroup.

In the end, believers are adopted by the Father and bought by the Son's blood. Observe where Paul is going with this! All of this is *to the praise of the glory of his grace* (1:14)! Worship is the outcome of these powerful doctrines.

In his book, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer sees the connection between our doctrine and our spiritual vitality.

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian, as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God.¹

Spend time as a group doing what Paul does. Bless God for who he is and what he has done.

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 1973, p. 182.

Sermon Notes



Study Eight

Justification, Redemption and Propitiation

Romans 3:21-26

Modern theology has for its main object the obscuration of the doctrine of atonement. It makes out sin to be a trifle and the punishment of it to be a temporary business, thus degrading the remedy by underrating the disease.

Charles Spurgeon

The truth that Jesus saves us by dying on the cross is the central and most glorious truth of all Scripture. The whole Bible is centered on this fundamental reality. A faith without the cross of Christ is not the Christian faith.

But how does the cross work? Why is it that one man's death can produce salvation for many? What transaction took place on the cross that produced salvation for those who believe?

When we ask these questions, we are swimming in deep water. We are probing mysteries too lofty for us to completely understand. But the Bible is far from silent about why the cross of Christ is filled with potency and efficacy. Romans 3:21-26 is, perhaps, the most important paragraph in the Bible explaining why the cross was necessary and how it resulted in our salvation.

The witnesses to the importance of this paragraph are numerous and impressive. Martin Luther wrote in the margin of his Bible that this section is *the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible*. Leon Morris, a 20th century New Testament commentator called this *possibly the most important paragraph ever written*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the famous preacher of Westminster Chapel in London, said of Romans 3:25, *We are looking here at one of the most important verses in the whole of Scripture; there is no doubt about that.*¹

Before reading on in this study, read these 6 verses several times. If you can, read from several translations. What is Paul doing in this paragraph?

¹ For the sources of these quotations see Tidball, p. 185.

How would you explain the cross and the gospel from this paragraph alone? Share your answer with your homegroup.

How does this passage speak to you personally? In what ways do you sense the truth of Romans 3:25 in your life? What word (or words) in this paragraph is most helpful to you? Why?

3:21 Read the first two words of this verse, *But now*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls these words the most beautiful in the whole of Scripture. This is quite a statement for the words, *But now*. . . Why are these words so important? Look back over the context of our passage. Why is this *But now* so significant?

3:23 is one of the most memorized and most quoted verses in the Bible. This is the Apostle's summary of the human condition. In a sense it is a single-verse summary of the whole Bible. Leon Morris explains:

Not only did all sin in the past, but they continually come short of God's glory. The linking of God's glory with man's sin is intriguing. It would seem that God intended people to share in his glory (as we see in the story of Eden). But sin cut Adam off from all that, and sin cuts his descendants off still. This clear statement of universal sinfulness is basic to Paul's understanding of the human predicament and also of the salvation Christ brought. Were it not for our sin there would have been no need for Christ's redemptive activity; because of our sin there is no possibility of our achieving salvation by our own efforts. This is "the point of departure for the whole redemptive work of God. No one has anything to offer which could elicit the love of God" (Nygren).¹

¹ Leon Morris, *Romans*, 1988, p. 177.



This verse starts off, *for all have sinned...* It is easy to consider sin as a general category or list to keep it at arm's length. Before you go on to verse 24 think about your life. What was and is your sin? What exactly did Jesus die for in your life?

It is in this context, the context of all of us sinning in the past and continuing to sin in the present, that Jesus enters our history and makes atonement for our sin and disobedience.

The word *atonement* means to *make amends*. Theologically, the word refers to making things right between sinful human beings and the holy God of the universe. We speak, appropriately, of Jesus *making atonement* for our sins on the cross. But how did he do this? Sometimes theologians speak of various *theories* of the atonement. John Stott is probably correct when he says the word *images* is a better term than *theories*. (Stott, p. 168) What are the *images* of the atonement in the New Testament?

- **Justification** is a legal image taken from a law court.
- **Redemption** draws our thinking to a transaction or purchase in the marketplace.
- **Propitiation** leads us to think of pagan sacrifices made on the alter at the shrine.
- **Reconciliation** is an image of mending broken relationships.

On the cross, Jesus does all of these things:

- He *makes* propitiation for our sin.
- He *provides* redemption from our sin.
- He *accomplishes* our justification even as he *reconciles* us to God.

Our passage teases out three of these four images of atonement, justification, redemption, and propitiation.

Justification

In 3:24 Paul declares the good news. While our sin condemns us, God *justifies* us by his grace. Justification refers to God's acquittal of the guilty. As a verb, the Greek word means *to give a person justice, to do right*. In the Bible, justification is a legal, forensic term that means *to declare righteous or to consider righteous*. Paul uses the verb 27 times in his letters (out of 39 NT occurrences). Fifteen of these occur in Romans.

Justification is the basic problem of every religion. How can sinful men and women stand before a holy and righteous God? Some religions deny the reality of sin and evil (Hinduism, New Age religions, Christian Science) while others deny the reality of personal sin (classical liberalism).

Paul's bold claim in this paragraph is that we are justified before a holy God based upon what Jesus did on the cross. It is not simply that we are saved by *grace*, we are actually justified, that is, declared righteous because of what Jesus did on the cross.

Grace is one thing, however; justice is another. And justification has to do with justice. (Stott, p. 190)

In Romans 5:9 we learn we are *justified by his blood*. Stott goes on to explain:

[J]ustification is an act of justice, of gracious justice. Its synonym is 'the righteousness of God' (Rom. 1:17; 3:21), which might for the moment be explained as his 'righteous way of righteousing the unrighteous'. . . . When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; he is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself in his Son has born the penalty of their law-breaking. (Stott, p. 190)

Do you feel justified? Can you embrace this? Why or why not? How would you encourage a Christian who cannot grasp justification?

Redemption

Paul speaks of the *redemption* that came through Jesus. This is a word picture that contains the notion of buying back a slave or a prisoner of war. If *justification* is a legal term, *redemption* is commercial. We've moved from religious ceremony to *business transactions*. (Stott, p. 175)

In the Old Testament, the word referred to paying a price for something. Scholars point out that in New Testament times when people heard this word on the street, they would immediately think of the purchase of a slave from his or her owner.¹

Biblically, we were *redeemed* because Jesus was the *ransom* for our sin, that is, he was the *payment* for our sin. (Mark 10:45)

Propitiation

Christ *bought us back* while on the cross. But how? What was it about the cross that justified us? Why did the death of Christ procure our salvation?

The answer comes (finally) in 3:25. Jesus is our *propitiation*.

Undoubtedly this image of atonement is the most controversial of the three that Paul uses in this paragraph (and the most difficult to pronounce). Let's make sure we see the word in Paul's sentence.

... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Romans 3:23-25a)

Here Paul uses the Greek word *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον). The word is usually translated *propitiation*, which means to appease someone's wrath. In the Greek Old Testament the word occurs twenty times to denote the golden cover of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat. This is the place where the high priest met with God on an annual basis. Here the high priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to assuage the wrath of God. Through the shedding of blood this was the place where Israel was reconciled to her God.

In Romans 3:25 Paul uses this familiar imagery and gives it new significance. When Christ was on the cross God provided *propitiation* to himself.

The death of Christ, then, is the means by which God does away with His people's sin—not symbolically, as in the ritual of Leviticus 16 in which the material mercy-seat figured, but *really*. And *really* in a twofold sense; the sin has been removed not only from the believer's conscience, on which it lay as an intolerable burden, but from the presence of God.²

John Stott adds,

What is revealed to us in Scripture is a pure doctrine . . . of God's holy wrath, his loving self sacrifice in Christ and his initiative to avert his own anger.

1 See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 1965, p. 14.

2 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 1963, p. 106.

Justification, redemption, propitiation. What difference do these words make in the way we live and in our understanding of all of life? Respond to the following questions in light of what we have learned in the previous stupendous paragraph.

Explain how it is that a woman or a man can be saved by Christ's death on the cross. Put into your own words what he did on the cross.

There are various ways we can think about ourselves in our positions before God. Some of us catch ourselves thinking, at least for a nanosecond, *God must be impressed with me, after all, I am a pretty good person, I do this. . . and I don't do that . . .* If, and when, we think like this, how should this paragraph in Romans instruct us?

At the other extreme, we may say to ourselves *I am not worthy, my life was (or is) deeply steeped in sin, I do the right thing part of the time but it's really hard... oh how I want to change...* If, and when, we think like this, how should this paragraph in Romans instruct us?

Christians often claim that God is both *just* and *merciful*. How does the death of Christ on the cross point to both of these truths?



How should these verses affect our self-image? What is your emotional response to this section of Romans?

What does it mean to place your faith in Jesus (3:22)? Is this merely an assent to the *fact* that Jesus is God and Lord? In what ways does *faith* involve a lifestyle?

Sermon Notes



Study Nine

Daring to Draw Near

Hebrews 10:1-25

Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it? Oh, that there was an abyss as deep as Christ's misery, that I might at once hurl this dagger of sin into its depths, whence it might never be brought to light again!

Charles Spurgeon

If there is a particular book of the New Testament explicitly devoted to the cross of Christ, it is the book of Hebrews. The 13 chapters of Hebrews comprise a sermon to Jewish believers who seem to be tempted to wander away from Christ. Evidently, the

church to which the book is addressed is suffering some degree of persecution and the temptation was to simply give up. The message of the entire book can be summarized from the first chapter, God has spoken uniquely and finally through his son Jesus. Listen to him!

Along the way, every chapter, except chapter 11, refers to the cross of Christ as God's final act of mercy and grace for the believer. Consider:

- The Son came to provide *purification for sins* (1:3).
- Jesus is *crowned with glory and honor* because he suffered death (2:9).
- Jesus, *the author of salvation*, was *made perfect* through suffering (2:10).
- By his death, Jesus destroys him who holds the power of death (2:14).
- Jesus was *faithful to the one who appointed him* (3:2).
- Jesus is *the great high priest who helps us in our time of need* (4:14-16).
- He is *the source of eternal salvation* because he *learned obedience through what was suffered* (5:7-9).
- Jesus went as a forerunner on our behalf *into the inner place behind the curtain* (6:19-20).
- He sacrificed for sins *once for all* and saved us *completely* (7:25, 27).
- Jesus cleansed our conscience from sin by offering his own blood (9:12).¹

Throughout the sermon (book), the writer draws a comparison between what the Old Testament priests did in the earthly tabernacle built by Moses and what Jesus did, spiritually, on the cross. The *old* covenant is seen as a shadow of the reality that has now been found in Christ.

¹ See Tidball, p. 264.

With this in mind, read Hebrews 10:1-25. For those newer to the world of the Bible, some of this will be challenging. Do your best with these verses concentrating on 10:19-25.

What stands out? What questions do you have of this passage?

The Cross as the Final Sacrifice (10:1-18)

10:1 says the *law is only a shadow of the good things to come*. . . (NIV). The Greek word used is *skia* and refers to *a nebulous reflection, a mere silhouette, a form without reality*.¹ The *shadow* is compared with the *true form (reality)* in the NIV). This is the Greek word *eikôn* which refers to an *exact replication*. This is the same word Paul uses of Jesus in Colossians 1:15:

He is the image (eikôn) of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Compare 10:1-4 with 10:5-14. Compare the *shadow* of the law and the *reality* found in Christ. What are the similarities between the two?

Specifically, what did the sacrifice of Jesus do that the Old Testament sacrifices did not do?

Look at 10:12. What did Jesus do that the Levitical priests did not do?

¹ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 1955, p. 112.



Kent Hughes comments:

Significantly, there were no chairs in the Tabernacle—no provision whatsoever to sit down. Priests stood or kept moving, because their imperfect work was never over. But Jesus, in exact fulfillment of the Melchizedekian prophecies in Psalm 110:1 — “The Lord says to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’”— sat down forever at the right hand of honor and power (cf. 1:3, 13; 8:1). Jesus rests. Our salvation . . . is a “done deal.”¹

As you think personally about the forgiveness God has provided you in Christ, what difference does Jesus’ posture of sitting make?

From our New Testament perspective these verses seem self-evident. *Oh, of course*, we say. But such was not the case for first-century Jewish believers.

For readers of Jewish origin who considered the law of God their most precious possession, the author’s assertion—“the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming”—must have been astounding. If the law was their treasured possession, it would be difficult to imagine that far more desirable things were in store for them. The writer of Hebrews calls these things “the realities themselves,” and he explains that they consist of Christ and his redemptive work. Writing to Jewish readers in Colossae about religious observances, Paul says almost the same thing. He writes, “These [regulations] are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:17).²

10:5-7ff. Notice what our preacher does in these verses. By putting Psalm 40:6-8, originally from the pen of David, on the lips of Jesus, the author makes the quotation a messianic prophecy. The Psalm points out what any student of the Old Testament would know: Obedience to God is more important than observance of the sacrificial system. When Psalm 40:6-8 is interpreted as our Lord’s declaration, the author of Hebrews sees the announcement of the end of the sacrificial system (10:8-9). When Jesus said, *Behold, I have come to do your will*, he declared his willingness to suffer and to completely atone for our sins (Hebrews 10:10).

1 Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor For the Soul*, vol. 2, 1993, p. 24.

2 Simon Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 1984, p. 278.

10:16-18 contains a quotation from Jeremiah 31:33-34. Here we learn that the cross of Christ brings two blessings.

First, the law is written on our hearts. The *law* is no longer exterior. Instead, God's people have inward motivation and guidance through the Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 8:1-11. Here Paul expands upon this theme.

Think about your own conversion and walk with God. How has this blessing become evident in your life?

The second blessing concerns the forgetting of sin. The daily sacrifices in the tabernacle, and later the temple, were a constant reminder of the people's sins. The annual offering made on the Day of Atonement was actually a reminder of the sins committed during the previous year. The quotation from Jeremiah (10:17) gives us the wonderful assurance that God cannot remember what we often remember: our own sins!

What helps you forget what God cannot remember? What does it mean if we are burdened inordinately by guilt over past sins?

The Cross and Drawing Near to God (10:19-25)

Read these verses again. Notice the words *since*, and *let us* in verses. What is the author's argument?

10:19 *since* _____

10:21 *since* _____

therefore,

10:22 *let us* _____

10:23 *let us* _____



10:24 *let us* _____

10:25 *let us* _____

10:25b *but (let us)* _____

What does the first *let us* mean to you personally? What does it mean to you to *draw near* to God?

What advice would you give to a believer who doesn't *feel* right before God? See Romans 8:31-34. What specifically has helped you in this area?

Respond to the following statement:

Jesus is both the curtain (our access) and the priest (our advocate). His torn body and shed blood provides our access to the presence of the Father. And in our access he is our perpetual priestly advocate.¹

Compare 10:1 with 10:22. Notice the powerful difference between the blood of the old covenant and the blood of Christ. What is this difference? The ritual of the old covenant could never *make perfect those who draw near to* God. But the blood of Christ allows us to *draw near* to (God) *with a true heart in full assurance of faith*. . . By employing the same Greek word in both instances our preacher draws attention to the wonderful difference between the two covenants.

Spend time as a homegroup doing just this. Ponder and worship God for the cross.

¹ Hughes, p. 30.

We began our study with John's vision of the crucified, yet glorified, Christ (Revelation 5). We end this study in the book of Hebrews which paints a detailed portrait of what Jesus was doing on the cross. Look back over the pages of this study guide. What stands out from these nine glimpses of the cross? How has your vision of Jesus changed because of these scriptures?

Throughout this study we have pondered the supreme manifestation of the love of God for sinful humanity. Let us make a life-long habit of standing at the foot of this cross and marveling at the place where, as Isaac Watts put it, *love and sorrow* met so that we might live for God. The words of Charles Spurgeon seem an appropriate coda to our ponderings of the cross:

If I were asked the secret of the attractive power of the crucified Savior, I should answer that it is the invincible love. The only crime that ever could be laid to Jesus' charge was that of loving beyond all reason and beyond all bound—love as none ever loved before. If all the rivers of human love did run together, they could not fill such another ocean of love as was in the heart of Jesus the Savior. This it is—the unique unrivaled love—that draws men to Jesus. The pierced heart of Christ is a loadstone to draw all other hearts. (Spurgeon, pp. 19-20)

Sermon Notes