

Christ, Our Sacrifice



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:2–12, Heb. 2:9, Heb. 9:26–28, Heb. 9:12, Exod. 12:5, Heb. 4:15.*

Memory Text: “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24, NASB).

Catholic Priest Maximilian Kolbe was imprisoned in Auschwitz for providing shelter to refugees from Greater Poland, including 2,000 Jews. When a prisoner in his barracks vanished (perhaps he escaped), the SS picked ten prisoners to be starved to death in reprisal. One of the selected men cried out, “Oh, my poor wife, my poor children. I shall never see them again.” At that point Kolbe offered himself in the man’s place; that is, he asked that he be the one to starve, not the distraught family man. The surprised SS officer agreed, and Kolbe joined the ranks of the doomed while the other man survived.

However moving, Kolbe’s sacrifice is only a shadow of the One who willingly took our place, an act symbolized in the sanctuary service. The New Testament identifies Jesus with the two major aspects of the Old Testament sacrificial system: He is our Sacrifice (*Hebrews 9, 10*), and He is our High Priest (*Hebrews 5–10*).

This week we will study different aspects of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice and see what His once-and-for-all death has provided for us.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 16.*

Jesus in Isaiah 53

Read Isaiah 53:2–12. What do these verses teach about what Christ did for us?

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is a powerful description of Christ’s death for the sins of the world. Several aspects in this passage provide clear evidence that Jesus’ death is atonement in the form of penal substitution, which means that He took the penalty that others deserved and, in fact, died as a Substitute for them. Here are some of the implications of this passage for Jesus’ ministry for us:

1. Jesus suffered *for* others. He took their grief and sorrows (*vs. 4*), transgressions, iniquities (*vss. 5, 6, 8, 11*), and sin (*vs. 12*).
2. He brings great benefits to those for whom He suffers: peace and healing (*vs. 5*) and justification (*vs. 11*).
3. It was God’s will for Jesus to suffer and be crushed (*vs. 10*). God put our iniquity on Him (*vs. 6*) because it was God’s plan that He died in our stead.
4. Jesus is righteous (*vs. 11*), without violence or deceit (*vs. 9*).
5. He was a guilt offering, an atoning sacrifice for sin (*vs. 10*).

Read Luke 22:37, Acts 8:32–35, and 1 Peter 2:21–25. How do these New Testament authors interpret Isaiah 53?

The New Testament allusions to Isaiah 53 establish beyond doubt that Jesus Christ fulfills this prophecy. Even He identified Himself with the person depicted there (*Luke 22:37*). Christ took our sins upon Himself so that we could be forgiven and transformed.

Dwell on all that Isaiah 53 says that Christ did for us. How can you make this personal, and know that no matter what you have done, the assurances here can apply to you if you give yourself to the Lord in faith and surrender?

Sufficient Substitution

Read Hebrews 2:9. What does it mean that Jesus “taste[d] death for everyone”? See also *Heb. 2:17, 9:26–28, 10:12*.

Jesus died for sinners. He was without sin (*Heb. 4:15*) so that when He gave His life as a sacrifice He would not die for His own sin. On the contrary, He was “to bear the sins of many” (*Heb. 9:28, NKJV*), to “make propitiation for the sins of the people” (*Heb. 2:17, NKJV*), and to put away sin forever (*Heb. 9:26*).

According to Hebrews 2:9, the purpose of making Jesus “lower than the angels” is so that He could suffer death. The point is to explain why Jesus’ death is an indispensable requirement for His exaltation. In simple terms, in order for humanity to be saved, Jesus had to die. There was no other way.

In this passage, the goal of the Incarnation is the death of the Son. Only through the suffering of death could Jesus become the Author of salvation (*Heb. 2:10*).

Why was it fitting for God to let Jesus suffer? The context in Hebrews 2:14–18 suggests that Jesus’ death was necessary in order to rescue God’s children from the slavery of death, from the devil, and from the fear of death, and to qualify Jesus to become a “merciful and faithful High Priest” (*NKJV*).

In short, the Cross had to precede the crown.

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Christ, the Creator of the universe, died as a human being for your sins. Dwell on what this means. Think of the incredible good news that it is. Think of the hope it offers you, personally. How can you make this amazing truth the chief motivation of all that you do?

Christ's Blood

The concept of redemptive blood pervades the entire Bible. Starting from the earliest sacrifices after Adam and Eve sinned, blood was always present when animal sacrifices occurred. Blood rituals characterized the Israelite sacrificial system in order to illustrate the crucial truth that, without blood, we would not have any chance to be forgiven our sins and to enter into the presence of God. Blood was the only way to receive God's mercy and to have community with Him.

Read the following passages in Hebrews about Christ's blood and the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices. What do they teach us about the blood?

Heb. 9:12 _____

Heb. 9:14 _____

Heb. 9:18 _____

Heb. 9:22 _____

Heb. 10:19 _____

Heb. 12:24 _____

Heb. 13:12 _____

Heb. 13:20 _____

Christ's blood does not refer to His life, but instead it is a symbol of His substitutionary death. As such, it describes the functional aspect of that death. Christ's shed blood is amazingly multifunctional. Christ's blood obtains eternal redemption for us, provides us with cleansing from sin, provides us with forgiveness and sanctification, and is the reason for the resurrection.

In Hebrews, there is a powerful contrast: Christ's blood is better than any other blood. In fact, no other blood can really provide forgiveness; Christ's death is the only reason why sins are forgiven, before and after the Cross (*Heb. 9:15*). The shedding of Christ's blood, and its effects, are clear evidence that Christ's death was substitutionary, which means that He took the penalty that we deserve.

How should an understanding of Christ's death help to free us from any notion that our own works can save us?

Spotless Sacrifice

Which criteria does a sacrificial animal need to meet? *Read Exod. 12:5, Lev. 3:1, 4:3.*

The selection of a sacrificial animal required great care. A person could not just take any animal for an offering; the animal needed to fulfill several criteria, depending on the kind of offering.

However, there is one criterion that all offerings had to meet. They had to be “unblemished.” The Hebrew word *tamim* could also be translated as “complete,” “unscathed,” “without fault,” or “perfect.” It expresses the idea that something meets the highest standard possible. Only the best was good enough.

Pertaining to people, the word is used to characterize their relationship with God as being “blameless” (*Gen. 6:9, 17:1, NASB*).

How do these texts describe Jesus? *Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 9:14; and 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.* **Why was it crucial that Jesus be sinless?**

Jesus, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (*John 1:29, NKJV*), perfectly fulfills the Old Testament criterion of a spotless sacrifice. His pure life established Jesus as a perfect sacrifice. This is the guarantee of our salvation, for only a sinless one could bear our sin for us, and it is His perfect righteousness that covers us, now and in the judgment. That righteousness is our hope of salvation.

Like its Hebrew equivalent, the Greek word for “without blemish” (*amomos*) is used not only to describe Jesus and His flawless sacrifice but also the character of His followers.

“By comparing their lives with Christ’s character, they will be able to discern where they have failed to meet the requirements of God’s holy law; and will seek to make themselves perfect in their sphere even as God is perfect in his sphere.”—Ellen G. White, *The Paulson Letters*, p. 374.

Through Christ’s death and His ministry, we are presented blameless before God (*Jude 24*). This is possible only because the Blameless One stands in our place.

Why can the concept of being “holy and blameless” cause uneasiness? How can the knowledge that Christ is our Substitute help you to accept that you are “holy,” as well? How should our new status before God impact the way in which we live?

A Great Danger

In the book of Hebrews, Paul not only focuses on the theological understanding of Christ's sacrifice, but he also explains some of its practical implications. At several places he shows what happens if someone ignores this sacrifice.

Read Hebrews 6:4–6 and 10:26–31. About what is Paul warning us? What kinds of attitudes does he describe?

In the book of Hebrews, Paul demonstrates how magnificent God's salvation is, how God has revealed Himself, and what He has done and is doing for the believers. However, there is at least one main, problematic issue that Paul has to address. It is the danger that Christ's sacrifice could gradually be taken for granted. He describes such a danger as "drifting away" from the goal (*Heb. 2:1*). The imagery behind Paul's words is that of a ship that is veering off course and does not reach the port of destination. So, the main task is to stay on course.

Some of those who reject God do so deliberately, which means that their lives after receiving the gospel are virtually the same as they were before these people received the gospel. These people do not, in fact, have any efficacious sacrifice for their sins (*Heb. 10:26–31*). It seems that not many believers would forthrightly reject Christ's sacrifice or even think about such a thing. Still, Paul sounds a warning. The real danger of disregard and neglect is that it is often a subtle and very gradual process. The transition can be unnoticeable. Gradually, the work of Christ is not appreciated enough, similar to Esau's failure to appreciate his birthright anymore (*Heb. 12:15–17*). Christ's sacrifice should never become so familiar that we regard it as commonplace.

Paul does not want to make his readers fearful; nevertheless, he needs to show them the consequences of veering away from God. He does not want such a thing to happen. On the positive side, he encourages them vividly to "hold fast" to all the good things of salvation (*Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:23*) and to fix their eyes on Jesus (*Heb. 12:2*).

What about yourself? Have you simply become "used to" the amazing truth about the Cross? Why is this such a terrible thing to do? How can we protect ourselves from the danger that Paul warns about here?

Further Study: “The Atonement, Part I—Atoning Sacrifice,” pp. 457–476, in Appendix C of *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A.

What Martin Luther frequently called a “wonderful exchange” or “joyous exchange” of Christ’s righteousness for human sin, Ellen G. White describes in a classic statement as follows: “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

“Nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us. It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Some don’t like the idea of Jesus as our Sacrifice. They think it makes God sound bloodthirsty or vengeful, like the pagan deities of the past. (In fact, some argue that the language of blood and sacrifice and so forth in the Bible is simply a reflection of these pagan concepts.) What is so dramatically wrong with this perception of the Cross? How do the concepts of death, sacrifice, and blood help to show us just how serious sin and its consequences are? How should this realization of the cost of sin help us to seek God’s power to put sin out of our lives?
- ❷ Some people struggle with the issue of works and how they relate to salvation. How can keeping before us Christ’s substitutionary death, and what He accomplished for us by that death, help to protect us from falling into the trap of salvation by works? After all, what could our works possibly add to what Christ has done for us by dying in our stead?
- ❸ Ellen G. White said it would be good to spend a thoughtful hour every day focusing on the life of Jesus, especially the closing scenes. How could such an exercise help to strengthen our relationship with Christ, as well as increase our appreciation of what He has done for us?

God of the Impossible

When my parents died, my grandmother took me in. Her priest hoped I would follow in his footsteps, so he paid my school fees. One day he gave me a sermon and told me to preach it the following Sunday. I didn't understand it, and the priest wasn't there to explain it. So, I asked a Seventh-day Adventist neighbor to explain it to me. He read the sermon and said the sermon wasn't biblical. Then he read several Bible texts that explained what the Bible actually said.

I skipped church that Sunday. Angry, the priest threatened to stop paying my school fees. I told the Seventh-day Adventist man, and he read me two powerful Bible texts. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (*Mark 8:36, NKJV*), and "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). He invited me to visit his church. On Sabbath I found a few Seventh-day Adventists worshiping under a tree. But I sensed that God was there.

The priest stopped paying my school fees, and I had to quit school. My neighbors taunted me for rebelling. But the Seventh-day Adventist district pastor found a sponsor so I could study. In time I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

When my sponsor died, I had no means to continue studying. I prepared to go home, but the school's accountant stopped me and said my fees were paid for two more terms. I praised God and continued my studies. I worked to pay my remaining fees until I graduated.

I wanted to study at Zambia Adventist University, but with no sponsor, I couldn't enroll. I prayed fervently for God's help. I was offered a job on campus that would pay my tuition. I stayed with four other students in an unused chicken house until the school helped us find something better. We didn't mind, for we are studying!

I'm studying to serve God as a pastor. That's not exactly what the priest had in mind when he sent me to school, but I know it's God's will. I love to tell others this wonderful truth that I have learned. People in my village have seen that my God is the God of the impossible. Four members of my family have surrendered their lives to God and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Your mission offerings have helped build Zambia Adventist University to train leaders for service to God and humanity.



KISCO MWEEMBA shares his faith in Zambia.