

More on the Meaning of Jesus' Death

--:part one:--

Last class I surmised that Paul was the first person to understand that Jesus' death was for our sins. This was an incorrect statement because in the first epistle to the Corinthians we read:

1 Corinthians 15.3-4 ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Notice that Paul says "I delivered to you...what I also received, that..." Paul received this creedal formulation from others (probably the apostles in Jerusalem) and is now reminding the Corinthians of when he passed on this information to them. But notice the phrase, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The notion of Christ's death as atoning in some way for our sins is already present here. Since Paul visited Jerusalem roughly five years after Jesus' death, this is a very early understanding of the death of Jesus. His death was for others, for our sins. Indeed this understanding must have hit the disciples as they reflected on the Hebrew Scriptures. Perhaps the two who Jesus met on the road to Emmaus were the leaders in explaining this?

Luke 24.25-27, 32 ²⁵ And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures... ³² They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

Or perhaps Jesus communicated this information directly to the disciples later that day.

Luke 24.44-48 ⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things.

What Scriptures did Jesus point to in order to explain his suffering and death? Although it is difficult to know exactly which places he pointed too, we can surmise that among them were Isaiah 52-53 and Psalm 22. In particular Isaiah 52-53 explains the reason for which the servant of Yahweh died: to justify the many by voluntarily bearing their transgressions.¹ Psalm 22, although not couched in prophetic language sets out a clear type for the crucifixion of Jesus the Nazarene. No doubt Scripture references could be added to these two² including the typology of the Levitical sacrificial

¹ See appendix to this lecture

² Zch 13.7 (quoted in Mt 26.31; Mk 14.27); Zch 11.12-13 (quoted in Mt 27.9-10); Ps 22.8 (quoted in Mt 27.43); Ps 22.1 (quoted in Mt 27.46; Mk 15.34); Is 53.12 (quoted in Lk 22.37); Ps 31.5 (quoted in Lk 23.46); Ps 22.18 (quoted in Jn 19.34); Ex 12.46 or Nm 9.12 or Ps 34.20 (quoted in Jn 19.36); Zch 12.10 (quoted in Jn 19.37).

system (in particular the Day of Atonement) and the annual Passover Celebration but this is not our aim at this juncture.

Furthermore, after the resurrection (once the dust had settled) the disciples no doubt reflected in the last supper they had with Jesus the night of his arrest. During this meal the following statements were said:

Mark 14.22-25 ²² While they were eating, He took *some* bread, and after a blessing He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, and said, "Take *it*; this is My body." ²³ And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, "This is My **blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many**." ²⁵ "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Matthew 26.26-29 ²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for **this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins**." ²⁹ "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Luke 22.14-20 ¹⁴ When the hour had come, He reclined *at the table*, and the apostles with Him. ¹⁵ And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My **body which is given for you**; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁰ And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This **cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood**."

1 Corinthians 11.23-26 ²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My **body, which is for you**; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood**; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

So, even before Jesus was arrested he had told them that the broken bread was his body which is given over (to the executioners) for them. He had told them that the wine was his blood, the blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. Thus, we can trace the earliest teaching about the atonement at the last supper itself. However, it is clear that the disciples did not grasp what Jesus told them until after his resurrection. Nonetheless, it is certain that this understanding however primitive in comparison to the full development we find (in Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, and Hebrews) was already grasped before Paul wrote any of his epistles. Now we shall turn our attention to what the rest of the New Testament says about the atonement.

General Epistles

1. James
 - A. No mention of Christ's death
2. 1 Peter

- A. 1.2: we have been “sparkled with his blood”
- B. 1.11: the sufferings and subsequent glory of Christ were testified to in advance by the prophets
- C. 1.18–19: we were ransomed from our futile ways with the precious blood of Christ (like a lamb without defect or blemish)
- D. *2.21–25: The context is talking about slaves who suffer abuse by their masters though they are in the right. Christ also suffered and gave an example that we should suffer. He suffered even though he had committed no sin and when he was abused he did not threaten. Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we would live for righteousness.
- E. *3.18: Christ suffered for sins once for all in order to bring us to God.
- F. *4.1: Christ suffered in the flesh so we should arm ourselves for the same purpose because the one who has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin.
- A. 4.13: We are to rejoice when we suffer because we are sharing in Christ’s sufferings.

Appendix: The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53

Isaiah 52.13 - 53.12

¹³ *Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.*

The servant of Yahweh will prosper but not yet, he has a task to complete that cannot be accomplished if he does not humble himself and submit himself entirely to the will of his God even if that ends him in suffering to the point of death. Then once he has gone through the fiery trials that await him he will be greatly exalted.

¹⁴ *Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men.*

“My people” is not in the text. The NAB reads “Even as many were amazed at him-- so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals.” The NET reads “(just as many were horrified by the sight of you) he was so disfigured he no longer looked like a man;” This servant of Yahweh will be beaten severely though not as a punishment for his disobedience. For what reason is this servant beaten?

¹⁵ *Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.*

Hebrew experts mostly agree that “sprinkle”³ should be translated “startle” (cf. NAB, NET, LXX, RSV, NRSV, NJB, NLT, JPS). This human has been so disfigured, so marred, so irreversibly damaged that his sight is shocking to the eye. Indeed the nations reel at him and kings shut their mouths.

³ If the word is taken as sprinkle a new interpretation opens up: Through the abuse he suffers the servant of Yahweh will sprinkle many nations. Under the Mosaic Law on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal on the altar to “make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities” (Lev 16.16).

Or more likely this refers to the law of cleansing one who has become unclean. If someone in Israel touched a dead body, a grave, a human bone, or was in the same tent as someone who died was considered unclean until they went through a ritual involving the sprinkling of a special liquid (the ashes of a red heifer mixed with water from a stream) (Num 19.14-20). By definition the Gentiles were unclean and entering the house of a

¹ ¶ Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Who would even believe this message? “Nothing is more outrageous than to hear that God’s sinless Son would die on behalf of all people. This story is the ultimate stumbling block for those looking for a Messiah who would come as a conquering king.”⁴

“We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1.23-24)

² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

This man did not grow up in the palaces of royalty. He is not to be compared to those great cedars of Lebanon, but rather to mere shoot off a branch—something that would normally be considered common and even expendable. He is not like the oaks of Bashan flourishing in a forest of hospitable conditions, but rather he is a root surrounded by the hostility of parched ground—one who was not prideful but fully acquainted with the struggle for survival. Even so he grew up before Him—God—which is to say that he lived his whole life in the presence and under the watchful eye of the Almighty.

Yet his appearance was common, easily confused with other men of his time. In such a way Jesus was able to slip into the crowds, eluding the grasp of the authorities. So indistinct were his features that Judas while betraying him, found it necessary to kiss him as a sign to his adversaries that he was the one they wanted. He is not like the stars of our age, who would be disqualified up front unless they have artificially whitened teeth, a fashionable haircut, a lean figure, and a beauty that instantly grabs the eye. He is common. He is one of us. He is not in the minuscule minority of pretty people, but one who fits in with the majority.

³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

He is not the winner of American Idol or any other such popularity contest; rather he is the one who would receive the least number of votes because he is despised and forsaken. Unlike Herod Antipas (the ruler in Galilee) who constantly courted Rome’s approval while seeking after the love of the people, this one does not woo the crowds.

He is a “man of sorrows,” acquainted not with sumptuous meals and the extravagance of wealth, but with grief. One who saw him was more likely to pass him over than esteem him to be someone great. Even his own people did not receive him.

“He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.” (John 1.11)

⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

He is not in this for his own benefit; he is doing something for us. Our infirmities, our pain, our grief, and our sorrows he carries on his shoulders. Even so, we do not recognize that this is what is happening. Instead of gratitude we look at the pitiful figure and say, “surely he is cursed by God, what must he have done to deserve this.” All the while we do not realize that it is our own pain written on his face.

non-Israelite resulted in uncleanness at least by NT times (John 18.28; Acts 10.28; 11.23). It is therefore all the more remarkable that the suffering of this servant of Yahweh results in the sprinkling (i.e. cleansing) of many nations (gentiles).

⁴ Pastor Steve Taylor of Lakeshore Bible Church, Tempe Arizona, Sermon Notes from March 9th, 2008.

⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

He is pierced through, crushed because of the sin of others. It was not for any crime of his own that he was beaten. He is at once innocent but also enters into solidarity with us. He is endured the chastening (punishment) that makes us well. It is for our benefit that he endures blow after blow from the scourge. And somehow, by this process he is not merely wounded but we are also healed.

⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

We have not kept the law of God as we should have. We have not served God with all our hearts, all of our mind, all of our strength, all of our being. We have gone astray; each and every one of us has turned to our own way. We have defiled ourselves with our willing rebellion, our pride, our wicked heart that cries out “no one will rule over me. I can do this on my own. I don’t need anyone to tell me what to do.” Through such efforts we have shaken our fist in the face of our Creator and separated ourselves from him. In an effort to break free we find ourselves slaves to sin and addicted to self-destruction.

But God does not leave us in such a pathetic state of affairs! Just when we were crushing under the weight of our own selfish sins God in an act of outrageous mercy lifted the mountain of guilt and allowed it to fall on his servant. Yahweh in his astounding love for us has caused this iniquity which we thought we could bear to fall on the shoulders of one who truly can bear it.

⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

The usual cries of complaint and murmurs of injustice that one would expect did not pass by his lips. He was oppressed and afflicted by the consequences of other’s actions yet he would not open his mouth. He did not avenge himself nor did he seek from God that his vengeance would fall on his enemies. He kept his mouth closed staggering the world with his silence. When brought before kings he would not even seek to defend himself. He knew what awaited him yet he did not seize upon a private moment with the willing procurator to secure for himself an escape route from the plan of his God.

“And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.” (Matthew 27.12-14)

⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

“Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away, and who would have thought any more of his destiny? When he was cut off from the land of the living, and smitten for the sin of his people” (NAB)

“He was led away after an unjust trial- but who even cared? Indeed, he was cut off from the land of the living; because of the rebellion of his own people he was wounded.” (NET)

He was led away after a mock trial fit only for someone that was either so guilty as to not need an authentic trial or else someone so difficult to prove guilty that he must be rushed the motions of “justice” quickly and under the cover of night lest others are made aware of his innocence. And who was there to advocate for him? Who sounded the alarm of injustice loud and clear? Even his own disciples had left him, fleeing for fear of their own arrest. The chief of which did not stand up for him but denied him over and over again until he horrified himself at his cowardice.

His suffering, his wounds, his torture, brought his body beyond the point of remedy. With many stripes upon his back and nails through his hands and feet he continued on past the point of no return. With all the violence of a world drunk with pride and blinded by its own rage he, this servant of Yahweh, absorbed it all. “While being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *himself* to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet 2.23).

He was brought to the brink of pit and having stared deeply into it, he whispered “it is finished” and he bowed his head exhaling his last breath (John 19.30).

⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

He had not broken the Law of God nor was he even deceitful, for he had no reason to be deceptive. He had done no violence; never had he assaulted others though he had received the fiercest attack. “They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man's tomb” (NET). Since he had done nothing wrong it was only fitting that Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb which had been hewn out in the rock (Mark 15.42-46).

¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

Yahweh was pleased to crush him not because he enjoyed the process but because of the incalculable good that will result from this voluntary action. This is no case of divine child abuse, but the horrifying result of our own sin meeting the wrath of a holy God, hungry for redemption not blood.

Furthermore it is essential to stress that this servant of Yahweh volunteers for this work. The language is conditional: “if he would render himself as a guilt offering...,” which indicates that he has a choice. We are not observing a case where someone is being forced to be the scapegoat against his will. He is not just someone who is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Jesus did not merely fall victim to the volatile political paranoia of a vicious Roman procurator nor did he unwittingly fall into the trap of conspiring, jealous, religious leaders. He was not crucified just because men hated him. It was the will of the Father to crush him, to put him to grief. This was the plan from the beginning (Gen 3.15).

²² “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.” (Acts 2.22-23).

He will be the guilt offering (or his life is given as an offering for sin cf. NAB) calls to mind the sacrificial system of the Law under which Jesus lived and died. In order to expiate for the sins of the people an animal would be killed and offered to God on the altar. Similarly, Jesus through his work on the cross nullifies the guilt of the people and redeems them with his blood.

⁹ “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ “You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” (Revelation 5.9-10)

Even though he offers his life (lit. soul) as a guilt offering he will see his offspring. This indicates that he will not stay dead for the dead no nothing (Ecc 9.5) nor are they capable of observing what is done under the sun (Ecc 9.10). In order for him to see his offspring, his seed, he must somehow live again. And when this occurs the good pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in his hand. He will carry out the desires of God. One day the will of God will be done on earth as in heaven (Mat 6.10).

¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

When the work is completed the servant will look back upon what has been done, difficult though it was, and be satisfied in it because by his suffering many are justified—declared righteous—and their iniquities which they could not atone for have been lifted from them.

⁶ "...our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin." (Romans 6.6-7)

¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

He will be given the ultimate inheritance. He poured out his soul to death and though not a transgressor was numbered among them. It is clear that the observers of the crucifixion thought Jesus was a transgressor, they accused him of being a false messiah!

³⁵ And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" ³⁸ Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." ³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (Luke 23.35-39)

Yet, Jesus undaunted by this abuse remains on the cross, resisting the temptation to prove that he is the son of God (cp. Mt 4.1-11; Lk 4.1-13). He will be exalted (cp. Php 2.5-11).