

Atonement¹ at the Cross



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 26:37, 38; Matthew 27:46; Mark 14:33, 34; Luke 22:40–44; John 19:28–30.

MEMORY VERSE: “He [the Father] has saved us from the kingdom of darkness. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Because of what the Son has done, we have been set free. Because of him, all of our sins have been forgiven” (Colossians 1:13, 14, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: To describe the experience of Jesus in Gethsemane² and on the cross. In this way we can understand better the meaning of His atoning (cleansing) death.

A MAN SUED A FAST-FOOD COMPANY. He claimed that his health and weight problems had been caused by his eating four or five meals a week at the fast-food restaurant. He blamed the company, not himself, for his problems!

We all are like that. We blame others for our wrong actions. But God does not accept excuses. He knows that each one of us is responsible for our sins. But, here is where the mystery³ of atonement begins to appear in its beauty. If we accept responsibility for our sins and have true faith in Jesus, God is willing to forgive us those sins. When we admit our responsibility, we are freed from the penalty⁴ of our rebellion.⁵ What happened to that penalty? God did not overlook it. No, but He let it fall on Jesus. Christ's experience of that punishment will be our theme this week.

1. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus' sacrifice (death) on the cross.

2. Gethsemane—the name of the garden on the mount of Olives where Jesus spent His last night before He died on the cross.

3. mystery—anything that cannot be fully understood or explained.

4. penalty—a punishment for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

5. rebellion—a fight or struggle against any kind of power.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 30**SUFFERING: HEADING TO GETHSEMANE (Matthew 26:37, 38)**

What do Matthew 26:37, 38 and Mark 14:33, 34 tell us that Jesus was experiencing at Gethsemane?

“He began to be very upset and troubled” (Mark 14:33, NlrV). The Greek verb⁶ *ekthambeo*, translated “deeply troubled,” shows a highly emotional condition⁷ of deep excitement caused by something puzzling. It often comes with fear, even terror and trembling. Matthew uses the verb⁷ *lupeo*, translated “overwhelmed by sorrow,” to show a high level of emotional sadness and worry (Matthew 26:38). The second verb in Mark 14:33, *troubled* (Greek, *ademoneo*), shows more clearly anxiety and horror. The emotional and physical condition of Jesus was reaching a new and unknown level of discomfort and worry. The peace that was with Jesus most of His life appeared to be fading out. Fear, trembling, and worry were taking over instead. Mark says that Jesus “began” to feel that way as He got to Gethsemane. This emotional experience was going to get worse.

No special reason is given for the physical and emotional condition of Jesus. But from the New Testament we can guess that this is the result of

accepting the world’s sin, not from fear of what humans⁸ would do to Him.

“‘My soul is very sad. I feel close to death’” (Mark 14:34, NlrV). This is how Jesus Himself described His condition to the disciples (followers). The wording “overwhelmed with sorrow” (NIV) is the translation of the Greek word *perilupos*. This shows deep sorrow that cannot be measured. This kind of sorrow was bringing Jesus very close to the second death. He was already starting to suffer the future end that should have been ours.



As the sins of the world pressed upon Him, Jesus said, “‘My soul is very sad. I feel close to death’” (Mark 14:34, NlrV).

Look at the sufferings of Jesus here and think that this should have been you, not Him. How does this make you feel? How should those feelings change your life?

6. verb—a word that shows action.

7. condition—the way a person or thing is or becomes; a state of being.

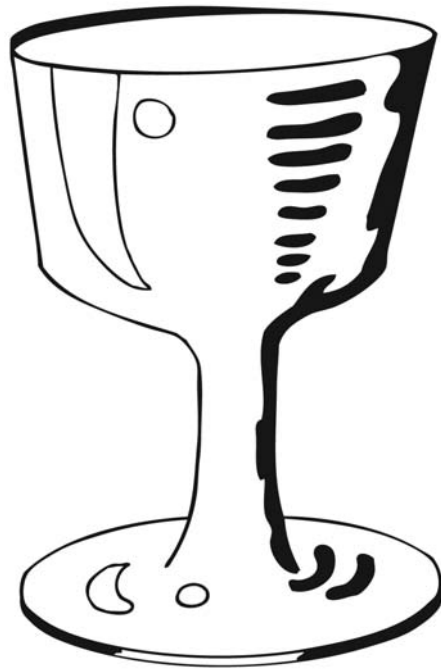
8. humans—men, women, or children.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 1**THE CUP: WILLING SURRENDER⁹
(Matthew 26:39–42)**

Read Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39–42; Mark 14:35, 36; Luke 22:40–44). What is the message of the prayer? What important part shows how Jesus feels about what He was to face?

In the garden, Jesus used the symbol (word-picture) of the cup to help us understand His inner feelings. The cup is used in the Bible to mean blessings received from the Lord (Psalm 16:5; Psalm 23:5) or the salvation¹⁰ He offers us (Psalm 116:13). More often it means God's judgment against sin and sinners (Psalm 75:8). This cup holds the "wine" of His anger against His enemies. This is His anger as a Judge (Jeremiah 25:15, 16). This kind of cup is what Jesus was talking about when He asked the Father to let it be taken away from Him, if possible (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36). Jesus was experiencing loneliness. This loneliness was felt deeply by Jesus when His disciples ran away from Him. Jesus felt that God the Father had left Him too. Jesus wanted the company and support of the disciples. But He did not get it. And now, all by Himself, Jesus prayed to the Father not to leave Him. The answer that came back to Him was silence. It was the same as the Father saying, "There is no other way to save

humans." Then Jesus surrendered¹¹ to the will of the Father.



Jesus tasted the *cup* that held the *wine* of God's anger against sin so we do not have to drink from it.

When the mob came to take Jesus, Peter tried to protect Him. How do Jesus' words to Peter (John 18:11) help us better understand Christ's willingness to suffer for us?

Jesus came to this planet to die: "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free" (Mark 10:45, NIV). God cannot die. But for Him to accept our sin and its penalty He became a human. Because of sin, humans can die. In Gethsemane Jesus was ready to die and surrender His life for sinners everywhere.

9. surrender—the act of giving oneself completely.

10. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

11. surrendered—to give one's whole life to God.

When was the last time you let yourself suffer for another person and with no personal gain for yourself? What can you learn about yourself from your answer? And what can you learn about Jesus from your answer too?

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 2

DARKNESS: HANDED OVER TO THE ENEMY (Luke 11:20–22)

Jesus was in Gethsemane, and now the events were leading to the Cross. Jesus was facing the forces of evil as never before. The struggle against satanic powers was reaching its peak. It was testing the Savior to the very limit.

Jesus was being “‘betrayed into the hands of sinners’ ” (Matthew 26:45, NIV). The verb *betrayed* (Greek *paradidomi*, “to hand over”) is used several times to describe what would happen to Jesus. Here the Bible suggests that Judas is the one who betrays Jesus. But behind Judas’ wicked decision (choice), God’s plan was being mysteriously fulfilled. It was God who “delivered [Christ] over to death for our sins” (Romans 4:25, NIV). But Christ also gave Himself up for us. Galatians 2:20 and Ephesians 5:2 point very clearly to Jesus’ sacrificial¹² death on the cross.

Matthew 26:45, 46 says that Jesus was handed over into the hands of sinners. The verb suggests the idea that something owned is passed from one to another. This was when Jesus was to experience total separation



Jesus was betrayed into the hands of sinners.

from the Father’s love. Christ was going into the kingdom of darkness by Himself. But it was there, in that kingdom, that Jesus would defeat evil once and for all. As the God-man, Jesus overcame the kingdom of Satan.

How does Jesus describe His victory over the power of darkness in Luke 11:20–22?

Luke says that Jesus was facing the hour of the kingdom of darkness (Luke 22:53). Paul adds that God “has saved us from the kingdom of darkness. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Because of what the Son has done, we have been set free. Because of him, all of our

12. sacrificial—having to do with an animal, gift, or offering that is given up to get something else that is wanted.

sins have been forgiven” (Colossians 1:13, 14, NIV). Christ went into the area of darkness and experienced what we should have experienced. And He did it so that He could free us from the power of Satan (Acts 26:18). He won the battle over sin by dying on the cross (Colossians 2:15).

How should our knowledge of Christ’s victory (win) over these evil forces encourage us in our daily struggles during the great war between Christ and Satan? What does Jesus’ victory mean for us? How can we have that victory in our lives?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 3

THE CRY: EXPLORING THE MYSTERY (Matthew 27:46)

How do you understand Jesus’ cry in that verse?

On the cross God experienced something He never before had experienced: The penalty for sin. “It was necessary for the awful darkness to gather about His soul. This was because the Father withdrew His love and favor. Jesus was standing in the sinner’s place. . . . Jesus must suffer the penalty and wrath (anger) of God. The heart of God was greatly saddened when His guiltless Son was suffering the penalty of sin. This separation of

God the Father from His Son will never again happen throughout the eternal [without end] ages.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 924.

Ellen G. White’s statement shows, first, that the Father withdrew His love from the Son. He did not withdraw because He did not love Him. He withdrew because Jesus was dying in our place. There was no one to connect Jesus to God’s love! Second, there was no revengeful¹³ spirit in the heart of the Father as His Son was dying for the sins of the world. The Father did not rejoice in the death of the Son. But the Father was suffering with Him. Third, the real penalty God paid for our sins was “the sundering [tearing apart] of God’s powers.” Ellen G. White is taking us inside the mystery of the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. She is describing for us what the Godhead¹⁴ had gone through while Jesus was on the cross. The verb *to sunder* means “to break or force apart.” That which should have remained united (joined together as one) was torn apart.

In short, through Christ’s sacrifice¹⁵ the Godhead was accepting responsibility for the world’s sins. More so, the Godhead was suffering the results of these sins. The Godhead cannot die. But, at the tearing apart of God’s power, could the Godhead feel the great pain of the eternal death of

13. revengeful—having to do with doing or saying something bad to someone who has hurt you.

14. Godhead—the Father, His Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit are Three Persons who make up the Godhead. Together they are One God.

15. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as a life, to save or help someone or something.

all fallen sinners during the Son's short "absence" from the unity¹⁶ of the Godhead? The plan of salvation,¹⁷ the atonement, pulled the Trinity¹⁸ apart for a short while. This experience of great "pain" within the Godhead took place only once and will never happen again.

That is what our salvation cost.

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 4

IT IS FINISHED: FROM DEATH TO LIFE (John 19:28–30)

How does John 19:28–30 describe Jesus' last experiences just before He died? What did Jesus mean when He said that "it is finished"? What was finished?

"It is finished" meant that the perfect atoning (forgiving and cleansing) sacrifice had once and for all been offered and that heaven and earth had been reconnected through it. The plan of salvation had been kept secret for ages. But now it was fully shown to the universe¹⁹ through the obedient death of the Son of God on the cross. God had given the sacrifice. And now its atoning power was available to every person who will look to the Cross as the only way of salvation. As a result, the sacrificial system²⁰ of the Old

Testament ended. At the moment Jesus died, the veil (curtain) of the temple was torn apart, from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). It showed that God could be reached only through the sacrifice and person of His beloved Son.



Jesus' death meant that the perfect sacrifice for sin had once and for all been offered.

"It is finished" was a cry of victory (a win). Jesus came to defeat Satan. And He succeeded in doing this in the weakness of human form and in the midst of death (Hebrews 2:14). Satan and his angels' full downfall was fixed (determined) at the cross.

This victory was shown and sealed through Jesus' return to life. It was done when the forces of evil were unable to keep the Son of God inside the tomb. That glorious Sunday morning the words of Jesus were fulfilled: "I have the authority [power] to give it [my

16. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people are in agreement in ideals, feelings, and so on.

17. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

18. Trinity—Our God is Three equal Persons in One: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit.

19. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature, that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

20. sacrificial system—the offering of the blood of animals by the Jewish priests for the sins of the people. The blood that was shed represented Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died this system (sacrifices) was not needed.

life] up. And I have the authority to take it back again. I received this command from my Father' ” (John 10:18, NlrV). Jesus is “ ‘the Living One. I was dead. But look! I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of Death and Hell’ ” (Revelation 1:18, NlrV).

What hope does the fact that Christ finished His work at the cross offer us? What does that tell us about trusting in Him and His works for us? How should this trust be real in our lives and behavior (actions)?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 5

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Man has not been made a sin-bearer. So he will never know the horror of the curse of sin which the Saviour accepted. No sorrow we could suffer is the same as the sorrow of Jesus when God’s wrath [anger] fell upon Him with great force. Human nature²¹ can endure²² but a limited amount of test and trial. Humans can only stand the limited measure, and then human nature falls. But the nature of Christ²³ permitted Him to suffer more deeply than any human ever could. The human part of Jesus, together with His divine (of God) nature, gave Him the ability to suffer deeply for the sins of a lost world. The suffering which Christ had broadens, deepens, and gives better

understanding of what sin is truly like and the kind of punishment which God will bring upon those who continue in sin.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 1103.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Read carefully the Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s study. How does this idea, of Christ’s suffering being worse than anything we could face, help us understand how suffering could continue in a world created by a loving God? What comfort can you receive from knowing that God has suffered worse from sin than any of us ever had or ever could?
- ❷ Go over Wednesday’s study about the idea of the tearing apart of the Godhead. What can you take from that to help you understand the deep meaning of the atonement? How was that experience in the Godhead “the penalty” for our sin? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.
- ❸ What does it mean to give of yourself unselfishly for others? What examples from everyday life can you find of this principle (rule) at work? How can we, both as individuals and as a church, better show such unselfish giving?

21. human nature—any of the qualities or aspects of humans (men, women, and children) that make us who we are. Without God our natures are sinful, fallen, selfish, proud, unkind, and so on.

22. endure—to suffer through hardship with patience.

23. nature of Christ—any of the qualities or aspects of God that make Him who He is, such as love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.