

Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

a seven-week interactive study on the death
and resurrection of Jesus Christ

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introduction

History literally revolves around the person of Jesus. Time magazine called Him “most influential person to ever walk the face of the earth.”¹ Our calendar is split around His life: B.C. designates “Before Christ” and A.D., which is “Anno Domini” or “The Year of Our Lord”. The Roman cross which, until the resurrection of Jesus, was a symbol of torture, cruelty and domination, has become a worship icon worn by pop stars and grandmothers alike.

But who really was Jesus? And what did His death ultimately accomplish? Was it simply a horrific miscarriage of justice? A tragic end to the “greatest story ever told?” Or was it, as some pastors and theologians have begun to insist, a case of “cosmic child abuse?”² Or could it be, as orthodox Christians have insisted for two millennia, the God-man who lived the life we could never live, dying the death that we deserved to die? And even if we side with thousands of years of orthodox belief, what did it really accomplish?

Theologians term all of the theories relating to God dealing with human sin through the death of Jesus on the cross “Theories of the *Atonement*.” The atonement is the “crown jewel of Christian doctrine”³, and like any jewel, it has many sides. Each of those sides reveals a different portion of this incredible jewel, not refuting each other, but rounding out our understanding of what the death of Jesus really accomplished.

During this Lenten season, I am asking that we as a church family participate in the discipline of study, that is, that we truly dig into the question “Why did Jesus have to die?” As theologians, pastors, and thinkers have been wrestling with this question for literally thousands of

¹ Time magazine, cover story. 06 December 1999

² This phrase was originally quoted by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann in their book “The Lost Message of Jesus” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003, pg. 182-183) and is seconded by Brian McLaren in “The Story We Find Ourselves In” (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003, pg. 102)

³ Hill and James, ed. “The Glory of the Atonement” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2004)

years, it would be foolish to think that we would exhaust the question. However, with a commitment to the foundation of the Word of God and a willingness to dig into the Word, we can certainly gain a new and deeper perspective.

In this study series, “Why Did Jesus Have to Die?,” we will look at seven major views of the atonement, wrapped up in the responses to the question:

- Jesus died to take our place (Penal Substitution)
- Jesus died to forgive our sin (Justification)
- Jesus died to restore the Kingdom of God (Incorporation)
- Jesus died to pay our debt (Satisfaction)
- Jesus died to create in us a new nature (Redemption)
- Jesus died to be our model (Christus Exemplar)
- Jesus died to defeat sin and Satan (Christus Victor)

As we begin to study, let me offer these thoughts and words of encouragement: while Bible reading enjoys a measure of popularity among Christians, Bible *study* is often discussed but rarely practiced. It can be difficult and sometimes confusing. The topic of the atonement is one that has been debated by theologians for centuries, and that fact alone can make it seem overwhelming. However, please let me encourage you to push through the difficulty! At the end is a great reward—understanding and appreciating more of the cross! While we’ll never understand completely why Jesus had to die, at least until we’re before the throne, we *can* understand it more.

As you study, there may be days where it doesn’t seem to make sense: slow down, think it through, and start again. There may be times you read a passage and the words seem to jumble up—pray and ask God to make it clear to you, and then start over again. You may hit points where you can’t figure out a specific point or concept—dialog it with your LIFE group leader, accountability partner, or someone else going through this study. Whatever you do, don’t quit! Keep pressing through, and I believe that as a church family we will all emerge from this Lenten season with a broader, deeper, and more devoted love for Jesus.

Grace and peace,

Brian Kannel
York Alliance Church

How to Use This Book

This book is intended to be used as a companion resource to the Lenten 2010 sermon series at YAC entitled “Why Did Jesus Have to Die?” While each week’s message will hopefully give a broad response to the series’ central question, these studies will help us dig deeper into the truth of the Word. My hope is that both your personal time with God as well as the discussion time within your LIFE group will be greatly enhanced as you process these truths in conjunction with God’s Word. Please note that these studies are in no way a substitute for your LIFE group meeting—in fact, I hope by utilizing this tool, you are even more driven toward interaction in your LIFE group as you wrestle through the application of these truths to your everyday life!

A few specifics about this study guide:

- Each of the six weeks of Lent as well as the week following Easter are represented by five studies, one intended to be used each day Monday through Friday (though they actually can be utilized at any time throughout the week). They shouldn’t take long; however, don’t rush through them. Set aside time to look up Scriptures, read the passages, process thoughts and questions, and to truly hear from God.
- As “preparatory” for the series, two studies are included at the beginning of the book to complement and follow the Ash Wednesday liturgical service. They can be used on Thursday and Friday of that week preceding the first Lenten message.
- Unless marked otherwise, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV). However, I would encourage you to read key passages in more than one translation in order to get the full effect of what the Word is saying. I would highly recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) on the more literal side, and the New Living Translation (NLT) or Eugene Peterson’s “The Message” (MSG) on the less literal. To get the full picture, it’s often helpful to read a passage in a very literal translation, in a middle of the road version (NIV), and in a less literal translation.

- Unique to this study guide is a “Family Time” section at the conclusion of each week’s content. My hope is that the list of questions will provide appropriate conversation around the dinner table or during an intentional family devotional time. However, they *are* questions, not activities—my intent is that you engage your children in the dialog. Written with 8-12 year olds in mind, the questions may need to be slightly adapted for younger or older children. Following many of the questions, basic answers are included to assist you in being comfortable with the intended dialog. However, don’t let these answers limit you—they are merely provided as discussion prompters!

If you have questions about how to best utilize the book or have comments on what you’re finding in it and/or on your experiences with it, they are welcomed! Email me at bkannel@yorkalliance.org.

My prayer for us all is that as we study, we’ll find that, as John Piper says, “We are more sinful than we ever imagined, but more loved than we ever dared hope.”

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Ash Wednesday: The Problem

Ash Wednesday is a weighty, dark time in which we consider our sin. As a whole, the Lenten season is a somber time, and Ash Wednesday, the day when we particularly remember our sin and recognize that it ultimately leads to death, is among the most somber of the days of Lent. During these next two days, take time to really meditate on your sin—allow the weight of sin to rest on you fully. It's only when we understand the depths of our sinfulness that we can begin to appreciate the love of our Savior.

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Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Romans 7:7-24*

Biblically, sin is an incredibly large concept. In the New Testament alone, there are five different Greek words that all are translated “sin” in English. Throughout the Bible, it is clear that “sin” is the primary separation between God and man.

Look up the following passages, and paraphrase what they say about sin:

- Deuteronomy 24:16
- Psalm 51:4
- Psalm 66:18
- Matthew 5:29-30
- Romans 3:9, 23
- Romans 6:23

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Write a definition of sin:

If you grew up or spent any time in the liturgical church setting, you might be familiar with some variation of the following words: *“We have sinned in thought, word, and deed. That which we have done, and that which we have left undone.”* This divides sin into two categories: sins of commission (that which we have done), and sins of omission (that which we have left undone).

What are some examples of sins of “commission”?

What are some examples of sins of “omission”? (Romans. 1:20-21)

Things you're called to do but didn't, including overt actions (connecting with someone) and covert ones (glorifying God in all things).

Look at Romans 14:23. What was Paul's definition of sin? What do you think that means?

When you think of all the ways that you've failed to glorify and honor God and all of the ways that you've acted apart from faith, those sins likely tower over the sins that you've committed in your life. When we see sin as broadly as God does, the weight is incredible. We say, as Paul did in our reading today, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24) Take time to meditate on the weight of your sin.

Application:

- How does a right understanding of sin encourage my relationship with Jesus?
- What would it look like for me to live a life that is completely based on faith? How would that change the way I currently live?

Lord, during this Lenten season, help me to realize the depth of my sin. May I not simply acknowledge the sins I commit, but may all the omissions be just as evident and real. Give me a deep knowledge of my sin so I recognize my deep need for a Savior! Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Psalm 51*

The sin that we both commit and omit is bad enough. However, biblically, sin is beyond even that! David states in the Psalm we read today, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (vs. 5) Sin, then, is not just an action or a grouping of actions, but it is also a *condition*. We are *born* with sin!

Read Romans 5:12-21

- How do we know that we are connected to Adam, and therefore to Adam’s sin? (vs. 12-14)

- What does God say about even the most remote possibility that someone doesn’t commit a sin? (vs. 14)

- Name some ways that Jesus and Adam are parallels.

- How does what Paul is saying in this passage, and specifically in vs. 19, relate to what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:5-7?

Do you think it's fair for one man's sin to condemn all men? It's easy to say that it's not. However, it's actually the grace and love of God toward us! Because we have been condemned through the sin of one man, we are also able to be redeemed through the righteousness of one man—Jesus Christ.

Application:

- How does the realization that I'm born into sin effect you trying to earn favor with God?

- What's the significance of being "born again", and how does it effect the way that I live my life?

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Lord Jesus, thank You that You lived the life that we were unable to live and died the death that we rightfully should have died. As we study Your atoning death for us on the cross this Lenten season, convict us of our sin and draw us close to Your heart. May we increasingly be aware of Your deep love for us! Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: *Matthew 5:17-20*

1. What does it mean to sin? *(To fall short of God's perfect standard for our lives.)*
2. What are some ways that sin separates us from God?
3. What are some of the ways that sin separates us from each other?
4. Who were the Pharisees and teachers of the law? *(Religious leaders in Jesus' day that were outwardly perfect, following every law to the letter.)*
5. What does Jesus mean that we need to be more righteous than they are? Is that possible? *(He meant that our hearts needed to be pure as well as our actions, which is impossible apart from Jesus. However, through Jesus' life, we're given HIS righteousness!)*

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Lenten Week One: Jesus Died to Take Our Place

Penal Substitution is the idea that there is (a) a penalty for sin and that (b) Jesus bore that penalty in our place. It is a doctrine that is being attacked in many Christian circles as unkind, unjust, and unnecessary. However, the concept of substitution is biblically central throughout the Old Testament as well as the New. This week, we'll dig more deeply into the way that our sin separates us from God, but also into the glorious news of Jesus acting as the substitute for us.

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Monday

Daily Reading: *Romans 1:18-32*

As we observed last week, sin is pervasive—we're more sinful than we could ever imagine. It goes without saying that our sin makes us unclean. When it comes to sin, we certainly have a problem. However, the larger problem is not simply our sin, but the effect of that sin.

What do the following passages tell you about the connection between God and sin?

- Exodus 34:18-20
- Joshua 24:19-20
- Isaiah 6:1-7

The Bible contains many metaphors for God as He relates to humans. Look at the following passages. What metaphors are used for God in His relationship to sinful man?

- Isaiah 57:15
- Joshua 3:4, Exodus 3:5
- 1 John 1:5
- Hebrews 12:29
- Leviticus 18:25-28; Revelation 3:16

All of these metaphors indicate the utter incompatibility between a holy God and sinful man. Larger than simply the fact of our sin is the effect that we are completely unable to be in the presence of God *due* to our sin—not just

the actions, but our very nature!

You may say, “Yes, but I have God living in me now through the Holy Spirit. Why does this matter?” It’s true—you can now not only be in His presence, but He can indwell you. However, until we understand God’s complete inaccessibility to sinners, we won’t be able to appreciate the miracle of *our* access to Him.

Application:

- Am I more often overjoyed or repentant in God’s presence? Why do I think that is?

- How does a biblical understanding of sin and holiness affect the way that I live my life? (See *1 Peter 1:16-17*)

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Lord, You are holy, and I am not. The separation between “You as You are” and “me as I am” is incredible! Thank You for the sacrifice of Jesus, which has allowed me to enter Your presence, even as I pray this prayer, with confidence. Amen.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Hebrews 9:11-28*

Imagine a great crime has been committed against you—your youngest child has been brutally murdered. However, the police have found the culprit and you all come before a judge. How would you feel if that judge hears the case, the confession of the murderer, and all the grisly details, and even pronounces the man “guilty”? However, how would you feel if, after that verdict, the judge lets him go free, fully forgiving the one declared guilty of the crime?

In its essence, forgiveness assumes grace. If a “cost” is paid, it’s not forgiveness.⁴ However, even when grace is freely issued, the offence is still there. When the offence is great, justice still must be paid. This is characteristic of God’s justice—while forgiveness is a free gift to us, it has a cost that must be paid.

Read Ephesians 1:7

- What is the basis for the forgiveness of our sins?

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- Based on today’s reading in Hebrews 9, why is that important?
- What was the “cost” of our forgiveness? Why wasn’t the sacrificial system enough? (See *Hebrews 10:4*.)

⁴ Piper, John. “Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die” (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2006) pg. 36 | 4

The blood of Jesus is a substitute for our blood. Not only did Jesus live the life that we could never live (without sin), He also died the death we should have died. That's why trying to "pay God back" for His love to us is such a travesty—there's nothing that we can do that would amount to anything in comparison with this great gift.

Application:

- If I'm completely honest, do I believe that I have somehow earned right standing with God? On what basis?

- If the cost for my forgiveness is fully paid, what should my response be? (See Luke 7:42.)

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Lord Jesus, what an incredible gift! Thank You for paying the cost I deserved to pay so that justice could be done, but that I could be forgiven. May my love for You only increase as I realize Your love for me! Amen.

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Exodus 11 – 13:16*

Note: The reading for today is long, but the study is a bit shorter. Even though it will take more time, read through the Exodus story and meditate on this compelling “shadow” of the cross! (See Hebrews 10:1.)

List some of the parallels between the Passover story and the substitutionary death of Jesus.

- Did any families that didn't sacrifice a lamb have their sons escape death? What does this say about the need for a substitute?

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- What was the process of appropriating the blood of the lamb? Was it enough to simply kill the animal?

- What does the sprinkling of the blood show us about our need of making an individual choice to pursue Jesus?

What do the following passages show about Jesus and His relation to the Passover celebration:

- John 1:29
- 1 Corin. 5:7

In their annual Passover celebrations, the Israelites reminded themselves of the basic truths of the atonement. In fact, today this is done in Jewish homes throughout the world. However, the vast majority of Jews don't recognize the sacrifice of Jesus as the Passover Lamb. Without this recognition and appropriation in faith, there is no substitution; no forgiveness of sin.

Application:

- Why is it not enough to simply believe Jesus died?

- What else is needed for the forgiveness of sin?

Lord Jesus, what an incredible picture of Your love for us—that You would be both the judge and our Savior; that through your death, we might be spared, and even have life. Help us to receive Your life by faith! Amen.

Thursday

Daily Reading: *Genesis 22:1-14*

The language of sacrifice is present throughout the Old and New Testament. John Stott says that the Old Testament sacrifices “first expressed the sense human beings have of belonging to God by right, and then second their sense of alienation from God because of their sin and guilt.”⁵ The sacrificial system was an integral part of worship as the Old Testament Israelites recognized the Lordship of God over their lives and the grace of God to accept their worship.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2

- Based on the sacrifice of Jesus for us, what should be our response?

Read Romans 12:1-2

- What are some of the things we are commanded to do as part of offering ourselves as a sacrifice?

- What does Paul say is the result of that kind of worship?

⁵ Stott, John. “The Cross of Christ” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 135.

- Which actions in these verses are *active* (we are commanded to do them), and which are *passive* (God is doing them in us)?

- Are we called to “not conform” *before* or *after* we’re sacrificed? What’s the significance of that?

The problem with sacrifice is that we often get it backwards. We believe that we earn God’s approval through our sacrifice, rather than recognizing that He already approves of us. If the sacrifice of Jesus is not the motivation for the sacrifice of our lives, we are seeking to earn His love, not responding to it.

Application:

- Do I work harder at “not conforming” or “transforming”?

*Lord Jesus, help my life to be a living sacrifice, pleasing to You!
Amen.*

Friday

Daily Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Our reading today is one of the great passages of the New Testament, calling us both to be reconciled to God and to reconcile others. Take time to re-read this passage.

- What does it mean for me to not regard anyone from a worldly point of view?
- How does that affect the way that I view myself? (*Philippians. 3:7-8*)
- Based on vs. 18, is God the “Judge” and Jesus the “Savior”? Why is that not the case?
- Are we simply saved from hell into heaven? Based on this passage, what’s our purpose on the earth? How does this parallel with the work of Jesus? (*Ephesians 1:10*)

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Look up the following verses, and then compare them with vs. 21.

- Isaiah 64:6
- Philippians 3:9

What's the problem with my own righteousness?

Martin Luther called vs. 21 “the great exchange”—my sin for His righteousness. In order to fully understand substitution, we must not only see that Jesus has paid the price for our sin but that we have been completely and fully given His righteousness!

Application:

- How does the “great exchange” affect the way that I live my everyday life?

Lord Jesus, thank You for this incredible truth that You have become my sin and that I have gained Your righteousness! May this truth motivate me into the world to reconcile others to You! Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: *Exodus 12:21-32*

1. Tell the story of the captivity in Egypt and God's deliverance of His people from slavery. Over the next several days, you may want to keep recalling this Biblical account and try to have children/youth remember as much as they can about the story.
2. Why was God so concerned about getting His people out of Egypt? (*They were being mistreated and they weren't able to worship Him.*)
3. What is like "Egypt" in our lives, that which is holding us captive and hurting our lives? (*Sin.*)
4. Just like in the story of the Passover, a first-born son had to die in order for us to be freed from our "Egypt". Who was it? (*Jesus.*)
5. How do you think the Israelites felt as they were leaving Egypt? (*Thankful, glad, relieved, etc.*)
6. Would it have been a good idea for the Israelites to go back into Egypt after God had released them? (*No.*)
7. What does that mean for us and for the way that we're called to live?

Lenten Week Two: Jesus Died to Establish the Kingdom

Brokenness is evident throughout creation. We daily see brokenness in our relationships, in our workplaces, in our families and in the news, as well as experience it in our own lives. Even more deeply, at least when we choose to be aware, we experience brokenness in our fellowship with God. "Incorporation" says that the death of Jesus occurred so that we can be fully connected to Him, fully reconciled to each other, fully at peace with ourselves, and a part of the restoration of the world around us. As you study this week, seek to gain a view of not only the brokenness of the world, but of the heart of God to see it restored.

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Monday

Daily Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18

Last week we looked at the separation between God and man due to sin and the need for a substitute to bear the penalty for our sin. This week, we need to dig into the far-reaching results of that sin, so that we're able to see the equally far-reaching results of the atonement.

Read Genesis 2.

At the conclusion of Genesis 2, with whom or what did Adam and Eve have peace?

- 2:23
- 2:25
- 2:19-20
- 3:8

Shalom is the Hebrew term translated "peace". More literally, it is God's perfect design for creation in complete harmony. At the end of Genesis 2, Adam and Eve are experiencing perfect *shalom*.

Now, read Genesis 3.

With whom are relationships broken?

- 3:7
- 3:12
- 3:17-18
- 3:10

The way we define “sin” plays a large role in the way that we view the atonement. When we see sin as that which incurs the wrath of God, we need a substitute. However, when we see sin as our independence and desire to be disconnected from everyone and everything, including God, we need incorporation for the Kingdom to be established.

In order to more fully understand the image of incorporation, we’ll need to look at the way Jesus saw the Kingdom. However, for today, we need to understand that the loss of shalom is among our primary problems.

Application:

- Can I think of examples of ways that my *shalom* is broken in all four directions referenced in Genesis 3?

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- Do I see individualism as good or bad? What might some problems with *hyper*-individualism be?

Lord Jesus, I thank You that your death began the restoration process of all things, and that I’m a part of that. Help me to enter into Your peace, and bring peace to those around me. Amen.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Luke 4:16-21*

The “Kingdom of God” is central to the teachings of Jesus. In fact, some theologians argue that “Jesus’ kingdom vision and atonement are related; separating them is an act of violence.”⁶

In today’s reading, we hear Jesus’ initial proclamation about the nature of the Kingdom that is to come. Look at Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. What do you learn about the Kingdom in these passages from Jesus’ teaching?

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Read Matthew 13:44-46. Does Jesus seem to say in this parable that, prior to His second coming, the Kingdom will be *partial or complete*?

⁶ McKnight, Scot. “A Community Called Atonement” (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007) pg. 13 **26**

Read Matthew 13:44-46. What does Jesus indicate about the value of the Kingdom?

To what might the “clothes” be referring in Jesus’ parable?

The Kingdom that Jesus taught is central to His purpose on the earth and, therefore, is central to the atonement. The atonement restores all that was broken through the fall, which includes our relationships with God, each other, the world, and ourselves.

Application:

- Are there things in my life that I see as more valuable than the Kingdom? What won't I trade for the Kingdom?

Lord Jesus, may Your Kingdom come! Thank You for the promise that You are restoring all that's broken and making it whole. Help me to be a part of the work of Your Kingdom all around me. Amen.

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Colossians 1:13-23*

In Genesis 3, our relationships in every direction were broken. However, they are not broken equally. The Bible is clear that our sin is first against God (Ps. 51:4); consequently, that relationship is most foundationally broken. As such, that is the first relationship that needs to be restored. It is only through the restoration of our relationship with God that the *shalom* of all other relationships will be restored.

Because of the death of Jesus, we are united with Christ! The relationship is restored! Look at the following verses regarding what has happened to us in our union with Christ:

- Romans 3:24 – we have _____ in Christ
- Romans 6:11 – we are dead to sin and _____ to Christ
- 1 Corinthians 1:2 – we are _____ in Christ
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 – we are new _____ in Christ
- 2 Corinthians 5:19 – we are _____ the world in Christ
- Galatians 2:4 – we have _____ in Christ
- Galatians 2:17 – we are _____ in Christ (see Week #3)
- Ephesians 1:3 – we have every _____ in Christ

Our reading for today further expresses the breadth of this incorporation in Christ:

“For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether things *on earth* or things *in heaven*, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”

- Colossians 1:19-20, (*italics added*)

What is Paul saying is the method of this reconciliation and peace?

Without the blood Jesus shed on the cross, our relationship with Him would still be broken; we would be without a basis for our relationships with each other and with the world.

Application:

- What aspects of my relationship with Jesus are only possible because we've been reconciled to Him?

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Lord Jesus, we have so much because of Your love for us. Without Your self-sacrifice, we would be without hope and without You—but because of You, we have hope! Thank You for your love for us! Amen.

Thursday

Daily Reading: *Ephesians 2:11-22*

Of utmost importance, our broken relationship with God must be dealt with first. However, it's important that we don't stop there. In the "incorporation" image of the atonement, we see that every relationship that we have—beginning with God, but including other people, creation, and even those within our own heart—*all* are broken and in need of restoration.

John 17:20-23 records words that Jesus prayed for us. Paraphrase this prayer:

Now carefully read Hebrews 3:12-13 and Ephesians 4:11-15. Do you see a common thread in them?

In these two passages as well as many others, the Bible affirms that we are not only made for union with God, but also with each other, and that, without each other, we cannot become what God has called us to be. However, the restoration of our relationships is not only for us!

Look up John 13-34-35 and 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. What will happen when our reconciled relationships are displayed to the unbelieving world?

The purpose of Jesus' death does not end with our restored relationship with Him. That's simply the beginning! So that we are able to live in community with one another and display Jesus to the world, we are equally called to have relationships that are restored *among one another*.

Application:

- How highly do I value the community of faith? What purpose does it have in my life?

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- Am I living at peace with others, at least as much as it is up to me? (Romans 12:18)

*Lord Jesus, thank You that You have called us together by Your Spirit!
May we strive to embody that love. Amen.*

Friday

Daily Reading: *Revelation 7:9-17*

The atonement image of incorporation must not end with the here and now. Rather, all that results here on earth is simply a shadow of the glory that is to come. With His death, Jesus has created an eternal, worshipping community that is both perfectly restored to God and reconciled completely to each other.

As you think of the eternal community that is being created, read Revelation 21. (*Yes, the whole chapter!*) As you do, write down some of the images that you read. Remember, this is a blend of imagery and symbolism as recorded by John...

- Vs. 3-4
- Vs. 9-11
- Vs. 23
- Vs. 25
- Vs. 27

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Biblically, images of darkness are often associated with sin and evil, while images of light are often associated with purity and goodness. Likewise, old/dirty with sin; new/clean with righteousness. What is your immediate impression of the kingdom that is to come?

We began this week with Genesis 2 and 3 in the garden. With Revelation 21, we end the week in a city. The interesting thing is that, over years, inhabited gardens become cities! Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, the brokenness that came to Adam and Eve in the garden is fully restored in the city of God.

Application:

- Do I think about eternity, or am I only ever focused on the here and now? What is the reason to be focused on both?

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- How would it change my life if I lived with this Kingdom in mind?

Lord Jesus, we can hardly wait for Your Kingdom! It seems so foreign to us that there will be no weeping, no struggle—only peace. Like Paul, we confess that we live to Your glory, but to die will be gain! Help us to live with this Kingdom in mind. Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: *John 15:1-17*

1. When do you find it most difficult to love other people?
2. Do you sometimes find it hard to love God? Why?
3. When Jesus tells us in this passage to be “in Him”, what picture does He use to talk about that? (*The vine*)
4. Can you tell if a plant is alive and growing, or if it’s dead? How? (*Green leaves, flowers, fruit, moisture in it, etc.*)
5. If you took a branch or a leaf off of a tree and just left it on the ground by itself for a few weeks, what would happen to it? (*It would dry up and die.*)
6. What happens to us when we’re “disconnected” from God? How do you think we would get disconnected? (*We also dry up and stop bearing fruit—we spiritually die. Various ways.*)
7. Jesus’ command for us is to love each other. However, that’s the “fruit” from the vine. Where do you think the life comes from that produces the fruit? (*From Jesus himself—this is the point of the atonement!*)
8. What are some ways that we as a family can stay connected to Jesus?

Lenten Week Three: Jesus Died to Forgive Our Sin

The image of “justification” is a legal image. God is the judge, and we have broken the law. The method through which we are “justified”, or declared and made righteous, is one that has divided the church since the time of the Reformation. The Protestant reformers, in whose path we walk, maintained that justification is “by grace alone through faith alone.” This week, we’ll dig into what the Bible has to say about justification and about the free gift that is given to us in Christ.

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Monday

Daily Reading: *Romans 2:12-29*

As we observed in the study following Ash Wednesday, it's almost impossible to fathom the depth of our sin. Even if it were somehow possible for you to stop sinning right this minute and maintain a *perfect* record for the rest of your life, you would still have to answer for the sins that you've already committed.

The justice of God does not just say that we must be forgiven, but that we must be somehow declared "righteous". However, with our record of sin, that's impossible. In a human court, the only way for us to be declared "not guilty" is by having kept the law. But we've broken God's law and, therefore, justice dictates we must be declared "guilty."

Look up Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Titus 3:4-6.

According to these Scriptures, what is the basis for our justification before God?

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In what ways do we help God with our justification? What do we need to do in order for it to occur?

“There is no cooperation here between God and us, only a choice between two mutually exclusive ways, His and ours.”⁷ There is nothing that we can do to assure our justification—not to help it, not to add to it. We can only trust in the grace of God to procure it for us.

Application:

- What are some ways that I seek to “earn” justification before God?

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Lord Jesus, I praise You that You have done it all. There's nothing that I can add to Your work on the cross. Thank You for both declaring and making me righteous! Amen.

⁷ Stott, John. “The Cross of Christ” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 184.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Romans 3:19-28*

Over the next two days, we're going to dig into this classic passage on justification from Paul's letter to the Romans. It's not too extreme to say that, not only has this passage been debated, but that wars have been fought over it! Dr. Charles Cranfield, among others, has described these verses as the "centre and heart" of the whole letter to the Romans.

What comes to mind when you think of the "righteousness of God"?

The righteousness of God tends to either evoke thoughts of judgment (the righteous God who deal with sin righteously by punishing the unrighteous⁸) or mercy ("that through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith⁹"). The word "justify" in the Bible is the same Greek root word that is in the word "righteous". Therefore, when we see the word "justify," we should also think of "righteous."

What do the following verses say about justification?

- Romans 5:1

- Romans 5:9

⁸ Martin Luther, as quoted by F.F. Bruce, "The Epistle of Paul to the Romans" (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1963) pg. 59

⁹ Ibid.

- 1 Corinthians 6:11

- Titus 3:7

One of the great joys of justification is that God does this work *prior* to my actions, not *following* them (*Romans 5:8*). Therefore, as I pursue God, I don't need to worry if I'm doing it "right" or "well enough", because I'm fully assured of my righteousness before God!

Application:

- What does it mean for my life that Jesus justifies me *before* I live my life? How should that affect the way I live?

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- What aspects of my character are affected by this complete assurance of righteousness before God?

Lord Jesus, I recognize my utter inability to provide my own righteousness. Thank You that You have provided it for me! Amen.

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Romans 3:19-28*

The great difficulty with justification is not so much in the “what”, but in the “how”. *How* is it that a just and righteous God can forgive sins? What happens to the wrath that the Bible so clearly says was stored up in God for us because of our sin?

Many of our modern Bible translations do a disservice to this question by dropping a key theological word out of some key passages, this one included. The following is the ESV translation of Romans 3:25a:

“...whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith...”

The word *propitiation* is the key word in question here. Literally, the word means “to pacify or appease anger or wrath.” Is it proper, however, for us to say that God is “angry”?

The consideration for us is how we define anger, and whether that response is in keeping with the sinless, holy God as revealed in Scripture. While “anger” is an unsteady and often abrupt emotion in us, the wrath of God is “His steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.”¹⁰

Look up the following verses in the most literal Bible translation that you have access to:

- Hebrews 2:17
- 1 John 2:1-2
- 1 John 4:10

According to the Scriptures, how is the wrath of God appeased?

¹⁰ Stott, John. “The Cross of Christ” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 171.

It is important for us to recognize that God's love is the *source*, not the consequence of Jesus' sacrifice.¹¹ God's love for us was what sent Jesus, not what was the result of Jesus! God's love is the basis for our justification!

Application:

- Why is it important for me to practically understand that the complete wrath of God was received by Jesus?

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Lord Jesus, thank you for freely paying the price for my sin. Amen.

¹¹ Ibid.

Thursday

Daily Reading: *Romans 8:1-11*

What, then, are the effects of our justification? What does it mean for us that Jesus' death on the cross has pronounced us "righteous"? Today, we'll look at three key effects of our justification through grace by faith.

Read Galatians 3:24-29. What does Paul say comes to us because of our justification?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and Titus 2:11-14. For what earthly purpose have we been saved according to these texts?

Read Romans 8:31-39. What security do we have in our justification?

Because of our justification in Christ, we are given a new status, a new purpose, and new confidence!

Application:

- What does the provision of grace mean for my pursuit of Jesus? Do I need to be concerned about doing it “wrong”?

- If we’re no longer subject to the law, what are we now called to? (Romans 7:4) How does that effect the way that I live?

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Lord Jesus, I praise You for the grace that You give me to follow You with passion. Free me from the desire to “get it right”, and give me confidence to simply pursue! Amen.

Friday

Daily Reading: *Matthew 27:45-54*

Tucked into the narrative of today's reading is a profound theological symbol of our justification before God—and perhaps the single greatest effect of our justification in Christ.

Read Exodus 26:31-33. What is the purpose of this curtain?

The Most Holy Place was an area in the Tabernacle, and then later in the Temple, where God's presence was manifest. Priests were only able to enter the Most Holy Place once a year, and even then, only with detailed preparation. Read Leviticus 16, and list the process the high priest needed to follow in order to enter:

With that in mind, read Hebrews 10:19-22. What attitude are we now to have as we approach God, based on the sacrifice and work of Jesus?

Jesus' sacrifice has made a way for us to come before the Father. Without it, we would be consumed by His holiness and die. Without it, our sin would defile His perfect holiness. With it, however, we are called to not just enter, but to do so with confidence!

Application:

- Do I see prayer, worship, and other forms of connection with God as this significant? Why or why not?

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Lord Jesus, there's truly no greater love than Your blood, given for us, so that we might enter the presence of God with confidence and blessing! We praise You that You made a way where there was no way! Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: *Ephesians 2:1-10*

1. What happens at home or at school when we do something wrong? (*We get in trouble/punished.*)
2. Is that what should happen? Why or why not? (*Yes, that's the "just" thing—if you break the rules, you get punished.*)
3. What does the first part of this passage say about how we've acted before God? (*We've sinned and broken God's law.*)
4. Look up Romans 6:23. What happens when we sin? (*The wages of sin is death.*)
5. Back to Ephesians 2. What did we do so that God forgave us and declared us righteous? (*Nothing—it was only through grace.*)
6. What about the fact that we broke the law? Did God just forget about it? (*For help, look at 2 Corinthians 5:21. Our sin was punished, but it was punished in Christ!*)
7. The word "workmanship" in vs. 10 means "work of art"—God made us beautifully and perfectly. For what does this verse say He did that? (*Good works that He's prepared for us to do.*)
8. If that's the case, how should we be looking at the world around us? (*In order to see what God's doing, and where He might be calling us to do good works!*)

Lenten Week Four: Jesus Died to Pay Our Debt

One of the simplest images for us to understand in the atonement is the image of “satisfaction”—that is, that we owe a great debt because of our sin, and that debt must be satisfied. While the concept may be simple to understand, the implications are difficult: to whom is a debt owed? What exactly is the debt? How can we know that the debt is satisfied? This week’s study will dig into the image of satisfaction and the fact that Jesus, through His death, paid our debt.

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Monday

Daily Reading: *John 10:1-18*

Debt is easy for us to understand. While many of us consider ourselves to be “homeowners”, there are very few of us who actually own our homes. Cars often come with payments, not with titles. Even more insipid are the credit card bills that begin arriving in our college mailboxes as our first “real piece of mail”! Missing the fine print stating the “80%” interest rates, we sign up, and often pay the consequences for years to come.

But what about the debt we owe to God? We have sinned against God, and placed ourselves in a bondage that is more restricting than any credit card. Furthermore, our sin provokes the holy wrath of God, and that wrath must find satisfaction.

Look up the following verses from the book of Ezekiel, and write down the wording that God uses to talk about satisfying His wrath:

- 5:13
- 6:12
- 7:8
- 13:15
- 20:21
- 21:17

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The difficulty is not only that we owe God, but that our good deeds have no

possibility of outweighing our bad ones. John Piper makes two arguments against this logic:¹²

- Apart from faith, even our good deeds are defective and can't possibly honor God. (Romans 14:23)
- That's not the way God saves. We can't just have more good deeds than bad. The record of our debt must be cancelled.

But the glorious news? Read Colossians 2:13-14.

That's right—our debt *has* been cancelled. Our debt has been nailed to the cross, and through Jesus' death, it's all been paid!

Application:

- What does it mean for me to lay down my life for others, just as Jesus did for me? What would that look like?

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Jesus, thank You for paying my debt and making me free! Amen.

¹² Piper, John. "Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die" (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2006) pg. 32-33.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Galatians 4:1-7*

Our reading today makes it clear that we've been accepted as sons and heirs into the family of God. But what is the basis for this acceptance? More clearly, with the excessive debt that we owe, how could God in His justice accept the payment of Jesus' death on the cross for *our* debt?

Look up each verse to answer the following:

- Isaiah 53:5 - Why was Jesus wounded and crushed?
- Philippians 2:8 – What was the motivation for Jesus' death?
- Romans 5:19 – How are our debts (disobedience) paid for?

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Put more succinctly, Jesus lived the life that we couldn't live (obedience) and died the death we should have died (disobedience).

Re-write 2 Corinthians 5:21 in your own words:

It's not enough that Jesus simply forgives our sin. As noted in last week's study, we must also be declared righteous. But not only is this declaration made *over* us (justification)—the righteousness of Jesus is actually *given* to us! This is the concept of "imputation"—that as our sin was *imputed* to Jesus, He became our pardon; and as His righteousness was *imputed* to us, He became our perfection!¹³ Although we have sinned and fallen short of the perfection of the law, He has fulfilled the law on our behalf!

Application:

- If Jesus has fulfilled the law completely, what does that mean for me in regards to the law?
- Does that mean I can live without any regard for the law? Why or why not?

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Lord Jesus, thank You for fulfilling the law on my behalf. Without Your life for mine, my debt is too great—but now I'm paid in full! Amen.

¹³ Piper, John. "Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die" (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2006) pg. 45.1

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Hebrews 2:9-18*

The satisfaction, or *ransom*, image of the atonement is both a central and biblical one. Jesus Himself said that He came to "give His life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) The question that then emerges is this: To whom is the ransom paid? Until they are satisfied, what demands are being made that stand in the way of our redemption? And who is making them? This question is at the heart of satisfaction.

Re-read Hebrews 2:9-18. According to this passage, Jesus has become flesh in order to destroy whom? (vs. 14-15)

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However, the fact that Jesus has destroyed the devil and redeemed man from slavery to sin is not the same thing as Jesus' death being a "ransom" to the devil. While this idea, popular for the first several centuries of church history, recognizes the power of Satan and of Jesus' victory on the cross, it attributes far too much power to Satan.

Read the 1 John 3:4 and Galatians 3:10, 13.

In these passages, what appears to be the core of sin?

What, therefore, might the ransom price of Christ be for?

While it's partially accurate to say that the law of God needed to be satisfied, as well as to agree with the church father Anselm and say that the honor and justice of God must be satisfied, we get into a challenging position theologically. If these things are the *barriers* that stand in the way of our redemption, than God is, at least in part, *subject* to these things!

While the devil, the law, and the honor and justice of God are partial answers, God Himself must have needed to be satisfied. If there was a ransom to be paid, it must have been paid to Him. Tomorrow we'll look at the implications of that truth.

Application:

- Of Jesus' three titles in this Hebrews passage (author of salvation, vs.10; brother, vs. 11; and high priest, vs. 17), which one means the most to me? Why?

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your life as a ransom for me. Amen.

Thursday

Daily Reading: *Psalm 89*

God Himself, then, is the one to whom ransom is paid—He is one who must be “satisfied” in order for redemption of people to occur.

What single characteristic of God do you find in all of the following:

- 2 Timothy 2:13
- Titus 1:2
- Hebrews 6:18
- Deuteronomy 32:4
- James 1:17

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Look up the following verses and list the “opposites” that are simultaneously true of God:

- Exodus 34:6-7
- Psalm 85:10
- Isaiah 45:21
- Habakkuk 3:2
- Micah 7:18

- John 1:14
- Romans 11:22
- 1 John 1:9

This doesn't represent a God who is at odds with Himself or somehow conflicted; rather, it shows a God who is somehow both things at the same time. In just such a way, He is our judge who punishes and our lover who must find a way to forgive—both at the same time.

John Calvin said, “in a marvelous and divine way, He loved us even when He hated us.”¹⁴ This is the essence of God's self-satisfaction.

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Application:

- How does this understanding of the love of God help me to worship Him more?

Lord Jesus, through Your life and death, You have both saved me and satisfied Your holiness. I praise You for Your marvelous plan! Amen.

¹⁴ Calvin, “Intitutes”, 2.16.4

Friday

Daily Reading: *Hebrews 12:1-4*

Within the image of substitution, one of the most difficult pictures of God to get away from is that of either (a) the Father forcing the Son to bear the weight of sinful man, or (b) the Son begging the Father to forgive sinful man based on His sacrifice. However, neither of these images is true. Rather, acting in sheer mercy and grace and with Father and Son in complete unity, God became a man in order to satisfy Himself and save us.

Read that last sentence one more time. The question that constantly returns to us is “why?” The unconditional, self-giving, complete love of the Father is exceedingly difficult for us to comprehend.

Today’s Scripture reading begins to answer this question for us. Re-read the Hebrews passage, and then read Isaiah 53:10-12.

What is the common motivation of Jesus in these passages?

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In addition to His own joy being a motivation, what does Jesus promise for us as His disciples in the following verses?

- John 15:11

- John 16:24

- 1 John 1:4

- 2 John 12

What do you think the difference is between “normal” joy and the “complete” or “full” joy Jesus promised?

It was for the joy of you and me that Jesus endured the cross, and that same joy is His promise to us as we too endure!

Application:

- Do I know anyone with that kind of joy? What are they like?

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- What stands in the way of me experiencing “full” joy?

Lord Jesus, it's because of the joy set before You that You endured the cross. May we also endure difficulties and trials with great joy, with You as our example and as the satisfaction for our sin! Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: *Hebrews 12:1-11*

1. Who are some of the people in your life that encourage you to follow Jesus? What are some of the ways that they encourage you?
2. What does it mean to “throw off” sin and hindrances? (*To get rid of sin completely, focusing wholly on Jesus.*)
3. When you get in trouble for something, what happens? (*Get in trouble/discipline/etc.*)
4. How do you usually respond to that discipline?
5. How would you feel if you owed someone a lot of money, and then they told you that it had been paid off and that you didn’t owe anymore? What questions might you have about that? (*Who paid it off? Why did they?*)
6. If the debt has been paid, are you still responsible to pay it? (*No.*) Do you get “extra credit” if you pay a debt that you don’t owe? (*Of course not.*) How does that apply to trying to follow certain Christian “rules”? (*They don’t give us credit with God.*)
7. If we’re not supposed to “follow the rules”, what is the discipline of God for? (*In order to shape us into true sons and daughters!*)

Lenten Week Five: Jesus Died to Create in Us A New Nature

Second only to “salvation”, “redemption” is perhaps the most commonly used word for the atonement. The idea of being is one of literally being bought back, as from slavery, and brought into right relationship. It is a common misperception that the concept originated in the pagan slave markets, but it seems to originate in the heart of God Himself. It was the language He used with Moses in Exodus 6:6 saying, “I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.” In this week’s study, we will observe that redemption, as an image of the atonement, recognizes that Jesus has bought us out of slavery to sin and given us a new nature—the very nature of Jesus Himself!

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Monday

Daily Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-13

Like many of the atonement images, redemption has two sides: buying us back from sin and birthing in us righteousness. This “rebirth” is theologically called “regeneration”—literally, becoming new.

The most concise statement of this doctrine is in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Read Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus in John 3:1-8.

- Why does Jesus say that he must be born again?

Read the following passages from Jesus’ teaching:

- Luke 6:43-44
- John 6:63
- John 15:1-8

What is the common idea?

Now read Galatians 5:19-24.

- The warning is that those who commit the acts of the sinful nature (vs. 19-20) will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Based on our last four weeks of study, is it because of these acts that people won’t inherit God’s Kingdom?

- Verses 22-23 list the “fruit of the Spirit”. Based on our last four weeks of

study, are we commanded to possess these things in order to inherit the Kingdom?

- How do verses 24-25 help clear this up?

At issue is our nature. The “sin” in us (our nature, not just our acts) produces sinful fruit. However, the new nature of Christ placed in us produces good fruit, in accordance with the nature that’s in us!

Application:

- What fruit of the life of Christ do you see in my life?

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving me a new nature that seeks to obey You and do as You command! Amen.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Colossians 3:1-17*

It's strange to say it but, as Christians, one of our primary calls is to death. Of course, we're also called to life! Compare the following groupings of verses:

What do these verses say about us as believers?

- John 3:16
- John 10:28
- John 11:26

What do these verses say about us as believers?

- 1 Peter 2:14
- Galatians 2:20
- 2 Corinthians 5:14

How do we reconcile these two ideas from Scripture?

Up until the time we follow Jesus, our sin nature is the only life we know. This is the "me that has earned my death, and that sentence must be carried out—I *must die!* (Romans 6:23a) However, as we've already seen,

One has died in our place! Therefore, in an eternal sense, we'll never die!
(Romans 6:23b)

Re-read the Scripture for today in Colossians 3.

- According to verses 1-4, how are we to grow in our spiritual life?

- What are some “things above” on which your mind is to be focused?

Dying to our sinful nature requires us to focus on the things of God, not the things of this earth. Interestingly, though, the things of God are *present* here on earth—we just need to see them from God's perspective! That's the role of the new nature.

Application:

- What keeps me from engaging the world from God's perspective?

Lord, I praise You for life that comes from death. I was trapped in my sinful nature, but You have redeemed me to life in You! Amen.

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Romans 6:1-14*

We'll take the next two days to study Romans chapter 6 in detail. Take time to read the first 14 verses of the chapter slowly.

- List all of the phrases that include “with” or “with him” in this section

- What are the two ways in which we're identified with Jesus?

- What does the image of baptism show us as believers?

- As you think through Romans 6:1-14, read Ephesians 2:1-10 and Colossians 3:1-4 from yesterday's study. What is the solution for the problem of sin that Paul is presenting?

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- If we're dead to sin, why is it that Christians continue to sin? (See 7:17 and 20.) If we're already dead to sin, why do we even need the admonition of vs. 13?

“Sanctification” is the theological term for growing in holiness—and it’s not a one-time event. Rather, it’s a process, or “progressive”. While we’re redeemed from sin and given a new nature in Christ, we still battle our sin nature that is seeking to regain “ownership” of us.

Application:

- What are some areas of my life that need to be dead to sin and alive to Christ? What stands in the way?

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Lord Jesus, I thank You that I died with You and will also live with You. Help me to offer my body as an instrument of righteousness so that I will not allow sin to have any dominion over me! Amen.

Thursday

Daily Reading: *Romans 6:15-23*

We continue our study in Romans 6. Re-read this passage slowly, paying close attention to the imagery of slavery throughout.

- Paul is painting a picture of a slave market and of us as slaves. What were we slaves to? What are we now?

- Look at the following verses:
 - Vs. 13
 - Vs. 16
 - Vs. 19
 - Romans 12:1
 - 1 Corin. 6:19-20

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As you look at all these verses together, why is Paul asking us to present our bodies and/or parts of our bodies to God?

- Look at vs. 20-21. What are the “benefits” of slavery to sin? What kind of action/”fruit” comes from that?

- Now look at vs. 22. What are the “benefits” of being a slave to God? What kind of “fruit” comes from that?

At the end of this eloquently written chapter, Paul makes a clear statement: “If you’ve been redeemed, you’re now being sanctified. If you’re not being sanctified, there’s no reason to believe you’ve been redeemed.”¹⁵ While it’s a startling statement, the declaration for the redeemed is glorious—death is what you “earn” for sin, but the gracious “gift” of God is real life for those who are slaves of God.

Application:

- What are the evidences of sanctification in my life?

- In what ways are the parts of my body offered to righteousness? To unrighteousness? Do I pursue righteousness with the same intensity that I used to pursue sin?

Jesus, thank You for making me a slave to God! Amen.

¹⁵ F.F. Bruce, “The Epistle of Paul to the Romans” (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1963) pg. 142-143

Friday

Daily Reading: *Romans 7:7- 8:2*

On the first day of this study, following Ash Wednesday, the majority of this passage was assigned. However, we stopped reading at vs. 24 in order for us to feel the full weight of our sin. Today, read 7:24-8:2 one more time.

Martin Luther, at the outset of the Protestant reformation, nailed 95 statements on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The first one declared, "He [Jesus] called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

Read 1 John 2:1. How does this apply to repentance?

Repentance is an intentional turning *from* sin and embracing of God. Look one more time at today's Scripture. List some of the dilemmas that Paul found himself in:

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The New Testament as a whole declares that Jesus speaks to the Father in our defense (1 John 2:1), but nowhere is that more clear than the book of Hebrews. Write down what these passages say about Jesus:

- 4:14-15

- 7:25

- 8:1
- 9:11-12
- 9:15

Jesus call is for us to be perfect as God is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)
However, our call is to live in the redemption we've been given, constantly repenting from sin and embracing God, through the redeeming blood of Jesus.

Application:

- What stops me from repenting?

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- In what areas am I stuck in guilt/shame instead of repentance?

Lord Jesus, You have given us complete freedom to come to You by making a way through Your blood shed for us. You've bought us out of slavery and made us slaves to God. May we live like it! Amen

Family Time

Family Reading: *Romans 6*

1. Have you ever watched a baptism service, or been baptized yourself? What stuck out to you about that experience?
2. Paul tells us that going into the water is a symbol of dying to ourselves, and coming back out is a symbol of being alive to Jesus. What are some examples of both of those things?
3. Paul also uses the example of slavery. What does it mean to be a slave? *(No freedom, they are property, must do what they're told.)*
4. If someone is a slave to sin, what would that mean? *(That they have no choice but to sin and are controlled by it.)*
5. What does it mean if someone is a slave to God? *(They follow God and do what He says.)*

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Lenten Week Six: Jesus Died to Be Our Model

It is only through the atoning death of Jesus that we have life. However, what is our hope in the struggles of daily living? The writer to the Hebrews declares, “we have [a High Priest] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) In what way is Jesus a model for our suffering, temptation, and the challenges of our daily living? We must keep in mind that Jesus was not just fully God, but also fully man. Jesus lived as a man empowered by the Holy Spirit, just as we are! In this way, He is our example. While we are saved only through His atoning sacrifice, His model of being led by the Spirit should empower our living.

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Monday

Daily Reading: *Philippians 2:1-13*

Today's reading from Philippians 2 is often called the "*kenosis*" passage, a Greek word meaning "emptied". Paul tells us that Jesus humbled Himself in many ways, and in doing so is a model for us. It is one of the key places in Scripture where Jesus is explicitly set up as our example.

Re-read verses 5-8. Meditating verse by verse, what are we to do as we follow Jesus' example?

- Vs. 6 – What are some of the things that Jesus needed to set aside in order to become fully man? How is this an example for you?

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- Vs. 7 – Give examples from Jesus' life that portray His taking on the form of a servant. What are some ways that you can follow this example?

- Vs. 8 – The “death of God” is a difficult concept to understand. Look up the following two verses. What barriers to Jesus’ death are represented by these two verses?
 - John 10:30
 - Romans 6:23

Jesus set aside His divinity in order to take on our humanity. Because He did, Jesus became an effective model for us—a man empowered by the Spirit for the same ministry that we are called to do. As we continue this week’s study, we’ll look further into the implications of this truth.

Application:

- What are some ways that are difficult for me to humble myself as Jesus calls me to?

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Lord Jesus, thank You for not considering equality with God something to be grasped! So often, I consider the little bits of glory that I receive impossible to give up. May Your model encourage my humility and my service to those around me. Amen.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Hebrews 4:11-16*

The Bible teaches that Jesus was fully God, but also that He was fully man. However, yesterday's reading shows that, even as God, He set aside his rights as God (vs. 7) and fully embraced His humanity.

With this in mind, read the following passages and list some of the emotions that Jesus felt:

- Mark 3:20-21
- Mark 14:43-45
- Luke 22:55-62
- Matthew 26:36-44
- John 19:1-5
- Mark 15:21-25

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It's easy for us to "excuse away" the humanity of Jesus at these difficult points in His life. However, it's just these emotions and pain that makes Him able to fully sympathize with us.

Today's reading from Hebrews says that Jesus was our great High Priest, able to sympathize because He has been tempted in every way, yet was without sin. What are some areas of your life where you feel like you're alone, and that Jesus can't possibly understand?

The promise that Jesus understands every temptation and yet resisted sin gives us confidence to draw near to God. (vs. 16) In this, too, Jesus was our example—by drawing near to God, He was able to draw strength from the Father, hear from Him, and minister by the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. Later this week, we'll look at these aspects of Jesus as our model:

Application:

- Why do I think it's important that Jesus has been tempted in every way? How does that help me approach Him?
- Since Jesus is my High Priest, why might it be important for me also to confess my sin and temptations to others? (James 5:16)

Lord Jesus, I praise You that You have endured every temptation, and yet were without sin. Thank You for interceding at the right hand of the Father for me in my struggles and sin. Amen.

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Matthew 3:1-17*

The key reason that we can see Jesus as our Model is that all of His ministry was empowered, not by His deity, but by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Over the next two days, we'll look at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the anointing by the Spirit, and the way that He remained with the heart and will of His Father.

Read each of the four narratives of Jesus' baptism.

- Matthew 3:13-17 (within today's reading)
- Mark 1:9-11
- Luke 3:21-22
- John 1:29-34

Based on the harmony of these narratives, did John know that Jesus was the Messiah *before* or *after* baptism?

Did John recognize the sinlessness and holiness of Jesus *before* or *after* His baptism? What does that say about the humanity of Jesus?

What is the only similarity between each of the four baptism accounts? Why might all four gospel writers have been compelled by the Spirit to record this detail?

Look at Luke 4:1 and 4:14. What three things are noted about Jesus' relationship with the Holy Spirit?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Jesus' baptism signified the beginning of His ministry and, along with His baptism, came the Holy Spirit's anointing. It was the Holy Spirit that empowered the miraculous aspects of His ministry—if He leaned into His deity during His time on earth, He would not be able to sympathize fully with us as humans! However, He *is* able to sympathize, and He became an incredible model of what a life empowered by the Spirit could accomplish.

Application:

- Have I been filled with the Holy Spirit? How do I know?

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- The Father's words over Jesus were "This is my Son whom I love—in Him I am well pleased." Do I believe that He speaks these words over me too? Why or why not?

Lord Jesus, You have done incredible things through the empowerment of the Spirit. What's more, You have called me to do incredible things as well! Thank You for Your grace and model for me. Amen.

Thursday

Daily Reading: *Luke 4:1-15*

Immediately following His baptism and anointing with the Spirit, Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted. It might be said that His identity was clearly revealed at His baptism (Matthew 3:17) and, then, that it was tested in the desert. Even more than this, the depth of Jesus' connection with the Holy Spirit was tested in preparation for His ministry. When Jesus told His disciples to "abide" in Him (John 15), this was a practice that was tested through His desert experience.

In today's reading, we looked at the temptation account in Luke.

What were the three temptations? Why do you think they might have been a temptation for Jesus?

1.

2.

3.

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What are the Old Testament references for the three Scriptures that Jesus quoted in response to these temptations? (vs. 4, 8, 12)

Based on this, what does it seem Jesus was doing during His time in the desert? What connection does this have between our connection with the Holy Spirit and spending time in God's Word?

The anointing of the Holy Spirit wasn't a "fact of life" for Jesus any more than it is for us. He was tested to see if He would continue to trust and submit to the plan of the Father for His life and ministry. The same is true of us—we are called to abide in Him. We'll look at that concept in more detail tomorrow.

Application:

- What are areas that Satan might tempt me in if I spent 40 days in the desert? What biblical responses might I have regarding those temptations?

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Lord Jesus, I praise you that you have endured every real temptation and modeled for me what it means to abide in the presence of the Father. Amen.

Friday

Daily Reading: *John 15:1-17*

Just as Jesus modeled for us a life connected to the Holy Spirit, we are called to live with a deep connection to Him. This is most clearly stated in John 15, when Jesus is in the Upper Room with His disciples. Today, we're going to do a study specifically on this section of Jesus' teaching.

In the first section (vs. 1-3), Jesus gives us the metaphor of the vine.

- What is the difference between “cuts off” and “prunes”?

- What might “pruning” look like in your life? What are some things that Jesus might be interested in pruning?

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In verses 4-8, Jesus makes several promises as to what will happen if we will “remain” in Him. Find all of the references where He says “remain in me”, and write down the corresponding promises.

In the third section (vs. 9-17), Jesus develops a third key theme. What word do you see repeated in this section?

“Love” is the fruit that comes from the vine—as we remain in Him. However, this love is completely active, not passive. What is the result of this kind of love? (vs. 13)

Just as Jesus modeled for us a life connected to the Holy Spirit and then ultimately gave His life away for us, so also will be the response of His followers. If we are willing to submit to the rule of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and to remain in Him, we will be constantly driven towards self-sacrifice for the sake of others. We will serve each other. We will love the world around us and seek to draw them closer to Jesus. We will repent of our passivity and be driven into a dynamic, fruit-producing life of faith. May it be so!

Application:

- What are some ways that I can practically “remain in Him”?

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- In what ways might I be being called to lay down my life for my friends?

Lord Jesus, thank You for first modeling for me a life connected to the vine—and then dying so that it is even possible for me to follow Your example. Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: **Matthew 3:13 – 4:11**

1. In what ways do you see and hear God at Jesus' baptism?
(Hear the voice of the Father, see the Spirit descending, and Jesus)
2. What did Jesus *do* in order to gain the acceptance and pleasure of the Father? *(It seems like baptism, but He really hasn't done anything. He would do great things, but the Father is already fully pleased with Him.)*
3. How is this like our relationship with God? *(We don't have to do anything to earn His love.)*
4. What were the three things with which Jesus was tempted?
(Stones to bread, jump from the temple, kingdoms of the world.)
5. How did He resist these temptations? *(Spoke Scripture back to Satan, through the power of the Holy Spirit.)*
6. What are some areas of your life in which you feel like you're tempted to do things that you know aren't God's plan for you?
7. How are we to resist temptation, based on the model of Jesus? Further, how are we to live our lives based on His model?
(Connected to the Holy Spirit and based on the Word.)

Lenten Week Seven: Jesus Died to Defeat Sin and Satan and to Conquer Evil

The final image of the atonement that we'll look at in this study is perhaps the most inspiring. In addition to all the other things that Jesus accomplished through His death, He also gained *eternal* victory of sin, Satan, death and evil. It's easy for us, as modern Western Christians, to fall off on either side of opposite extremes when it comes to the spirit world: either an undue focus on Satan and evil or an excessive skepticism and even denial of its very existence. Neither is accurate—we have a very real enemy, but he is a powerful yet defeated foe! As we study this week in the wake of celebrating the resurrection, we'll consider this cosmic, spiritual battle, and the conquest of God over the forces of evil.

Monday

Daily Reading: *Genesis 3:1-19*

John Stott, in his powerful and important book “The Cross of Christ”, lays out the conquest of Jesus over sin and Satan in six stages.¹⁶ Over the next five days, we’ll consider these six steps as Stott describes them

The first stage was **conquest predicted**. From the very beginning of man’s sin problem, as recorded in Genesis 3, God predicted the eventual defeat of Satan and His victory over sin and death.

Re-read the today’s passage from Genesis 3.

- To whom are verses 13-14 directed?
- What are the curses and promises of God to Satan?

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From the very beginning, God proclaimed His victory through Jesus to Satan. It was only the arrogance and ignorance of Satan that kept him fighting what was clearly a losing battle.

What does Isaiah 9:2-7 predict about the rule of the Messiah?

¹⁶Stott, John. “The Cross of Christ” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 227-232. The structure for this week’s study was taken from this section of Stott’s work.

The prediction of conquest was the precursor to the work of the incarnate Jesus on earth through the cross. While Satan had temporary rule and dominion on the earth because of our first father and mother's alliance with him, God always had a plan through which to redeem us. However, in many of our atonement images, we see the work of Jesus on the cross as simply an "internal" affair within the heart of God.

Read I John 3:8. What is the purpose of Jesus' appearing?

Destroying the works of Satan is as biblically central to Jesus' coming as is His becoming a substitute for us! It is only through the work of Jesus that we have confident victory over sin and death. The prediction of Jesus' victory, even in the midst of evil and brokenness from the time of Adam to the time of Jesus, gives certainty that God had a plan and would ultimately have the victory.

Application:

- How does the prediction of Jesus' eventual victory on the cross give me hope and certainty in my daily battle with sin and evil? How should that affect the way I live?

Lord Jesus, I praise You for Your ability to win the battle that I had no chance of winning on my own. Through Your life and work, sin and Satan have been defeated, and I have victory! Amen.

Tuesday

Daily Reading: *Luke 11:14-23*

The second stage of Jesus' victory was **conquest begun**. This happened through Jesus' life and ministry, and took the form of a series of "mini-skirmishes" in which Satan tried to derail the plan of Jesus directly, through worldly powers, through friends, and through enemies.

In the following passages, what attempt was made to get rid of Jesus, and through whom was it attempted?

- Matthew 2:1-18

- Matthew 4:1-11

- John 6:1-15

- Matthew 16:21-23

- John 13:27, 18:1-5

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Despite Satan's best efforts to derail and distract Jesus from His purpose and work, Jesus continued on with a singular focus. In fact, He often narrated this drama for His disciples, speaking of the Kingdom advancing,

and illustrating it through powerful victories over evil spirits, diseases, and even death.

One of the most striking statements on this topic¹⁷ is found in today's reading. Look specifically at Luke 11:21-22:

- Who is the “strong man”?
- Who is the “stronger one”?
- What/Who might the “armor” and the “spoils” be?

The life and ministry of Jesus displayed the victory that eventually would be realized on the cross. However, as noted above, this was only the beginning! The victory Jesus had during His life was singular; the victory for all of us was yet to come!

Application:

- Do I think the victory Jesus experienced was due to His status as the Son of God, or should that victory be normative for us as well? (See *last week's study*, as well as *John 14:12*.) Is this reflected in my life and my attitude? Why or why not?

- What calling/focus has Jesus put on my life?

Lord Jesus, Your life is an incredible display of confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit and in focus towards the goal to which You were called. Help me to live just as focused on that which You've called me to! Amen.

¹⁷Stott, John. “The Cross of Christ” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 228.

Wednesday

Daily Reading: *Colossians 2:6-15*

The third and pivotal stage of the Victory of Christ was the **conquest achieved**. On the cross, Jesus confronted head-on the forces of death and evil, and achieved overwhelming victory!

Today's reading contains some of the most significant teaching on this subject. Re-read verses 13-15. The image here is of a *cheirographon* (translated "written code"), which was "a hand-written document, specifically a certificate of indebtedness" or "a signed confession of indebtedness, which stood as a perpetual witness against us."¹⁸

In verse 14, Paul lists three actions that describe how Jesus has dealt with our debts. What are they?

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In doing this, what happened to the powers and authorities (Satan and his demons)?

¹⁸Stott, John. "The Cross of Christ" (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 229.

What do the following verses show about the work of Jesus on the cross?

- Philippians 2:8
- Romans 5:19

It was through Jesus' obedience to the will and plan of the Father that Satan was wholly defeated. At every turn, He chose God's will over His own, and in doing so, triumphed. And the conquest was achieved!

Application:

- How should the reality of my cancelled debts affect the way that I live before God and others?

- Jesus was obedient, even to the extent of not retaliating in the midst of torture, suffering, and death. What are some areas of obedience that I am being called to?

Lord Jesus, the victory is Yours! You have won the battle, defeated sin and death, and gained eternal life. Hallelujah! Amen.

Thursday

Daily Reading: Acts 2:22-36

The fourth stage of Jesus' victory is *the conquest confirmed and announced*. It was through His death that Jesus gained the victory; God confirmed the effectiveness of the sacrifice through the resurrection.

Look up the following verses:

- Acts 4:10
- Acts 5:30
- Romans 4:24
- 2 Corinthians 4:14
- 1 Thessalonians 1:10

What is the common phrase used to describe the resurrection?

Acts 2:23-24 is a passage known as a *kerygma*, or a concise statement of the basics of the gospel. Read these verses carefully, and then compare them to 1 Corinthians 15:3. When do these Scriptures maintain that Jesus achieved victory over sin and death?

The Bible never declares that "Christ *rose* for our sins", but clearly that He died for them.¹⁹ Look at Hebrews 2:14-15. What should then be the result of Jesus' death for us?

The death and resurrection belong together as a full declaration of the gospel. However, it's clear from Scripture that victory was attained through the death of Jesus.

¹⁹Stott, John. "The Cross of Christ" (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986) pg. 233.

Look at Acts 2:24. Why was it impossible for death to keep its hold on Jesus?

What, then, is the significance of the resurrection? Paul declares that without it, our preaching and even our faith is in vain! (1 Corinthians 15:14) The resurrection is the unequivocal proof that Jesus lived the life that we couldn't live—perfectly!

It is maybe most helpful to think of the resurrection as a “receipt”²⁰ of sorts—a proof that the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient and that victory has been fully purchased by Him. This victory was attained at the cross and proclaimed throughout eternity in the resurrection!

Application:

- In what way does the resurrection impact my daily living? Does my life reflect the hope of new life in Christ?

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Lord Jesus, I worship You as both the One who has conquered death and hell, and the One who has risen from the dead. Thank You that both of those things give me great hope! Amen.

²⁰ The term “resurrection receipt” was first coined by Boaz Blough during the 2008-2009 Cornerstone class at York Alliance.

Friday

Daily Reading: *Revelation 20:1-10*

The final two stages in Jesus' defeat of sin and Satan are *the conquest extended* (in the church), and *the conquest consummated* (in eternity).

With the announcement of the conquest, both on earth and in heaven, the church began to expand. It would be a common mistake to believe that the Church of Jesus can expand in any way except for the supernatural: every time a Christian is converted, there is an encounter with the risen Jesus and the forces of evil, and the grip of Satan is forced to loosen.

How do these verses describe what happens at conversion?

- Acts 26:18

- 1 Thessalonians 1:9

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- Colossians 1:13

The expansion and sustaining of the church are a testimony to the victorious power of Jesus. For over 2,000 years, the church has continued to expand, and the victory of Jesus has been displayed. What does Jesus say about the future of the church in Matthew 16:18?

History continues to point, however, to a final consummation of the conquest. This is beyond the expansion of the church—beyond the salvation of individual believers. Re-read today's Scripture passage. List the events that you see happening within the passage.

While Satan was completely defeated on the cross, there will come a day in which he has no more influence or activity at all. Jesus will reign completely, and the will of God will be done on earth—and everywhere—as it is in heaven. We join with the early Christians in saying, "*Maranatha!*" Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

Application:

- Do I see the church as being as important as Jesus does? How do I know?

- Am I anxious for Jesus' return? Be honest! Why or why not?

Lord Jesus, it's been an incredible Lenten season. Thank You for all You've done on the cross for me. Thank You for dying for me! May Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Family Time

Family Reading: **Colossians 2:11-15** (The Message, below)

“Entering into this fullness is not something you figure out or achieve. It’s not a matter of being circumcised or keeping a long list of laws. No, you’re already in—insiders—not through some secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin. If it’s an initiation ritual you’re after, you’ve already been through it by submitting to baptism. Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as He did Christ. When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ’s cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.”

1. Do you feel like being a Christian is about rules?
2. If you don’t need to follow rules to be a Christian, why are there things that you’re supposed to do, and others you’re not supposed to?
(We’re called to love and glorify Jesus, not follow rules. Some things glorify Jesus—others don’t.)
3. Have you ever been forgiven for something that was a really big deal? Or asked to not pay something back that would have been very expensive? What did that feel like?

4. The Bible says that Jesus' death is all that we need for complete forgiveness of all that we owe God. Does that seem fair to you? Why or why not?

5. Do you know anyone other than Jesus that's risen from the dead?
(no!)

6. Because Jesus came back from the dead, does that make it easier to believe that He can forgive our sins? *(Yes. If they have a tough time with this, explain the "receipt" concept mentioned in yesterday's reading.)*

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For Further Study:

There are incredible amounts of resources available on the subject of the atonement, and deeply studying this jewel of the faith is an incredibly rewarding experience.

The following are just a few recommendations for further study. Some of these books were cited as a part of the study, while others have been valuable tools in thinking through the efficacy and significance of Jesus' death.

“Christus Victor” Gustav Aulen. (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1969)

“A Community Called Atonement” Scot McKnight. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007)

“The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance” Leon Morris. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1984)

“Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die” John Piper. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2006.) Formerly published as *The Passion of Jesus Christ*.

“The Cross of Christ” John Stott. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1986)

“Exclusion and Embrace” Miroslav Volf. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996)