

# THE224 Christian Narrative 2 Redemption

## Unit 1c The Atonement

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Hello and welcome to Session 1C of Christian Narrative 2. Today we're going to look at the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Our main teaching point is that Jesus has redeemed humanity. And this is probably one of the most powerful sentences you will ever read in your life. Don't let the simplicity of this sentence replace the absolute wonderful nature of this sentence that we get to talk today about how Jesus has redeemed all of humanity, how Jesus has redeemed you and me. And that's a pretty wonderful thing to talk about. Our time starts here but really talking about the necessity of action. What we quickly discover is that divine action was required in order to reverse the implication of humanity's fall. Now, in Creation Narrative 1, we talked at some length about the nature of the fall, what happened. And what we discover is that from its inception, sin has saturated humankind.

Two passages in the Scripture that help us understand the saturating nature of sin and really the sinister nature of sin are Romans 6:23 and 3:23. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." So here, what we discover very clearly and very succinctly is that when sin is present, when it is birthed in someone, the only result of that sin is death. Now, we've lived long enough to recognize that most of the time, in fact, the death brought about by sin is not immediate, that it usually bears itself out over a lifetime. But ultimately, death takes all human beings because all have sinned. And this is what Romans 3:23 tells us: that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So the reach of sin is universal and the penalty of sin is death. Therefore, death universally reigns in our world, and it has up until Christ came and redeemed humanity. When we talk about that in the fall when we look at Romans 5, we see that as well. So apart from divine action, humanity is in deep trouble.

Yet we also see that it's not just any action that can be taken on behalf of humanity. The only acceptable payment for the penalty of sin is actually blood because the penalty of sin is death and life is in the blood. The law actually of the Old Testament required that sin be atoned for through the shedding of blood. So we read in Leviticus 17:11, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." In other words, life has to be offered for life. The penalty of sin that is death is required if death is going to be atoned for. And we read that the religious and sacrificial systems of Israel were a copy of heavenly things in Hebrews 8:5. There it says, "They serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.'"

Now, why do I mention that? Well, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a picture, a copy, a shadow of something that was truly going to happen in heaven, something that is actually more spiritual in nature, that occurs in the heavens. This idea that sin must be paid for through death was foreshadowed in the sacrificial system, but something greater needed to come because, actually, when we come into the New Testament, in Galatians 3:21, what we discover is that the sacrificial system, and particularly the blood of bulls and goats that we just talked about in Leviticus 17, is ultimately inadequate to truly pay the full penalty of sins. Galatians 3:21 reads, "Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed come through the law." What we discover in the law of the Old Testament is the grace of God. But more importantly, what we see is that a better sacrifice was needed in order to reverse the penalty of sin, that while the blood of bulls and goats given in the Old Testament allowed God to look over the sins of his people, it did not ultimately and fully, in its full nature, atone for those sins. That had to come through something else.

And so in Hebrews 9:22-23, we read, “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves [must be purified] with better sacrifices than these.” What we begin to discover is that there needed to be a unique sacrifice, a unique atonement, an atonement that came from heaven, an atonement that was perfect, that could ultimately and truly deal with the penalty of sin once for all. And what we discover is that that is Jesus Christ. So when we use this phrase or word atonement, what we can understand it to mean is atonement is defined as the work accomplished by Christ for the satisfaction of sin’s penalties. So when we say Jesus atoned for our sins, he’s taking care of the work that needed to be done to satisfy the penalty of sin in our life.

Now, there are three other terms that are used in conjunction with the concept of atonement: sacrifice, propitiation, and reconciliation. I want to briefly cover each of these four so that we have understanding because if you’ve read throughout the New Testament, you’ve probably come across one or more of these words. A sacrifice is something that is offered in place of another. Hebrews 9:26 is a good example of that. “For then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin.” By what? “By the sacrifice of himself.” So he became something that was offered in place of another individual. Now, propitiation is a nice biblical word. It simply means a sacrifice which is able to bear God’s wrath to the end and so change God’s wrath to God’s favor. 1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” To be the one who changed God’s wrath into God’s favor for us by bearing the wrath of God, right? That Jesus, because he was the sacrifice, took upon himself the wrath of God so that we might receive God’s favor. Propitiation. Finally, reconciliation, the removal of hostility and the restoration of fellowship between two parties. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, “And this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” Hostility existed between God and humanity. Christ came to reconcile us back to God, that is, to remove the hostility that existed between us and God, and restore us back to relationship with God. These are the three words that go along with atonement: sacrifice, propitiation, and reconciliation.

So, something had to be done in order to deal with the problem of sin. And what we discover is that Jesus is God’s answer to the problem of sin. Another powerful sentence that I don’t want you to miss, because Jesus was fully God and fully man. We just talked about this in our last session and this is so important. That’s why we began there. Jesus, in his divinity and humanity, was uniquely qualified in order to deal with the problem of sin once and for all. So we said, like we said last session, Jesus was born of Mary. He was fully human. Yet as I said last session as well, we wanted to recognize that he was not born of Adam. And this is important. Romans 5, particularly verse 12, but let me read a little bit more.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is

not like the result of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now, we could spend hours talking about this one particular passage. We don't have that time. I simply want to draw our attention to the idea and the importance of the fact that Jesus was not born under Adam because if he was born under Adam, that is, if he was not born in a unique and special way through Mary, then he would have been tainted by sin because, as we read in Romans 6:23 and Romans 3:23 and here in Romans 5, sin is pervasive and it saturates humanity. Yet Jesus needed to be fully human in order to offer blood, in order to atone for the sins of humanity. So Jesus was born of Mary. He was not born of Adam. And then we have to recognize that Jesus lived a sinless life. He is a perfect sacrifice. Hebrews 4:15, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, and yet is without sin." So Jesus, although he was fully human, although he was tempted in every way, was still sinless. So Jesus becomes God's answer to the problem of sin because he became a better sacrifice.

Now, we have to ask the question, "What did actually Jesus do in order to atone for our sin?" Well, first of all, we recognize that Jesus' sacrifice was a complete physical death of his person. Mark 15:24, "They crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots of them, to decide what each should take." Simple passage, but what I want us to grab, they crucified him. He breathed his last. Jesus died on the cross. He didn't faint. He didn't swoon. He is fully dead. And he had to die if he was going to pay the penalty of sin. He had to let his blood be the sacrifice. Not only that, but Jesus' sacrifice was a complete spiritual abandonment by God. Matthew 27:46, "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" The tragedy of the cross, the profundity of the cross should not be lost on us, friends. That Jesus, the son of God, fully human, fully God, God that has existed into eternity past, perished at the hands of his creation. And then in the process of perishing, was completely abandoned by God, something that had never occurred to him ever. Death and separation he experienced so that he could deal with the problem of sin.

Now, also we have to recognize that the sacrifice of Jesus was a singular event. This isn't something that he did on a regular basis, like we could go back for the 9:00 showing or the 12:30 showing. Jesus did it once. He offered his life once for all. Hebrews 9:25-28, "Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of the many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." That Jesus offered his life once for all. And that is it. He did not need to offer it multiple times. And in fact, this is a place where he becomes the better sacrifice. In the Old Testament, sacrifices had to be offered on a

regular basis because they were fundamentally unable to deal with the root of the problem. But because Jesus was a better sacrifice, Jesus was able to deal with the source of the problem, offers life once for all, and because he's done that, we recognize that Jesus has become a better sacrifice. So this is what Jesus needed to do. He offered himself a complete death. He was abandoned by God and offered once for all for the sins of humanity.

And what we discover is that through this sacrifice, Jesus has become humanity's atonement. And so we see these three things that are important for us to recognize. First of all, that his sacrifice was for all sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." So the sacrifice that Jesus offered was for all of our sin. The sins that we have yet to commit are still under the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because it was a singular event. His singular sacrifice dealt with the promise of sin for all time.

Thus, Jesus also serves as a propitiation for all humanity. We come back to this passage we read a moment ago. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." He becomes our atonement because he bore the wrath of God, therefore allowing us to experience God's favor. And so he reconciles humanity back to God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation in turn; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." Now Jesus has brought us back into the relationship with God. Sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation. These three things help us understand what it means, that Jesus has become our atonement.

Now, a little bit of theology here about the atonement. The question is how do we apply the atonement? And there are two different views that I want to walk us through briefly related to limited or unlimited atonement. Now, limited atonement, which is traditionally what we would call a reformed view, is defined as this. Jesus only atoned for the sins of those who he knew will respond to the gospel call. We'll talk about the gospel call here in our later sessions. Basically here, the offer is humanly speaking for everyone because humanity does not know who will and who will not respond to the gospel. Only God does. Okay, so limited atonement basically states that the atonement of Jesus is only effective for those who are going to respond to the gospel call. So it is limited in nature. And those who hold this view will defend it several different ways. And we can look throughout these. Wayne Grudem systematic theology talks about both of these really well. Others do as well, if you want to look, kind of go a little bit deeper into the nuances between limited and unlimited atonement. But suffice to say, here are a couple of things that those who defend the limited atonement view or hold that would argue.

First, we're told in Scriptures quite clearly that Christ died for his people. So John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Acts 20:28, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Romans 8:32-34, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for

us.” Now we have the idea of God has his elect, right? Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” So certainly, there seems to be a defense from Scriptures that Christ simply died for his people.

We also see in John 6:37-39 that during his earthly ministry, Jesus was aware of the particular group of people that the Father had given him. There it reads, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” Then we also see in other places the atonement, in some sense, seems to be a transactional relationship between Christ and the Father, that in some real way, the Father is giving to Christ particular individuals. So we see this example in Galatians 1:4. “[Jesus] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and our Father.” This idea that Jesus was given in order to give us back into relationship with God, yet this was done through the will of the heavenly Father. So some people hold to this idea of a limited atonement or a reformed view of atonement.

Now, there are others who hold to what’s called an unlimited atonement or a non-reformed view. Here we simply say that Jesus atoned for the sins of the entire world because a limited gospel cannot honestly be offered to the entire world, right? So they take kind of a logical approach and say, “If Jesus died for the world, then his atonement is applicable for the world because Scripture says that.” And again, those who hold to this position are going to defend it using some of the passages you see listed here. They’ll say, “Look. When you read the Bible, it makes it pretty clear that Christ died for the whole world.” John 1:29, “The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” John 6:51, “I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give is for the life of the world, and it is my flesh.” We also see in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” 1 Timothy 2:6, “He gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” 1 John 2:2, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Hebrews 2:9, “But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

So those who hold to an unlimited atonement or this kind of non-reformed view really argue, “Look. When you look through Scripture, you see that it’s told to us time and time again that Christ actually died for the whole world.” Now, they also argue that when you look through Scripture, you’re going to find places where Christ died for those who will not be saved. They look at Hebrews 10:29. “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has thus outraged the Spirit of grace?” Okay, so it seems like there are times, according to this view, that Christ has died for someone who will ultimately not be saved.

So we have limited atonement. We have unlimited atonement. Two different theological historical views, different denominations or groups of Christians will hold to one or the other. But as we finish, understand that Jesus has redeemed humanity. He has atoned for our sins. He has become our propitiation and our sacrifice. He has reconciled us back to God. Whether that’s unlimited, whether

that's limited, let us recognize that we have so much to be thankful for in what Christ has done on our behalf. I hope that makes your day a whole lot better.