

God *as* Redeemer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 1:18, Gen. 3:15, Rom. 16:20, 1 Pet. 1:19, Mark 10:32–45, Matt. 27:46.*

Memory Text: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (*Revelation 5:12, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The Triune God is our Creator and Redeemer.

Closely related to God as Creator is His role as our Redeemer. Sin is so bad, so hostile to the created world, that only the Creator Himself could solve the problem.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (*Eph. 2:13, NKJV*). It is not through works, nor through anything we could ever do, but it is through His grace, manifest at the Cross that we as sinners can be redeemed by the Lord and be “brought near” to Him. Christ bore God’s wrath so that none of us would ever, ideally, have to.

Paul also tells the church in Corinth that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (*1 Cor. 1:18, NKJV*). The scandal of the Cross is that it appears so absurd: God, the infinite, holy Creator, becomes a sacrifice for the sake of twisted human souls, even His avowed enemies, taking upon Himself the penalty for their sins so that they wouldn’t have to face that penalty themselves! The atonement is so deep, so heavy, so profound, that we grasp only what we can. Beyond that, thinking stops, and all we can do is worship.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 21.*

At the Cross

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). What is this text saying to us?

At the cross, in the most humiliating, inconceivable manner imaginable, God triumphs over and shames the enemy. Love, justice, and compassion fuse in a singular dynamic act. God forgives sinners by paying in Himself the price of sin and absorbing into His own suffering Self the penalty of that sin. On Calvary, God reveals how extremely costly forgiveness is.

Christ didn't die in order to create love in God's heart for us. No, Jesus insists that the Father's love is the source, not the consequence, of the atonement (*John 3:16, 17*). God doesn't love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us. The atonement of Christ was not offered to persuade the Father to love those whom He otherwise hated. The death of Christ did not bring forth a love that was not already in existence. Rather, it was a manifestation of the love that was eternally in God's heart. Jesus never had to persuade the Father to love us. Notice how He insists on this truth in *John 3:16, 17; 16:26, 27*.

The real tragedy is that we have lost much of the knowledge of God, against whom we have sinned. We do not even feel that we have much to repent of, because we're not always sure about just how much we have offended God with our sins. We can become dull to just how bad sin really is. Modern religious sentimentality often minimizes repugnance toward sin. And because sin doesn't make us angry anymore, perhaps it becomes harder to realize that sin arouses the wrath of a Holy God.

Paul is not afraid to discuss the wrath of God. How does he express it in Romans 1:18?

This strong statement sets the tone for the lengthy treatment of the universal sway of sin on which Paul continues to elaborate for the next two chapters (*through Romans 3:20*).

An astounding aspect of the gospel is the fact that God is both the victor over our sin and the victim of it. And, as a result of this dual role, our holy God can keep His covenant with sinful covenant breakers. God's love does not lead to a bland tolerance of sin and evil but to a triumphant victory over it. It is precisely because God is love that He opposes sin and evil, for these realities corrupt and destroy His beloved children. The death that God endured on the cross is the price His love pays for taking sin seriously while still loving sinners.

How seriously do you take the sin in your life? And what criteria do you use to justify your answer?

The Gospel in the Old Testament

When is the first promise of salvation given, and what does it mean?
Gen. 3:15.

The language here is striking. Adam and Eve have sinned. Now the great controversy is announced to them through the strong language of “enmity” between two opposing sides. This is a precious promise for human hearts now attracted to sin. We are also assured that this major conflict will not be eternal, for the head of the enemy will one day be crushed. In these verses, not only is the great controversy first revealed, but we also are told how it is going to end.

Paul took courage from Genesis 3:15. How does he express it in Romans 16:20? What point is he making?

In Genesis 22:1–19, Moses also narrates an amazingly graphic atonement picture. What can we learn about the future atonement of Christ from this narrative?

Note the many mentions of “father and son” and how the two go to the mountain of sacrifice together. The son carries the wood and the father the instruments of sacrifice (fire and knife). Isaac, much younger than his father, could have overpowered Abraham on the mountain of sacrifice. But, instead, we see two miracles: the father yielding his son, and the son yielding his life.

What a powerful representation of the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf. The scene, however powerful and moving, was only a tiny foretaste of the time when—centuries later—another Father would offer His Son. This time, however, there would be no animal to die instead of the son. The Son Himself would die on the altar. The Father would truly give up His Son, and the Son would give His life.

There, on Mount Moriah, the world has been presented a very powerful picture (but still only a picture) of the plan of salvation and what it cost to redeem fallen humanity from the ruin of sin.

Salvation in Isaiah

On the famous road to Emmaus, Jesus taught the two despairing disciples about the atonement from “Moses and all the prophets” (*Luke 24:27*). What prophetic materials might Jesus have included in His study of the atonement?

It’s very likely that Isaiah was among the prophets to whom Jesus would have referred.

Read Isaiah 53, which describes the “Suffering Servant.” Describe the details included there that help you to more fully grasp the amazing atonement of Christ.

Although so much exists in this chapter, one point stands out more than anything else, and that is the substitutionary role of the Suffering Servant. Notice all the times that He is paying the price for the sins of others. Again and again this theme appears, and what it teaches is that at the heart of salvation, of atonement, is the death of Jesus on our behalf. As sinners who have violated God’s law, we can do nothing to make ourselves right with God. All of our good works cannot bridge the gap between us and God. The only way to save us was for Jesus to pay the penalty in our stead and then offer us His perfect righteousness, which we claim by faith.

Had our works been able to make us right with God in any way, then Jesus would not have had to die for us. The fact that He did, that it took nothing less than His death in order to make atonement, should be all the proof we need that we cannot earn our salvation. It is, instead, wholly a gift of grace.

Read 1 Peter 1:19, 2:21–25. How does Peter draw on Isaiah 53 in his explanation of Christ’s atoning death on our behalf?

Isaiah 53 presents what’s perhaps the clearest theological explanation of the Cross, showing unequivocally that, whatever else the Cross represents, it represents Christ dying on our behalf, bearing in Himself the punishment that we deserve.

Using Isaiah 53 as your text, think about the final scenes of Christ’s life. As you do, keep in mind that the person depicted there is our God, our Creator, one part of the Godhead Himself. How do we get our minds around this amazing truth?

The Gospels and the Cross

The astounding miracle of Christ's incarnation, His profound teaching, and the miracles He performed, are not the central focus of Christ's life. Instead, what dominates the thinking of Jesus is the giving of His life. As miraculous as His birth and ministry were, the great mission of Christ's life was His death.

In the four Gospels, we find Jesus endeavoring to prepare His disciples for His coming death. However, their devotion to Jesus, coupled with their hope for a political Messiah, prevents them from grasping what Jesus is telling them.

Read Mark 10:32–45. How did Jesus describe His coming execution? (vss. 33, 34). What was wrong with the request of James and John? (vss. 35–37). What was Jesus' pointed response? (vss. 42–45).

The evening before He died, Jesus celebrated a Passover meal with His disciples. He then gave instructions that this event should be observed until He returned again. This ordinance of Communion, instituted by the Lord Himself—and the only commemorative act He personally authorized—is not a memorial of His incarnation, nor His miracles, nor His parables, nor His preaching, but only of His death. Christ Himself wished above all else to be remembered by His death.

In fact, in the four Gospel accounts of the Messiah's life, the events surrounding and including the crucifixion carry the major emphasis. The staggering miracle of the Incarnation is mentioned only by Matthew and Luke. Only two chapters in each of their Gospels record Christ's conception and birth. Mark and John omit any comment on Christ's birth at all and begin their Gospels with Jesus as an adult.

All four Gospel writers, however, determinedly emphasize the last week of Christ's life and, of course, His death. Glance through them and notice this pointed focus on just a few days of Christ's life. The last week of Jesus' life, leading up to and including His death, takes up from one-third to almost one-half of all gospel accounts. Each reader is "forced" to rivet attention on the great redeeming act of God.

Look at your life, your past, your mistakes, your sins. Do you honestly think anything you have done, or could do, could ever atone for them? Why, then, should the death of Jesus on your behalf be the central focus of your life? What hope would you have without it?

The Cry on the Cross

Nothing is more destructive to our grasp of the atonement of Christ than the sentimentality that sometimes passes for Christianity in our day (all in the attempt to make the gospel conform to modern thinking). However, we must ever humbly acknowledge that anything we say about God can never do God justice, especially when we consider the atonement. We must avoid the temptation to reduce Jesus' death on the cross to merely an "example of selfless love." It was certainly that, but considering our situation as sinners, it would take more than "an example of selfless love" to redeem us. It would take, instead, our God bearing in Himself the full brunt of His own wrath against sin.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46, NKJV). How are we to understand this? What was Jesus saying, why, and how does this amazing cry help us understand what it cost to save us from sin?

"And now the Lord of Glory was dying, a ransom for the race. . . . 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 Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. . . . He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. . . . It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 752, 753.

Jesus addresses this prayer to "God," instead of to the "Father" as He always had done. Christ's cries from the cross are not some exemplary display that He appears to go through in order to demonstrate that He loves us. No, this is God giving Himself over to death so that our destiny would not be determined by death. This is God Himself dying the death from which we can be spared, the death that sin would otherwise bring us all.

Three Gospels record that Jesus cried out with a loud voice from the cross as He was dying. These loud cries are even mentioned in the book of Hebrews: "who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death" (*Heb. 5:7, NKJV*). Jesus' "cry of dereliction" is the most piercing cry in the Bible. There is no statement in all the Gospels to rival this one from Jesus on the cross, and in that cry we get a glimpse of what the Lord Himself was willing to go through in order to bring us salvation.

Further Study: “Oh, how inefficient, how incapable I am of expressing the things which burn in my soul in reference to the mission of Christ! . . . I know not how to speak or trace with pen the large subject of the atoning sacrifice. I know not how to present subjects in the living power in which they stand before me. I tremble for fear lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 115.

“The infinite mercy and love of Jesus, the sacrifice made in our behalf, call for the most serious and solemn reflection. We should dwell upon the character of our dear Redeemer and Intercessor. . . . As we thus contemplate heavenly themes, our faith and love will grow stronger, and our prayers will be more and more acceptable to God, because they will be more and more mixed with faith and love. They will be intelligent and fervent. There will be more constant confidence in Jesus, and a daily, living experience in His power to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 89.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In Scripture, God is portrayed both as a great Lover of sinners as well as extremely wrathful against sin. Some Christians try to pick one or the other as representing God’s nature. Why is that unnecessary? In fact, why is God’s love for sinners one of the main reasons why He is wrathful against sin?
- ❷ God’s love is not like the feeble and sometimes irregular affection that we bestow on one another. What does Christ’s act as Savior teach us about divine love?
- ❸ How does your understanding of God’s holiness, in contrast to your sinfulness, help you to understand better why salvation cost so much?
- ❹ Dwell more on the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. In what other ways does it help us to understand the nature of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf? At the same time, in what ways does it barely do justice to what it was intended to symbolize?

Summary: From the earliest pages of Genesis, the Bible points us to the death of Christ on the cross, where He would die a sinner’s death in order to redeem us, as sinners, from the eternal destruction that sin brings. Though the Bible uses different symbols and metaphors to explain Christ’s death, at the center of it all is His substitution, so graphically expressed in Isaiah 53. If we ever needed proof that works can’t save us, we have it with the death of God Himself on the cross. After all, what could fallen beings ever add to that?

Hope and a Future

by ALEXANDER GRINEV

I was a typical Soviet youth—ambitious and skeptical. When the Soviet Union broke up, I opened my own business.

One day Natasha, my wife, met a woman who invited us to evangelistic meetings sponsored by Seventh-day Adventists. I had heard of Adventists and believed that they were honest people. So when Natasha came home from the first meeting, excited about what she heard, I agreed to go to the meetings with her.

As I listened to the speaker, my youthful skepticism melted away, and we accepted the truths we were learning. We made a commitment to God, and He delivered me from my bad habits. We were so happy!

When Communism failed in Russia, the Mafia stepped in and threatened small business owners, including me. I realized that we had to leave Russia, but where could we go? In answer to our prayers, a pastor-friend invited us to go to New Zealand. I knew a lot about this small island nation from my years in the Russian military. We sold everything and moved to New Zealand.

We found a Seventh-day Adventist church in Christchurch and were welcomed into the church family. As we learned of other Russians moving to Christchurch, we invited them to church. Our Russian-speaking company meets in the English church. We're continuing to grow as we invite other Russian-speaking immigrants to worship with us. We share our faith with those we meet and make friends for God among newcomers to this country.

We hold small-group meetings, women's meetings, and Bible-study groups. We now have a growing—congregation with a part-time Russian-speaking pastor who has helped to build this congregation. We have discovered that about 4,000 Russian and Slavic-speaking people live in our area of New Zealand.

Our mother church supports us, and its members are happy to see our congregation growing. We're all very excited about the potential to reach others in the community who need to know Christ as a personal Friend and Savior. Some of our friends have been baptized, and we're looking for more who want to know Christ.

I'm amazed at how God has led us. We're happy to be living in His will and working for Him in our adopted homeland.

Our Russian church plant is sponsored in part through Global Mission. Thank you for sharing God's love so that other Russians in New Zealand will know how much Jesus loves them.

ALEXANDER GRINEV *shares his faith in Christchurch, New Zealand.*