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INTRODUCTION

TETELESTAI

In New Testament times, the Greek word tetelestai was written on business documents or receipts to indicate that a bill had been paid in full. Moments before Jesus breathed his last, he cried out: 'Tetelestai!' He was saying 'It is Finished', 'Done!' or 'Paid in full!' This word has so much meaning to us and to the world. So much so that this whole book is going to look at just what was meant when Jesus cried 'DONE!' on the cross.

The question we are exploring is, what had Christ just done on that cross?
What did he really accomplish?

There is one primary difference between the way of religion and the way of Christ. The way of every religion is spelt 'D-O!' Whether Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish or Hindu – one need to do good deeds and engage in religious observances in order to receive salvation or acceptance from God. But the way of Christ is totally different. It's spelt 'D-O-N-E'. We receive salvation and acceptance from God not because of what we do for God, but because of what Christ has already done for us.

Religion, as understood in our culture, is associated with lists of requirements. Things to do to be found acceptable before God. One way of thinking about religion is a ladder. You're always trying to climb up it through good deeds. At the top of the ladder is God's love, God's acceptance, God's approval. The way to get there is to 'do, do, do, do, do, do' and also to avoid all the 'don'ts' (which make you slip down a rung or two each time). But there are three problems with religion. Firstly, we can never be really sure where we are on the ladder and whether we have done enough. Secondly, when we are doing well, we tend to look down on others who are lower down than us on the ladder with a smug self-righteousness. Finally, when we are at the bottom of the ladder, despite real efforts to be higher up, we feel depressed and defeated.

The God of the Bible is not interested in ladders. He doesn't call us to meet him at the top of a ladder. He calls us to meet him at the foot of a cross.

'THE CROSS IS THE BLAZING FIRE AT WHICH OUR HEART ARE SET AFIRE WITH GOD'S LOVE, BUT WE MUST STAY CLOSE ENOUGH TO IT SO THAT ITS SPARKS CAN KEEP ON FALLING ON US.' **JOHN STOTT**

If you are a Christ-follower but some of the fire is gone, this book might just help re-ignite your passion for God. If you don't yet believe in the message of the bible – this is what you want to know. It's all of our prayers, that as you hear this message, you too would be set

ablaze with God's love. By the scandalous message you're about to hear.

A book about the salvation Christ accomplished on the cross.

PROPIVIATION:

On the cross, Christ turned away God's wrath

MARK 15:33-37

The Death of Jesus

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").[a] 35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

GOD'S WRATH

Wrath is not a word we use a lot. On the continuum of irritation to anger, wrath is the outpouring of vast amounts of anger. Its connotation is anger in its extreme. Indignation, anger and wrath are all indications of someone not tolerating certain behaviours. It is a feedback mechanism. When the Bible speaks about wrath is it referring to the holy displeasure and anger God feels towards sin.

Jl Packer defines sin like this: 'Sin is the sinner's unholy hostility against God.'

We are hostile to God. We especially don't like his authority. And our hostility is unholy, which means it is wrong. God's response to our sin is his wrath. Sin provokes God's wrath. Listen to how Jl Packer defines wrath: 'Wrath is God's holy hostility against our sin, his refusal to put up with our sin'

Take a second to reflect on your own life – and the lives of those you love and work with, and collectively, at our world. You don't need long to see that selfishness, hate, injustice, racism, abuse and betrayal is rampant and their effects are devastating. There is a lot of sin in our lives, and in our world. And it angers God. God's anger is not a temper tantrum though. It is the steady rise in hatred he feels towards the accumulation of evil in our lives and world. God

is hostile toward our hostility. And his hostility is holy, which means it is right. It's perfectly in touch with the way things really are.

Romans 1:18 says that God's angry displeasure erupts. And then from verse 18-32, he tells us specifically what causes his anger to steadily rise against us. It's like Paul has a future glimpse even to the very world we live in, the world sang about in music hits, the world mirrored back to us in soap operas. Here is what causes God's anger...

ROMANS 1:18-32

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

THE MESSAGE SAYS IT LIKE THIS:

'God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power and the mystery of God's divine being. Therefore nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the gods they made instead of the God who made them.

Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either – women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men – all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it! Emptied of God and love, they became godless and loveless wretches.

Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way. Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care – worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!

These are the things that are like 'spitting in God's face.' These are the things that provoke God's righteous anger. Yes, he is slow to anger, but his anger rises steadily nonetheless, as our collective hostility toward him rises. And his anger eventually will erupt in dramatic, terrifying power on the Day of Judgment. Listen to Romans 2:5-6: 'But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will repay everyone according to what they have done."'

And if that doesn't cause you to freak out, maybe this description of Judgment Day will.

REVELATIONS 6:15-16 SAYS,

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'.

These verses should cause us to shudder. We know the shameful things we have done, and thought, and said. And we know all the shameful things we have wanted to do, but never had the chance to do. Instead of loving God like we should, we have loved other things far more – our careers, our kids, our weekend plans, our status.

SURVIVING A HURRICANE – WOULD I LIVE THROUGH THE NIGHT?

MICHELLE BECK

“ Like so many hurricanes seem to do, Ivan made landfall during the night. The night time landfall adds to the stress level, because it's dark and you can't see what's flying by the window. A lot of people would probably think that this absence of vision is a good thing, but it would be better to be able to see what's going on, so that imminent danger – like something headed for the window or the roof coming loose – could be spotted. There might not be anything that could be done about these kinds of problems at the time, but at least the people in the house could be moved to another part of the house that might be safer. I've always thought that hurricanes are exciting, since I've always been fascinated by the power that weather has. Despite my weather interest, however, I wasn't really prepared for the devastation that Ivan would bring.

As the sky darkened and the wind picked up, I went over my hurricane supplies and made sure that I had everything that I would need. By the time night fell, the wind was seriously blowing, and the power and television were intermittent.

Myself, my daughter, and our pets all just sat in the living room, listening to the wind slam around the house and rattle through the chimney. It was very dark, even with the back step light on, and the rain that I could see through eyes squinted against the oncoming storm was traveling almost horizontally.

Around midnight, the wind had begun to literally shriek; it sounded like a woman screaming, and the house creaked and groaned every time a gust hit it. I began to fear for the safety of the roof, and the safety of my family.

I knew that the whole house was shifting with each gust, and I could actually feel the floor shifting slightly. The wind was whistling under the house as well as around the eaves. The wind was so amazingly loud that I was unable to hear the rain hitting the roof. Eventually,

against all odds and out of sheer exhaustion, I fell asleep with the wind shrieking and the floor trembling beneath me.

It took Ivan over 12 hours to move through, and its aftermath was amazing. Full size telephone poles and vending machines lay in the roads, which were littered with debris, roofs were gone, trees were completely snapped in half.

(Surviving a Hurricane – Would I live through the night? Michielle Beck)



TO WHAT CAN WE COMPARE THE DAY OF WRATH?

Imagine a massive hurricane coming our way just a few kilometres off. Michielle Beck's testimony of waiting out a hurricane (to the left) is a good description of the terrific power of nature's onslaught. Her house was one that remained standing but others didn't. Her fear and experiences are helpful in imagining wrath as nature has a way of being so much bigger than we can imagine and yet is so much smaller than God really is.

Another picture is a veldfire, blown by strong winds, comes closer and closer. God's judgment and anger against sin is real, and it's coming, and there's no getting away from it! Just like the hurricane, just like the veldfire, God's wrath is real and it is coming. But in his love and grace, God provided a firebreak. Christ absorbed God's wrath thereby providing safety to all who call on him.

Remember Mark 15? The sky went dark in the middle of the day. On the cross God put our sin on Jesus, and then poured out his wrath upon him. The darkness stands for total abandonment. It is one of the themes of the Old Testament. In a special day of the Lord 'the sun will be darkened' (see Amos 8:9; Isaiah 13:10). As darkness covered the earth, it is as though the very universe is frowning on Jesus, who has become the garbage dump of all the sin of all the world.

The night before, Jesus had prayed that he was willing to drink the cup if need be. The cup he was referring to in that prayer was 'the cup of God's wrath' – a common Old Testament theme. As Jesus drank from that sponge on the cross, it was as though he were gulping down the cup of God's anger against sin.

Jesus the Son of God had only ever known perfect intimacy with his Father. We can't even begin to imagine this kind of intimacy. In order to understand Jesus' suffering at the end of the gospels, Tim Keller in *The Reason for God* says we must remember how he is introduced at their beginning. Jesus was not created. He was not only around when everything was created, but took part in creating it. For all eternity he had lived in a relationship of absolute intimacy and love. At the end of his life, he was cut off from his Father – for the first time in

eternity, he was separated from his Father and the Holy Spirit. The emotional pain at the loss of a relationship one desperately wants is possibly one of the worst pains one can experience. As Keller points out; if a mild acquaintance condemns or criticizes someone, and says they never want to see them again, it is painful. If a friend or dating partner does the same thing, it is significantly more painful. If a spouse does this, or a parent (especially to a young child), the psychological damage is infinitely worse. Keller asks who can grasp what it would be like to lose not just spousal love or parental love that has lasted several years, but the infinite love of the Father that Jesus had from all eternity?

2 Corinthians 5:21 says that, as mysterious as this is, Christ became sin for us on the cross. And yet God the Father cannot be close to sin, it cannot be near Him. So in that moment, the intimate fellowship between Father and Son came to an end. Intimacy was replaced with desolate isolation as the bond between Father and Son was torn apart by sin and God's judgment on it. Christ's loud cry reveals that there was something in the cross that even Jesus didn't expect. The horror of the cross was not just the physical or emotional suffering, but rather it was that Jesus who had for all eternity experienced unbroken fellowship with his Father was torn from his Father's side, and now became the one on whom God's wrath against sin was poured out. His agony on our behalf would have been unimaginably astronomical.

To make this even more vivid, let me quote an extended story from the book 'When God Weeps' in which Stephen Estes and Joni Tada give the following imaginative account of Christ's experience of wrath on the cross.

'The physical pain [Christ experiences on the cross] is a mere warm-up to his other and growing dread. He begins to feel a foreign sensation. Somewhere during this [time on the cross] an unearthly foul odour begins to waft, not around his nose, but his heart. He feels dirty. Human wickedness starts to crawl upon his spotless being—the living excrement from our souls. The apple of his Father's eye turns brown with rot.

His Father! He must face his Father like this!

From heaven the Father now rouses himself like a lion disturbed, shakes his mane, and roars against the shrivelling remnant of a man hanging on a cross. Never has the Son seen the Father look at him so, never felt even the least of his hot breath. But the roar shakes the unseen world and darkens the visible sky. The Son does not recognize these eyes.

"Son of Man! Why have you behaved so? You have cheated, lusted, stolen, gossiped—murdered, envied, hated, lied. You have cursed, robbed, overspent, overeaten—fornicated, disobeyed, embezzled, and blasphemed. Oh, the duties you have shirked, the children you have abandoned! Who has ever so ignored the poor, so played the coward, so belittled my name? Have you ever held your razor tongue? What a self-righteous, pitiful drunk—you, who molest young boys, peddle killer drugs, travel in cliques, and mock your parents. Who gave you the boldness to rig

elections, foment revolutions, torture animals, and worship demons?

Does the list never end! Splitting families, raping virgins, acting smugly, playing the pimp—buying politicians, practicing exhortation, filming pornography, accepting bribes. You have burned down buildings, perfected terrorist tactics, founded false religions, traded in slaves—relishing each morsel and bragging about it all. I hate, loathe these things in you! Disgust for everything about you consumes me! Can you not feel my wrath?”

Of course, the Son is innocent. He is blamelessness itself. The Father knows this. But the divine pair have an agreement, and the unthinkable must now take place. Jesus will be treated as if personally responsible for every sin ever committed.

The Father watches as his heart’s treasure, the mirror-image of himself, sinks drowning into raw, liquid sin. Jehovah’s stored rage against humankind from every century explodes in one, single direction.

(And Christ cries out,) “Father! Father! Why have you forsaken me?!”

On the cross Christ drank down the cup of the wrath of God – down to its very dregs. Romans 3:25 says ‘Christ whom God put forward as an atoning sacrifice by his blood, to be received by faith.’ And then there’s 1 John 4:10: ‘This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.’

The words ‘atoning sacrifice’ have another word, propitiation. This word means that God took our sin and put it on sinless Jesus on the cross, and then poured out his anger and judgment against sin then and there! That’s what Christ did on the cross. He absorbed God’s wrath so that we don’t have to.

Let’s deal with an objection some people have in response to this teaching about God pouring wrath upon his Son: ‘That sounds like cosmic child abuse – a father beating up an innocent son.’ But that is not what is happening here at all. Notice that, not just the Son, both the Father and the Son are suffering on the cross. Though Jesus alone is experiencing the physical agony, the Father shares with him the devastation of separation.

Notice also that Jesus has chosen this. Before the creation of the world, Jesus made this choice (Rev 13:8). And notice also that this is love at work. Listen to this verse: ‘This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins’ (1 John 4:10). Mysterious as it is, God, because he loves us, would rather experience his own anger against sin upon himself than pour it out on us. Instead of demanding our blood (which he would be justified to do), he offers his own. That’s love like nothing we’ve ever seen before or after. That’s not cosmic child abuse. That’s divine love rescuing us from divine wrath through divine self-sacrifice.

And let me answer yet another objection: 'I find it difficult to love a God who is angry.' The Bible tells us that God is both a God of love and a God who gets saddened and angered by our sin. R.C. Sproul goes so far as to say, 'A God of love who has no wrath is no God. He is an idol of our own making, as much as if we carved him out of stone.' Having said that, there is a difference between his anger and his love. Nowhere in the Bible does it say 'God is anger.' But it does say 'God is love'. God's love for us is permanent, whereas his anger and his sadness are temporary responses to our rebellion and sin. Before humanity fell, God felt only love and no anger toward us. And toward all those who are saved by his act of love, his anger no longer burns – only his love. If you have trusted in what Christ did for you on the cross, then God's anger against your sin has been eclipsed by his sacrificial act of love. Oh, how can you not love a God who would rather offer his own blood than demand ours? He loved us though we loved him not. Surely this kind of love is the most powerful force in the world? Surely it has the power to awaken love in us toward him?

THE CHOICE

'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.' John 3:36

This verse shows us we have a choice – either to face God's wrath or to let the cross absorb God's wrath on our behalf. Remember our illustrations from the last chapter?

Imagine that like Michielle Beck a massive hurricane coming your way just a few kilometres off. Now imagine you're invited to take shelter in an unbreakable shelter which can withstand the fiercest storms. The cross of Christ is that shelter that takes the beating from the storm so that you don't have to. Either we face God's wrath ourselves or we hide in the shelter of the cross, which faces God's wrath for us.

In the 1700s a big travelling party with wagons were travelling across the American Prairies' giant grass plains when a terrifying wall of fire – travelling with the wind – fast approached on the horizon. Knowing they could not outrun it, they set light to some grass behind them with the wind blowing it away from them. By the time the wall of fire reached them, their own fire had faded and they stepped onto the recently burnt ground. Legend has it that a little boy – terrified – shouted, 'Father, we are going to burn!' To which the Father shot back: 'We cannot be burnt – we are standing on the ground that has already been burnt.'

That's what Christ did on the cross. He became the land that has already been burnt. One day when Judgment Day comes, the only safe place to be will be the field of the cross – the land already burnt by the fire of Judgment. Either we face the fire of God's wrath ourselves or we stand on the already-burnt ground of the cross.

John 3:36 makes it so clear, doesn't it? 'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE BUT WHOEVER REJECTS THE SON WILL NOT SEE LIFE, FOR GOD'S WRATH REMAINS ON THEM.' This verse divides everyone! Everyone in this city, everyone in this world and in every century, into one of two categories:

1. PEOPLE WHO TRUST IN CHRIST TO ABSORB GOD'S WRATH ON THEIR BEHALF.

The first part of this verse says 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life'. If you have entered into the shelter, the burnt ground that the cross is, then you are safe. Jesus is the one 'who rescues us from the coming wrath' (1 Thes 1:10). Rejoice! Christians should be the most genuinely happy people on the planet. This is the best thing that could ever have happened to you. You have been saved – not just from the guilt of sin but from the very wrath of God. Perhaps you can pray this prayer that John Piper recommends we pray: 'Please know, heavenly Father, that I thank you with all my heart, and that I measure your love for me by the magnitude of the wrath I deserved and by the wonder of your mercy and love, which you showed me by putting Christ in my place on the cross.'

Perhaps you have doubts. You might be asking, how can I be sure that it really worked, that Jesus' sacrifice really turned away God's wrath? The answer is so simple: we know that what Jesus did on the cross worked because he was raised again from the dead as the ultimate proof.

The resurrection is God's way of saying, 'The saving work of the cross has been accomplished!' Imagine Jesus had not been raised from the dead? Then we would have to doubt whether when Jesus said 'It is finished! Done!' whether anything had really happened. But his resurrection gives us total assurance! 'DONE! – God's wrath has been absorbed by Christ on the cross!' It worked! Rejoice! For Christians today – this truth needs to be hammered deeper – NOTHING that happens to you, no circumstance, challenge or tragedy can outmatch or outweigh the goodness of this news. Of course we will all go through times that are tough and even tragic, but the deepest parts of us should remain unshaken. What's more, we do not have a God who does not know what real pain and suffering feels like.

2. PEOPLE WHO, REFUSING TO ENTRUST THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST, CHOOSE TO FACE GOD'S WRATH ON THEIR OWN.

The second part of the verse says 'but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.' If you have not put your life in Christ's hands, can I urge you to reconsider? The giant wave approaches, but there is a harbour within reach. The hurricane rages closer, but there is a safe place to run to. The wall of fire is coming, but there is land already burnt.

Hebrews 2:3 asks us, 'how shall (you) escape (God's judgment) if (you) ignore so great a salvation?' There is no escape outside of Christ's great salvation. Why on earth would you not want to surrender to that kind of love?

Every other religion, every other school of philosophy, at their core, cries 'DO'. Only Christ has cried 'IT IS DONE!' on your behalf. We don't meet God on the top of a ladder. We meet him at the foot of a cross.

JUSTIFICATION

On the cross, Christ took my condemnation, and gave me his righteousness.

To be declared justified would be like saying that a condemned, guilty criminal has been declared not liable for any penalty for their crimes and is considered to be as 'right' as someone who has not broken the law. It is outrageous and scandalous. How can it be that before a just, holy, perfect God, we, who have scorned Him and done unspeakable things against him, could be considered not liable for any penalty and in God's sight, we can be seen as if we never broke his law?

Job, a man who experienced more suffering than most could imagine, asks a question that could be considered the most important question to ask. 'How can a man be right before God?' (Job 9:2) Said another way, 'How can we be acceptable to a Holy God when we're guilty of compromise and corruption?'

Romans 3

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin... 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

This verse reminds us that before a Holy God we're all guilty. One day we will stand before God on Judgment Day and 'every mouth will be silenced' as God holds us accountable for the way we have lived our lives. On that day, this verse says, 'no one will be declared righteous'. This Scripture uses court of law language – we stand before a Judge who bangs his hammer and says, 'GUILTY! GUILTY!'

There are two main ways that people tend to deal with guilt nowadays:

Relativists tend to deny their guilt. The easiest way to deny it is to refuse to believe that God (if there is a God) is a holy God who is concerned about the way we live our lives. We refuse to believe

that there is even a day called Judgment Day. We refuse to believe that there really is some kind of absolute wrong or right by which God would measure us. And this is an exceedingly popular way to deal with guilt.

However, it is probable that even self-proclaimed relativists aren't really relativists. To a person who says, 'I don't believe in absolute wrong and right. I believe everything is relative.' A good question to ask is; 'Is there anyone in the world right now who is doing something you think they should stop doing immediately?' The answer is no doubt yes. Which means that – deep down inside – people do believe there is some standard of wrong or right that applies to everyone. So who gets to ultimately set the bar? You? Or is it possible someone infinitely wiser would have a better perspective?

The above verse says that 'all have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory.' What does that mean? It means that from God's infinitely wiser perspective, none of us have made the cut. Scripture tells us that God is light and he created us to live in the light (1 John 1:7). What does it mean that God is in the light? This is a powerful metaphor that highlights several things about him. It tells us that he is a good God. That all his motivations are pure. He is a holy God. He hates sin. He will not tolerate evil and rebellion in his universe. He is radiant and beautiful, full of glory and wonder. He is a self-revealing God (not a God who lives in duplicitous shadows), who has plainly revealed who he is to us through Jesus and the Scriptures. He is a joyful God, with joy radiating from him like sunrays from the sun. To live in the light means that we acknowledge who he is, that we worship him for who he is, that we live compatibly with who he is, and that we live our entire lives in his presence and before his sight.

And yet, none of us have done this. We've all done things that God didn't want us to do (that's sins of commission). We've all not done things God did want us to do (that's sins of omission). We've all embraced beliefs and attitudes that God didn't want us to. We've all said things that God didn't want us to. We've all failed to love like we were meant to. We've all put lesser things ahead of God. And just because people around us have also sinned in innumerable ways doesn't make us less guilty. That's because God doesn't look at us in comparison to each other, but rather in comparison to his own nature, his own perfect love, his own uncorrupted holiness, his own standard of righteousness. God made us to be like himself, but we have failed to do the very thing we were created to do: reflect him into this world.

Judgment Day is coming. No one gets away with anything in God's universe. The video of our lives will be replayed. All we've said, all we've done, all we've thought – and all we failed to say, do and believe – will be evaluated by God himself! Because we're all sinners, all of us will stand before God 'guilty' one day. And that's the ultimate reality.

There's a second way we try deal with our guilt. Moralists tend to try atone for their guilt. Many people are ready to admit that they are guilty. Though we might suppress our own consciences, deep down inside we know we are corrupted and compromised. Proverbs 20:27 says, 'The Lord gave us a mind and a conscience. We cannot hide from ourselves' (Interestingly, many psychiatrists and psychologists say that guilt is the most common problem they try help people through. Psychologist

Fred Perls said, 'I could cure most psychological problems if I could just get my clients to not feel so guilty.' What moralists tend to do is say, 'I have done some wrong things. I will now try remove the guilt of doing all those wrong things by trying to be a better person and by doing many good things.'

Tiger Woods at the beginning of 2010 publicly apologized for his repeated adultery. He revealed that when he used to sin in that way that he did so as a relativist who had denied his guilt. He said, 'At that time I had so much fame and success, I felt entitled to the temptations. I felt I could have whatever I wanted. I felt the rules didn't apply to me.' But, once caught, he swung round to being a moralist who would try atone for his guilt. His words were precisely this: 'I was wrong. I am sorry. I have a lot to atone for. As my wife Elin has reminded me, my apology cannot be spoken. It must come in the form of new behaviour.' Listen to his words: 'I have a lot to atone for.' At one point in his speech, he even suggested that he would return to his Buddhist roots and try again to live by those core values. Now we can commend Tiger for trying to be a better person. But Tiger has to realize that he faces one profound problem: GOOD DEEDS AND RELIGIOUS ENDEAVOUR DON'T MAKE BAD DEEDS NON-EXIST. Once we have done wrong, we have done wrong. A person who says, 'When I am finally a good person I will then not feel bad about my sin anymore,' is setting themselves up for disappointment. We might feel better about ourselves but the record of our wrong still stands in the courts of heaven. As an example, just because someone drives well most of the time doesn't mean that they are not guilty of whatever traffic offences they have committed. If they were to argue, 'but I kept within the speed limit the whole of last month,' the traffic officer would simply say, 'but you sped on such and such a date' and they would be guilty. Good deeds don't make bad deeds non-exist.

So what can we do about the condemnation we'll experience on Judgment Day? The answer: THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO. Nothing – absolutely nothing. So we know now that we are guilty before a perfect God who demands perfection from us. We know that his wrath is coming. We also know what Christ did on the cross to atone for our sin.

JUSTIFICATION IS THEN PRESENTED AS THE SOLUTION FOR GOD'S WRATH.

But there is something God has done: 'On the cross, Christ took my condemnation, and gave me his righteousness.' Theologians have a big word to describe this grand aspect of salvation: JUSTIFICATION. Justification is the way, on the cross, Christ took my condemnation, and gave me his righteousness.

Let me talk about justification now.

Romans 3

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

NOTICE THAT:

- 'A righteousness (could also be translated 'justification') of God has been made known'.
- This 'righteousness is given'.
- All are 'justified freely by his grace' even though we have 'sinned and have fallen short of God's glory'.

But notice how this justification for us was achieved by God...

Romans 3

25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood...

Wow! Our justification was achieved by God through 'presenting Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of blood'. But what happened on the cross that this is so?

2 Cor 5:21

For our sake God made him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

MARTIN LUTHER CALLED THIS 'THE GREAT EXCHANGE.'

On the cross, Christ took my sin and condemnation upon himself. It is true that man has sinned. But it is also true that God has suffered. The death sentence that we were facing was embraced by Christ who died in our place. And now our sin and guilt is atoned for. Isaiah 53 puts it like this: 'the punishment that brought us peace was upon him.' On that cross, Christ had no sin – but my sin, and your sin.

But notice that on the cross, Christ not only took my condemnation; he gave me something in its place. He gave me his righteousness. Not only did he take away my guilt and condemnation before God, but he gave me his own righteousness and total acceptance before God. Now I can say I have no righteousness but Christ's own righteousness. That is justification. And that is also the answer to Job's question, 'How can a man be made right before God?'

To understand justification a little more, let's look at what justification is NOT:

1) It is not just a change of your past. Part of justification means that our past sins have been forgiven. Amazingly, we get a new past. But, nonetheless, justification is not a change in your past, as much as it is a change of your future. One day when we stand before God on Judgment Day we can be absolutely sure that we will experience no condemnation, rejection or being banished from God's sight regardless of what we have done. On that day the words God will speak over us will be 'Righteous! As righteous as my Son!' To be justified now is to be guaranteed that we will be justified then! Amazingly, Christ assumed the condemnation and punishment we deserved so that he can declare us righteous on that day. That is why the Christian can say 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!' (Rom 8:1).

2) It is not something that happens in your heart. When you trust in Christ, salvation happens. Some aspects of salvation happen in your heart, but others happen in heaven. Justification happens in heaven. It is not something that you feel happen inside of you. It is a change of status before the Father. It is not a change that happens in you as much as it is a change in how God views you. He now sees you in a new way. Before he looked at you and saw your sin covering you – and the fact that he is pure, honest and holy, meant that he had to say about you ‘Corrupt and condemned.’ Now he looks at you and sees his Son’s righteousness covering you – and he says about you, ‘Forgiven and accepted’. Now, it would be pointless to say one day, ‘Today, I feel justified’ or ‘Today, I don’t feel justified.’ It doesn’t matter what you feel. What matters is what God feels – and we’re told that if we are in Christ then God looks at you and sees you as righteous in his sight. His total acceptance flows toward you. Wow. Let me give you an analogy. If your passport says you’re South African, it doesn’t matter if you don’t feel very South African does it? Whether you feel like one or not doesn’t change the fact that you are one! In the same way, if God sees you as justified, then you’re justified.

3) It is not the same as personal holiness. It is true that God wants to change us and make us more like Jesus once we trust in him. But justification is something totally different to personal holiness. Once you’re in Christ – any sins you commit will not make you less justified, and any good deeds you do will not make you more justified. You are totally accepted by God not on the basis of what you do, but on the basis of what Jesus has done. Your current level of holiness does not change how much God accepts and loves you. You’ll never be more loved, accepted and justified than the day you first believed.

There might, here, be two points of confusion arising in light of our justification:

1) Someone may say, ‘Oh great – does that mean I can sin as much as I want if I’m a Christian? God will accept me no matter what. Yeah. Let’s sin.’ The Bible would suggest: ‘When a Christian refuses to turn from sin in their life this does not damage their acceptance by God, but it does damage their intimacy with God, and it does damage the unfolding of God’s plan for their life.’ Some Christians in this room walk closer to God than others, and some Christians walk more obediently in God’s plan for their lives, but no Christians are more loved and accepted by God than others. So there are still some very serious consequences to our sin, but loss of God’s acceptance is not one of them.

2) Some teachers nowadays say, ‘If we’ve already been forgiven for all our sin, then we don’t need to ask God to forgive us when we sin. The moment we sin, we can just assume it’s already forgiven.’ But Christ, in the Lord’s prayer, taught us to pray, ‘forgive us our trespasses’. And John the apostle told us (in 1 John 1:9) that when we sin as Christians that we need to confess our sins in order to experience cleansing and forgiveness. So these teachers are wrong. To be justified means that our sins will not lead us into condemnation. But our sins can still damage our closeness to God. When we ask God to forgive us, we’re not asking God to accept us (which he already does on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice), we’re asking God to remove this barrier to experiential closeness with him that has been built up through our sin, something he is eager to do.

Next question: HOW IS JUSTIFICATION RECEIVED?

Romans 3 tells us the answer:

Verse 22: This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Verse 24: All are justified freely by his grace.

Verse 25: God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

Justification is by grace alone and through faith alone. Grace means that there is nothing we do to deserve it. It is a gift of God. Justification results from God's action and initiative not our action or initiative.

And how do we receive this gift? 'By sheer faith'. Listen to how JC Ryle, over a century ago, so vividly describes this faith: 'Faith is but laying hold of a Saviour's hand. It is receiving a doctor's medicine. It brings with it nothing to Christ but a sinful heart. It gives nothing, contributes nothing, pays nothing, performs nothing. It only receives, takes, accepts, grasps, and embraces the glorious gift of justification which Christ bestows.'

Some people may resist this gift of salvation: you don't like the idea of a way of relating to God where you have nothing to boast about at all.

Listen to Romans 3:27. After speaking about a person receiving the gift of righteousness it asks, 'Where, then, is boasting?' And it answers: 'It is excluded.' In others words, you have nothing to boast about at all!

All religion outside the way of Christ is spelt 'do'. It can be summed up like this: 'If I do good then God will accept me.' This only leads to self-inflating pride (when we feel like we're doing well) or self-loathing (when we realize we can't keep the standards we're trying to reach). But the way of Christ is spelt 'done!' It can be summed up like this: 'When I realize that God accepts me in Christ, even though I have done so much bad, then I want to do good.' This is the power of a deep humble joy that melts the heart.

Imagine every person in the world was required to get to Africa but was standing on the shore of America. They all get in the water and swim to try and reach the next continent.

There will be some swimmers who are strong and could swim for a day before they drowned. Others would drown straight away. The point is, it doesn't matter how strong they are. All would drown. It is impossible to swim across the ocean and save themselves. It wouldn't do the strong swimmer any good to turn to the weak swimmer and mock them. Both are doomed. Unless a lifeboat comes along and they choose to get in it, they will die. It's easy to see why the so called "stronger" swimmers might refuse the lifeboat. They assume they can do it themselves. It's better to realize how weak we are. It makes us that much more able to see our need for that lifeboat, Jesus.

Let's take the swimming illustration a little further. Imagine, after being rescued by the boat, one of the rescued was to put their hands in the air upon arrival and say, 'Look how amazing I am! I did it! I swam the distance!' Everyone would say, 'Shut up. You cannot boast. You should be full of gratitude not pride. You were rescued!' That is a picture of justification by grace. We're made acceptable to God not by our good works, but by Christ's amazing rescue on the cross! You see – that's why a Christian is not someone who can ever look down upon anyone else as though they're better than anyone else. And a Christian is not someone who should ever feel proud about their own goodness. Rather a Christian is someone who – as they understand more and more that they're a sinner made righteous by grace – experiences deep, humble joy. A Christian doesn't approach God saying, 'I have obeyed you. Now accept me.' But rather a Christian approaches God saying, 'I haven't obeyed you. Yet you have accepted me nonetheless. Now, with a heart melted by your grace, I want to obey you.'

WHY DID GOD JUSTIFY THE PERSON WHO CALLS ON HIM?

The answer comes in Romans 5:

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 ... we have now been justified by his blood...

We see that Christ took our condemnation and gave us his righteousness

BECAUSE HE LOVED US.

One last illustration: Suppose you are found guilty of a crime. You are in a courtroom in front of the judge, and he sentences you to death for a crime. His sentence is just. You are guilty, and the punishment for your crime is death. But suppose that judge is your father. He knows the law; he knows that your crime demands a death. But he knows love; he knows that he loves you too much to let you die. So in a wonderful act of love, he stands and removes his robe and stands by your side and says, 'I'm going to die in your place.' That is what God did for you. The wages of sin is death. Heaven's justice demands a death for your sin. Heaven's love, however, can't bear to see you die. So here is what God did. He stood and removed his heavenly robes. He came to earth to tell us he would die for us. He would be our Saviour. And that is what he did. Wow!

RECONCILIATION

On the cross, Christ took my alienation, and gave me God's friendship.

Throughout history, and throughout the world people – those who have believed in God – have felt a certain distance between them and God. They have felt like something was missing, that there was some kind of barrier or gap between them and fulfilment and meaning.

Walter Percy the famous novelist put words to this when he wrote, 'Why do we feel so bad in the very age when more than any other age we have succeeded in satisfying our needs and making

the world over for our own use? We can put people on the moon. We can send rockets into deepest space, yet we're no nearer discovering meaning in our world, within its horizons, than we were 3000 years ago.'

With this sense that something is missing in mind, I'd like to read two verses that tell us what happened when Jesus was on the cross...

Mark 15:37

(On the cross), with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Isn't that an interesting thing to happen? Jesus was crucified just outside of Jerusalem and it's famous temple. In that temple was something called 'The Most Holy Place' where no one but the high priest once a year was allowed to go. It was meant to be the closest a person could ever get to God. But a four-inch thick leather curtain blocked access to it. As Jesus was on the cross, it tore right down the middle. Surely more than a co-incidence. The question is, 'What was God trying to say?'

To answer that, let us read another section of Scripture.

2 Cor 5:14-6:2...

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6: 1 As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Let me unpack these verses now...

Notice first that humanity has been divorced from God through our sinfulness. It as though our sinfulness has built up a big wall between us and God. There are three kinds of bricks that make up this wall:

THE BRICK OF REBELLION

Verse 15 says that we tend to live for ourselves. God had created us to live for him, to live with him, and to live on him. We were made to centre our lives around him. Much like the earth centres itself around the sun, or a young child centres herself around her parents. God is meant to be our frame of reference, the source of our energy and wisdom, the one who we seek to glorify and please. But we have chosen instead to centre ourselves around ourselves. Refusing to let God be God, we have usurped him. We know better than him. We don't need him. We will figure out what's right and wrong. We will live for our glory and our pleasure rather than his. That's called rebellion. Jesus tells a parable of a king who goes away for a while, and comes back to his own land but is rejected by the very servants he left to look after that land. That's what we've done to God. We've told him to get out of our lives because we'll manage just fine without him.

But there is another kind of brick that is built into this wall between us and God. It is ...

THE BRICK OF GOD'S ANGER AGAINST OUR SIN

Since God has creator rights over our lives, it is downright wrong that we should reject him and rebel against him. The Scriptures tells us that he is deeply grieved by and angered by our sin. Verse 16 suggests that because of our rebellion, 'God was counting our sins against us'. Charles Hodge, the Princeton Theologian, speaking on this verse, 'So long as we are under the anger of God, due to our sin, we are aliens and enemies, cut off from his favour and friendship, which are the life of the soul'.

Philip Ryken, speaking of these first two kinds of bricks says, 'Sin brings a double alienation: we are unrighteously hostile to God, and God is righteously hostile to us in response.' But there is still a third kind of brick that divorces us from God...

THE BRICK OF OUR SHAME

One of the most telling verses in the entire Bible is Genesis 3:10, which tells us that Adam who had once walked intimately with God hides from God after he sins. That's the power of shame. Think of a man who cheats on his wife. Though he may do his best to pretend all is fine, he cannot bare his soul to her anymore, because it is stained with shame. Or think of a child who has secretly done wrong. He can no longer look into his parents eyes. In the same way, we intuitively know that God is pure, and when our souls are stained with shame and sin, we tend to hide from God. We fear coming too close.

So now we're ready to understand why people throughout history and throughout the earth have felt this sense that God is far away, that there is some kind of barrier between them. The wall is real. And it is built up of 1) our rebellion 2) God's anger against our rebellion and 3) our shame. Throughout history, people have sought to try remove this wall through religion. Lee Strobel says, 'Every religion (other than the way of Christ) is based on people doing things through their

struggling and striving to earn the good favour of God. They say people have to use a Tibetan prayer wheel, or they have to go on pilgrimages, or they have to give alms to the poor, or they have to avoid eating certain foods, or they have to perform a certain number of unspecified good deeds, or they have to pray in a certain way, or they have to go through a cycle of reincarnation.'

Throughout this series we have been making this single point: the way of religion is spelt 'D-O'. Do this, do that – then eventually God will accept you. It is like climbing a ladder, only you don't ever know if you've taken enough steps, and at any time, through doing something wrong, you can fall off.

But the way of Christ is totally different. It is spelt D-O-N-E. God accepts you in Christ. We don't go up the ladder to Christ. He comes down to us and dies for us.

This passage of Scripture tells us that the way of religion is futile. There's nothing we can do to break the wall down from our side. The damage is done. The wall is up. But there is something that God can do about it. Listen to verse 18: 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.' God breaks down the dividing wall. And he does it through Jesus on the cross. And 'all this is from him'. This means he makes the first move.

So how does God destroy the dividing wall according to these verses?

1) Notice that he breaks down the bricks of rebellion.

Verse 17 says, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!' This verse says that God gives us a new nature. He gives us a new heart. One verse says that he takes from us our hearts of stone and replaces them with hearts of flesh. He takes from us our unresponsive, rebellious hearts of stone, and he replaces them with new responsive, trusting, obeying hearts. This certainly was my experience: when I first trusted in Christ, I started to experience new desires (desires that had not existed before): desires to centre my life around him rather than myself, desires to trust and obey him, desires to glorify and please him.

2) Notice that he breaks down the bricks of his own anger.

Where once he had counted our sins against us, now he no longer 'counts people's sins against them' (v19). But how does he do this? The answer is mind-blowing: v21 says that on the cross, 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us'. Christ, though sinless, took our sin upon himself. And God visited his full wrath against the world's sin upon Christ on the cross. Christ absorbed God's anger against our sin.

At this point we can answer a question that is often asked, 'Why can't God just forgive us? Why did Jesus have to die?' The answer: All forgiveness of any deep wrong and injustice entails suffering on the forgiver's part. If someone truly wrongs you, because of our deep sense of justice, we can't just shrug it off. We sense there's a 'debt.' We can then either a) make the perpetrator pay down the debt b) or you can forgive – but that is enormously difficult. But that is the only way to stop the evil from hardening us as well. 2) If we can't forgive without suffering (because of our sense of justice) it's not surprising to learn that God couldn't forgive us without suffering — coming in the person of Christ and dying on the cross.

3) Notice that he breaks down the bricks of our shame.

Verse 21 says, 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'. When God looks at us he no longer sees our sin, he sees his Son's righteousness. Martin Luther, in light of this verse, urged Christians to regularly pray: 'Lord Jesus, You took upon yourself what is mine – sin. And you gave me what is yours – righteousness.'

On a similar note, Colossians 3:21-22 says,

'Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.'

We are holy and blameless in his sight. Yes, we're still weak and prone to sin, but nonetheless we have a covering righteousness. We can approach God.

Remember the curtain being torn. We asked 'What is God trying to say?' It is God's way of saying, 'Sinners come as close as you want.'

Listen to how Hebrews 10:19-22 says just that:

'19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.'


Our sinfulness led to a dividing wall being built up, a wall built up of our rebellion, God's anger, and our shame. But Christ broke that wall down on the cross – he tore through the barrier curtain – by diffusing our rebellion, by absorbing his own anger, and by washing away our shame.

That leaves us with one more question: why would God go to such great lengths to do this?

The answer is breathtaking, and if you miss this, you miss the most important thing you could ever know... God made you for friendship with himself, and he would rather die than live without you, which is exactly what he did.

In AD 380, John Chryostom marvelled at this thought as he wrote, 'Can you see love surpassing all comprehension: who was the one who had been hurt? He was. And who is the one who sought to reconcile first? He did.'

The following real story from the Truth and Reconciliation commission illustrates just how amazing this kind of grace is...



A frail black woman and a white police officer named van der Broek faced each other in the courtroom. Mr. van der Broek had just been found guilty of murdering the woman's son and her husband. He had come to her home a number of years earlier, shot her son, and burned his body while he and some other officers reveled in the act. Several years later, Mr. van der Broek returned and took away her husband as well. For two years, she heard nothing of him.

Then the man came back and led the woman to a place beside a river, where she saw her husband bound and beaten, lying on a pile of wood. The last words she heard him say were, "Father, forgive them," as the officers poured gasoline over his body and set him aflame.


In time, however, justice caught up with Mr. van der Broek. He had been found guilty, and it was time to determine his sentence. The judge asked the elderly woman, "What should be done to this man who so brutally destroyed your family?"

The woman said, "I want three things, First, I want to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial.

"And because my husband and son were my only family, I want, second, for Mr. van der Broek to become my son. I would like him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining within me.

"Third," she said, "I would like Mr. van der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive me." Then she walked across the courtroom and embraced Mr. van der Broek.

The police officer fainted, overwhelmed by the widow's response. Then quietly, friends, family, and neighbors - all victims of similar oppression and injustice - began to sing "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound."



That is a modern picture of the kind of grace God shows us in Jesus. Not only does he forgive us, but, having removed the all between him and us, he brings us into a personal relationship with himself.

So to sum up, 'On the cross, Christ took our alienation, and gave us friendship with God.' The question is, 'Have you trusted in Christ and the cross yet?' Listen to verse 20: 'We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.' The door is wide open to friendship with God. But will you walk through it by faith?

One day you will stand before God face to face. And you will give account of your life. The question Job asked ('How can a man be in the right before God?') will turn out to be your life's most important question. And on that day – either you will be condemned or justified, depending on what you have done with Christ.

SUBSTITUTION

Jesus offered himself on our behalf

Passover happened 3300 years ago when God set the Israelites free from the slavery to Egypt through the provision of a lamb's blood. Christians believe that this event was a future flash of of another event – the cross – when God set the world free from slavery to sin through the provision of Christ's blood!

Exodus 12

The Passover

1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 4 If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. 5 The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. 6 Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. 7 Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. 8 That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. 9 Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. 10 Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. 11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

12 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13 The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

1) GOD IS HOLY: HE PROMISES TO PUNISH SIN

Holy refers to God's moral perfection, his abhorrence to sin. He is perfect in thought, word, deed, attitude. His goodness is uncontaminated. His purity undiluted. There is no darkness in him at all.

'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment' (v12).

This story tells of a limited Judgment Night:

- Limited because it was Judgment on One Night
- Limited because it was Judgment on One Place
- Limited because it was Judgment on One firstborn in each family.

Of course this local Judgment Night is a future flash of a universal Judgment Day. The Bible says there's coming a day when all people everywhere will stand before the Judgment Throne of God and he will punish whatever unforgiven sin he finds! And notice what he pays sin with? Death! The Bible speaks about being separated from God as death. It can be difficult to think of ourselves as "sinful". But that's often because we have not fully thought through what sin means. Consider the following:

1) Sin is any word, thought, attitude or action that is out of harmony with God's character:

You think you ever said anything that was out of harmony with God's character?

- Maybe thought something?
- Maybe an attitude?
- Maybe an action?

2) Sin is putting good things in the place of God's throne in your life:

- What do you live for? What is the thing you find your hope in, your joy in, your life, your strength in?
- We were made for God. We were made to live on God.

We believe what we prefer to believe. We should be highly suspicious of what we believe because we tend to believe whatever makes us feel best.

For example, a recent survey in the USA, 76% of people believe when they die they will go to heaven, and only 1% believes they might go to hell. Why is this? It's because we believe what we prefer to believe. That's why so many people believe in heaven but not hell. But my question is, 'Where did you get this idea of heaven from?' The answer is 'Straight out of the Bible.' See what we've done? Our culture has taken those bits out of the Bible that suit us (ie heaven) and rejected those bits that don't suit us (ie hell). But that's clearly inconsistent. Either reject both the belief in heaven and hell, or embrace the believe in both heaven and hell, but don't pick and choose. That's just wishful thinking.

Similarly the Bible teaches that God is a loving God who has compassion for people and that God is a Holy God who punishes sin in people. But guess what our culture has done? We've believed what we have preferred to believe. We take the bits that speak of God as love, and have rejected the bits that speak of God as holy. But that's dubious. That's wishful thinking. Either believe that God is both loving and holy, or believe that God is neither loving nor holy, but don't pick and choose.

That said, let's think a little about God's holiness and how he promises to punish sin.

'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment' (v12).

God's judgment was upon Egypt. The 'firstborn' of each family represented the entire family. God was going to kill the firstborn of every family in Egypt as a way of saying, 'the wages of sin is death' (see Romans 3:23). Still today, the wages of sin is death. God promises to punish us for our sin. No one gets away with anything in God's world. The Holy God sees all our wickedness of heart, thought, word and deed. And he promises to punish us for our sin. Judgment is real. Death is the consequence for our sin. God's holiness demands death.

Notice that God said he would judge every firstborn. This includes even the firstborns of the Israelites. The Israelites are no more godly or devoted than the Egyptians are. They too have sinned against God.

2) GOD IS LOVE: HE PROVIDES A SUBSTITUTE

The Old Testament is about God's dealings with ancient Israel. Augustine says that 'The New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.' See how the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament:

'The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'' (John 1:29),

'Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed' (1 Corinthians 6:7)

'He (the Messiah) was led like a lamb to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53:7).

The picture of how God sets Israel free through the blood of a lamb is a picture of how God frees the whole world through the blood of Jesus.

Notice some of the future flashes we see of Jesus in this original Passover event:

'This month is to be for you the first month of your year' (v2).

The death of the lamb was the great turning point in the history of Israel. It would even mark the beginning of a new year. Still today the Jewish people celebrate Pesach (or Passover) to remember this day. It still marks the beginning of their new year. This was God's way of saying, 'Never forget how I liberated you by the blood of a lamb. It is the most important moment in your history.'

The symbolic significance is that the death of Christ the Lamb marks the turning point in human history – and in the lives of those who trust in him. Similarly, the Christian and the church today

need to keep the cross of Christ central in their lives. It needs to be regularly remembered and celebrated. The New Testament emphasises the cross. The four Gospels give most of their attention to the events building up to the cross. The apostle Paul makes radical comments about the central importance of the cross:

'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2)

'Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified' (Galatians 3:1)

'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Galatians 6:14)

'You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat' (v4).

There was enough lamb to go round to feed everyone. In the same way, the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to save the entire world. There is enough of Jesus' salvation to be experienced by everyone who ever has lived, who now lives, and who ever will live!

'The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect' (v5).

The lamb was without defect. It had to be perfect. It was young, which speaks of innocence. Jesus, too, was without defect. He was entirely innocent. One sinner cannot save another sinner from their sin. No, it would take a sinless Saviour to save us from our sin. This is what Jesus was – sinless!

'They are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs' (v7).

The lamb's blood represents the lamb's sacrificial death. Mysteriously, God transferred the sin of the Israelites to the lamb. And then he punished those sins in the lamb. The innocent lamb, carrying their sins, took their punishment. God provided a substitute. The Israelites, though guilty, escaped God's judgment. The lamb, though innocent, took their judgment instead.

Similarly, though Jesus was sinless, God transferred the sin of the world onto Christ who took our punishment upon himself. His sacrificial death, evidenced by his blood, allows us to escape God's judgment against sin. Truly he is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Isaiah 53:5-7 makes this point so powerfully:

'But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.'

'God demonstrated his love for us like this: while we still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

Amazingly, instead of demanding our blood for our sin, he offered his own. Here is an illustration of the wonderful way that Christ takes the judgment we deserve, so that if we trust in him we don't need to be judged ourselves:

“Many years ago, a father and his daughter were walking through the grass on the Canadian prairie. In the distance, they saw a prairie fire, and they realized that it would soon engulf them. The father knew there was only one way of escape: They would quickly begin a fire right where they were and burn a large patch of grass. When the huge fire drew near, they then would stand on the section that had already burned. When the flames did approach them, the girl was terrified but her father assured her, 'The flames can't get to us. We are standing where the fire has already been.'”

When Christ died on the cross, he experienced the fire of God's judgment. Now, we can stand on Christ, the place where the fire of judgment has already burnt. Right now, if we shelter under the blood, we are free from God's wrath. We are not under God's wrath but under his grace and acceptance. And one day, when the flames of judgment come upon everyone everywhere on the great and terrible day of Judgment, we too will be safe from judgment. The wrath of God will pass over us. We will be safe because of the blood of the lamb.

3) GOD IS RELATIONAL: HE INVITES US TO RECEIVE SALVATION BY FAITH

Relational means that he invites but doesn't force us into relationship with himself. Imagine God forced people to accept his gift of salvation! That would be equivalent to a Stepford God. Seen the movie, Stepford wives? In it a whole bunch of husbands in a town agree to robotize their wives, programming them to be the perfect little wives, who do whatever they want. So they get submission, but they do not get love. You can't programme love. Love by nature has to be chosen or else it is not love. God wants us to love him, but he does not force us to do so, because then he would get only submission not love! Now look at what his invitation is:

'Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs' (v7). 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you' (v13).

God instructed Moses to instruct the people to apply the blood to their homes. For the Israelites to experience protection from God's judgment, they needed to shelter under the blood of the lamb. They were to put it on the tops and sides of the doorframes of their houses.

And they were to shelter in that house. If there were any firstborn Israelites that refused to shelter under the blood of the lamb, they too would have died. The only protection from judgment was the blood. They had to shelter under it. But they were not forced to shelter under it. The choice was theirs.

Still today, the only protection from God's wrath is the blood of Christ. We are privileged to shelter under the blood of Christ. When God sees the blood, his judgment passes over us. But the question is, 'Will we receive God's provision?' Will we trust in Christ's death on our behalf? Or will we make light of the death of Christ, or perhaps reject it entirely. If so, there is no way to escape the judgment of God. Either we pay the price for our sin, or we allow Christ to pay the price for our sin. There is no other choice. Let us make sure that we shelter under the blood. God will not force us to. If we love people, we too will urge others to shelter under the blood.

'Christ's love compels us ... we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5:14,20).

HOW IS IT THAT WE SHELTER UNDER CHRIST'S BLOOD?

The answer is that we do it by simple trust. Our nationality, our levels of godliness, our intellectual comprehension cannot save us. Imagine an Israelite firstborn thinking to himself, 'I will not bother sheltering under the blood – I am a Jew by birth. Surely God will not judge me.' But how wrong he would have been! Imagine another firstborn Israelite thinking to himself, 'I am a good person, so I don't need to shelter under the blood. Surely God will not judge me.' How wrong he too would have been. Consider yet another firstborn Israelite thinking to himself, 'I don't understand the concept of the blood of the lamb. It doesn't make sense to me. So I won't bother to shelter under it. Surely, God wouldn't expect me to submit myself to something that I can't fully understand.' Again, how wrong he would have been.

The only protection from judgment was to simply and trustingly shelter under the blood. Simple trust in God's provision of the blood is how we are saved.

4) GOD IS POWERFUL: HE CHANGES OUR SPIRITUAL STATUS IN A MOMENT

'That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast ... this is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste' (v8,11).

There are three symbols in the way they ate the lamb that emphasise the speediness of their salvation.

- The bitter herbs: which represent the long years of suffering in Egypt.
- The bread without yeast: bread without yeast cooks quickly.
- Eating with cloak tucked into their belt, with sandals on and staff in hand: this emphasises a readiness to move. They will be eating briefly, and then they will be set free quickly!

For years they had suffered. Prayers had apparently gone unanswered. The nine deliverances had not worked. But whatever they did, they were trapped in Egypt. They could not leave. Then suddenly, the death of a lamb changes everything. Now, they cannot stay. Things happen quickly.

Similarly, things happen quickly as we put our trust in Christ's death on our behalf. Instantly, we are transferred from the dominion of darkness to light. We are forgiven.

Col 1:12 God has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We are justified. We receive the Holy Spirit. We are given citizenship in heaven. We are adopted as God's child. God is powerful!

Mind you, it's not like his power is then done. His power continues to energize our saved lives: God was sending them out on a journey. They would need strength. They were to draw their strength from the lamb that they had eaten. This is amazing – not only did the death of the lamb accomplish their salvation, but the death of the life became their source of strength and energy.

In the same way, Christ's death on our behalf is not just our source of salvation, but also our source of strength. We draw ongoing vitality from Christ's sacrificial death. The death of Christ is a source of life for the Christian. Let us continue to feast on Christ's death. It is our source of life, energy, strength and vitality. God is so faithful. He does not just set us free and send us on our way into the saved life. He is faithful in sustaining us in that freedom and salvation. We can say, 'The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). We are saved by his death, but we also live by his death. His death sustains us with spiritual life.

GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION TO THE WHOLE WORLD IN THE ORIGINAL PASSOVER MOMENT SHOWS US THAT:

- Because God is holy, he promises to punish sin.
- Because God is loving, he provides a substitute.
- Because God is relational, he invites us to shelter under the blood.
- Because God is powerful, he achieves instant change in our spiritual status.

ADOPTION

Because of what Jesus has done, we are called God's children

John 20:1...

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Jump to verse 11... 11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Let's hone in on that last verse – verse 17. It's so important. Jesus had died and risen. But what is the meaning of his death and resurrection? What does it change for us? Notice that it makes it possible for us to truly be God's children:

1. For the first time Jesus calls his disciples 'brothers'. 'Go instead to my brothers.' Before they were disciples, servants, friends – but now 'brothers'. Can you see what is implied? Somehow Jesus' death and resurrection makes it possible for us to be brothers of Jesus.
2. But this surfaces a question. If Jesus is the Son of God, and I am his brother, does that mean that I am a daughter or son of God in the same way as he is? And he answers this in this phrase: 'my Father and your Father'. He doesn't say, 'Our father' but rather 'my Father' and 'your Father' to highlight that his relationship to the Father is unique. He is the Son of God. And I am a son of God. He is divine. I am not. He is to be worshipped. I am not. He is the Father's Son from eternity past to

eternity future. My sonship had a starting point. Said another way, I am his adopted brother. God is a Father – the best Father we could imagine. He is a Father who loves us, and who is ready to adopt us.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD IS FATHER?

Now, please don't miss how amazing this simple fact about God is! Listen to JI Packer in his book *Knowing God* speak of this on page 224:

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. 'Father' is the Christian name for God.

By way of contrast, Islam does not believe God is a Father. There is a book written by a Muslim woman who came to faith in Christ. It's title: 'I dared to call him Father.' She tells how she was reading both the Bible and the Quaran, and realized that the essential message of these two books was incompatible. So she called out to God saying, 'God which is your book?' And God spoke back to her in a near-audible way: 'The one by which you can call me Father.'

Let's unpack 1 John 3:1.

How great the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (NIV)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (ESV)

GOD THE FATHER IS READY TO ADOPT US AS HIS CHILDREN

It is true that God loves all people. For example John 3:16 says God so loved the whole world that he gave his only Son to die on a cross for us. But it is not true that all have received his love, and so doing been adopted as his son or daughter. For example John 1:12 says, 'To all those who received Jesus, he gave them the privilege of being a child of God.' So though God loves everyone, not everyone is God's adopted child, though God very much would like to adopt everyone.

That's what this verse teaches too. It tells us that there is a specific time when the Father did more than just love us, but lavished or gave (or as some older translations have it: 'bestowed') his love upon us. The best illustration of this is a wedding. You might love someone, but on your wedding

day you muster up all you are and all the love you have, and you lavish or bestow that love upon the person in the form of a covenant of love.

GOD IS READY TO RENEW US ON THIS INSIDE

This verse seems to be repetitive: first it says that we are called children of God. Then it says 'we are' children of God. Upon a closer look we realize that it speaks of the two ways God makes us his children.

When it speak of God 'calling us his children' that refers to 'adoption'. Adoption is a legal word. My friends Shawn and Nina adopted little Micah. Picture it. Micah is sitting in one room, and in another room adoptive papers are being signed – and in that moment Micah's identity is changed. He is now called 'the child of Nina and Shawn.' Same with the way God adopted us. Only the adoption papers – so to speak – were signed in heaven. Those records are kept safe. Even when you don't feel like you're God's child, if you've been adopted, you are!

But the second phrase 'that is what we are' speaks not of adoption but of regeneration, which simply means that God does more than sign legal papers. He actually gives us a new nature. He gives us a new spiritual genetic. He gives us his Spirit who implants in us some of the family likeness. We are renewed on the inside. We are not just called child of God. We really are children of God. Now this would be impossible for Shawn and Nina to do to Micah, but in a sense God implants his genes into our spirit.

THE REMARKABLE IDEA THAT WE BECOME GOD'S CHILD

The Bible says that our sinfulness contributed to the death of Jesus. Martin Luther says that it's as though we carry in our pockets the nails that crucified Jesus! He died for your sins and my sins. So – in a sense – our sins killed God's Son.

But now look what that death was accomplishing – it was accomplishing our sonship and daughtership. Said another way: God had his Son die in our place so that we might become his sons and daughters. Hebrews 2:9-10 says more or less that 'he tasted death in our place in order to brings many sons and daughters to glory.' Wow!

When Jesus died for us if it had only accomplished forgiveness for my sins that would have been enough! But God's grace goes so much further. He made us his children. Amazing grace! If God had just forgiven us that would be enough. But that he makes us his sons and daughters is too amazing for words.

SO WHAT BENEFIT DOES THAT BRING TO MY LIFE?

ONE BENEFIT OF THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS THAT IT IS A SOURCE OF WONDER!

That first part of the verse says, 'See what kind of love' (ESV). The NIV translates it 'How great the love'. Both of them struggle to translate what the Greek language actually says.

The first word – which the NIV leaves out – is the word 'See!' Some older translations make it 'Behold!' Can you see what's happening? John is writing about knowing God and right there and then, pen in hand, his eyes are opened again to see the love of God the Father. He is erupting with wonder as he writes.

Then there is the phrase 'how great is the love' or 'what kind of love'. The literal Greek is 'what country does this love come from'. Let me explain why the English translators didn't translate it like that. It's because it's an idiom from the ancient world. For example, if we were translating the phrase 'it's raining cats and dogs' into another language we'd probably translate it 'it's raining a lot!' Because the phrase 'cats and dogs' would only confuse them. It's the same with us. We don't have that idiom: 'What country!' I suppose we do have similar meaning idioms which the English translators could have used. How about these: 'Wow! What planet does this love come from!' 'Amazing! This love is off the rector scale.'

This is the point: being adopted by the Father, and having this love lavished on us, is a source of wonder. You see the wonder in John as he writes it! And you feel that wonder from time to time as God opens your eyes to see it. What planet does this love come from? There is nothing in all the world like it. This love is off the rector scale. It moves me in the depths of my being with seismic power.

ANOTHER BENEFIT OF THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS THAT IT'S A SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE!

Here's a formula for confidence: identity + security = confidence. Our confidence comes from our identity and our security. The more we know who we are, and the more secure we are, the more confident we are.

IDENTITY. The great question that plagues every heart is 'Who am I?' and we spend the vast majority of our life trying to answer that question. The problem is that we tend to find our identity in temporal things – most commonly the affirmation of people: 'I am who people recognize me to be'. We tend to see ourselves through the eyes of people. So we find our identity in our work, in our relationships, in our looks, in our level of wealth and education. But the problem with all these things is that they are temporary and inconsistent. They change. So our identity is built on shifting sand. If we're fired from a job we find our identity in, we're shattered. If we're dumped by a person we find our identity in, we're devastated. How much better to find your identity not in what people think of you but in what God thinks of you. Instead of seeing yourself through the eyes of people, see yourself through the eyes of a Father who has lavished love on you! Oh what confidence will flow

in your life when you do this. You'll be standing on solid ground. The solid ground of a Father who loves and affirms you as his child with perfect consistency. That's where any sane person will look for and find their identity.

SECURITY. The other question that plagues us is 'Who or what will be there for me when things become challenging?' Again, more than anything, we tend to look to money, and to people to be there for us. But again money is fleeting, and people are so often fickle. How wonderful then to know that there is a Father who is committed to being there for us now and forever. We can always count on him. We can rest secure in his promise: 'Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.' Think of John who wrote the book of Revelations, some 60 years after being Jesus' earthly disciple as a young man. In that book he tells us how he is imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos for his faith in Christ. He is the last surviving apostle. And yet he is still full of faith, wonder, joy and confidence even while in prison as an old man. But how does he do it? How does he endure under such crushing circumstances? The answer: the love of God has enabled him to be patient and persevering even under pressure!

The point? Being adopted by the Father is an unparalleled source of confidence – the confidence of finding your identity and security not in people and things, which so often fail us, but rather in a Father whose love never fails. Find your identity in the Father. Let him answer the 'Who am I?' question for you. And find your security in the Father. Let him answer the 'Who will be there for me?' question for you.

SINCE GOD IS FATHER, NOW WHAT MUST I DO?

MAKE SURE YOU'RE ADOPTED

John wrote this verse to a church of Christfollowers. So when he writes, 'For that is what we are!' he is not applying it to all people everywhere. So let's turn it around and ask 'Are we?' Are we yet adopted?

When people adopt little children, those kids are not asked for their consent. They are too small. But when God adopts us, he seeks our consent. He does not adopt us against our will. He waits for us to put our faith in him.

Galatians 3:26 says, 'So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.'

See that? You need to put your faith in Jesus Christ. If you've already done that, then rejoice! But if you have not yet entrusted your life to Christ, then why not do so right now? The adoption papers have been signed on his side in blood, but they need your signature of faith too.

DON'T CONFUSE YOUR EARTHLY FATHER WITH YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Some of us have wonderful fathers who have consistently loved and affirmed us, who have shown deep interest in our lives, who has worked hard to build a relationship with us, who lovingly confronted us when we needed to be confronted, who have set an example of integrity and sacrifice

for us. How privileged you are! Well, the good news is that your heavenly Father is all those things only infinitely more so.

Some of us have less than wonderful fathers who have failed to love and affirm us consistently, who have not shown a deep interest in our lives, who either failed to confront us when we needed to be confronted, or when they did did so in a unloving way, who have not worked hard to build a relationship with us, who have not been examples of integrity and sacrifice at all. Well, the good news that your heavenly Father has none of those weaknesses at all. He is perfect.

Some of us have not had fathers at all. Perhaps our fathers died while we were young. Or they have been physically or emotionally absent. Now you have a Father who will never leave you nor forsake you!

BE IMMERSED IN THE LOVE OF GOD

Listen to Galatians 4:4-6:

4 God sent his Son 5 that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Notice what this verse teaches. It teaches that God sent his Son to make us sons and daughters. But then he also sends his Spirit so that we can experience God as our Father. It says that the Spirit in our hearts calls out 'Abba, Father.'

This refers to those special times when we move beyond knowing God's love in our heads to knowing God's love in our hearts. It refers to those times when the Spirit enables us to feel the love of God. They're very special times. We can't make these times happen, but we can ask for them. Thomas Goodwin, centuries ago, gave us an illustration to understand these experiences.

Imagine a child walking in the street hand in hand with their father. The child knows that the father loves them. Then suddenly the father picks up the child, squeezes them affectionately, and whispers in their ear: 'I love you so much. There is nothing I would not do for you. I'd even die for you.' Now it's not like the child has learnt something new. They already knew that the father loved them. But now they feel that love. It is as though they discover the love of the father for the first time. Thomas Goodwin says that most of the Christian life is lived by faith in God even when we can't feel his love. Yet still we can hold his hand by faith and remind ourselves that he loves us. But there are special times where God the Father scoops us up, reaffirms his love for his, reminds us afresh what he did for us on the cross. In those times when we're immersed in the love of God we're filled with fresh wonder and confidence.

BE A CONDUIT OF THE FATHER'S LOVE TO OTHERS

In an age of massive selfishness, what the world needs is people who are courageously loving. But how do we become these kind of people? The answer lies in living in the love of God. The more we affirm the Father's love for us, the more we're able to pass it on to others.

Think of John who wrote this letter. He was not just filled with wonder and confidence, but he became a conduit of the Father's love to others. For example, Eusebius the third century historian records a story about John the apostle as an old man.

He tells how John, now an old man, had helped a young man from a very troubled background come to faith. He then spent time with this man, nurturing his newfound faith in Christ. But John had to go on a long ministry trip. So he asked one of the pastors to take this man under special care for the time being. When he came back, he asked this pastor where the young man was. The pastor sadly told him, 'He is now dead to God. While you were away, he doubted the gospel, and went back to his old friends. He is now one of the leaders of a gang of thieves who live in the mountain. You cannot get to him, because they kill anyone who enters their territory.' At this John tore his clothes and fell to the ground in prayer. Then he ordered, 'Bring me a horse.' He rode straight to that mountain. And he was captured. Before they killed him, he shouted, 'I am unarmed. Take me to your leader. I have a message for him.' So they did. When the young man came out and saw John, he dropped his arms and ran. John ran after him shouting, 'Why run from an unarmed man. I have come to let you know I love you. And I would willingly die for you. Come back my son.' At this the young man stopped in his tracks and wept. And he renewed his faith in Christ, the one who actually did die for him.

Can you see the lesson? Where did John get his love for this young man from? He got it because he was so transformed by the Father's love. And still today, what the world needs is people who love courageously, selflessly. Would you be a conduit of the Father's love to others?

MEDIATION

What Jesus is doing right now

Up to this point we have answered the question about what Christ achieved on the cross. How religion says DO while Jesus says DONE. But another important question is "what is Jesus doing?" What is happening right now? Most people know about the Jesus of yesterday (the manger, the cross, the empty tomb) and many even know of the Jesus of tomorrow.

The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as the High Priest. His ministry is both past tense (ie offering himself as a sacrifice on the cross) and present tense. The best way to think of the High Priest is as the go-between, mediating between sinful humanity and the Holy God.

We know what happened on the cross in AD 33. We have spent 4 chapters looking at it. An atrocity went down. The best man who ever lived was given the most painful, humiliating death – death on the torture weapon of the cross. Put to death by a combined agreement between a Roman leader (Pilate) and the top religious man of Jerusalem (Caiaphas the High Priest of the Jerusalem temple).

But God used this evil to accomplish something unimaginably good – the salvation of all people in every country and in every century who would call on the name of Jesus.

JESUS, THE HIGH PRIEST

Through Moses, God set up the system of the High Priest. It was God's idea. For over a millennium this ministry played out in Israel. But why did God create the High Priest? Answer: because the earthly high priest pointed to the Ultimate High Priest – Jesus himself. By getting your head around the idea of a high priest, you begin to make sense of what Jesus did, and what Jesus is doing.

WHAT HIGH PRIESTS WERE

Israel had a High Priest in every generation. In 1300 BC God instructed Moses to build a port-able tabernacle. It was made of cloth. Under King Solomon the tabernacle was changed into an immovable temple of stone and jewels and metals – set up in Jerusalem.

The tabernacle/temple had three sections. First you walked into an open-air outer court. Most people were allowed in here. Then you walked into the first structure – the Holy Place. Only priests were allowed in here. Then there was a curtain that blocked off a deeper room – the Most Holy Place. God was said to live in there. And no-one except the High Priest - and only once a year - was allowed in there.

The point that God was making through the tabernacle/temple structure is that God is utterly holy and pure and perfect. And we are defiled and dirty with sin – the sin of not doing what God wanted us to do and the sin of doing what God did not want us to do, the sin of our motivations and the sin of our thoughts and the sin of our words and the sin of our deeds. And the result: we cannot approach God.

There was one way to approach God: this tabernacle/temple was run by a system of priests. People who wanted to get right with God would come to the entrance of the tabernacle with sacrifices and offerings. Priests would then kill and burn these on an altar on behalf of the people. For us, this sacrificial system seems bizarre. But God was the one who created it – as a way of showing people 1. How serious their sin is – so serious that they deserved to die. 2. How sin could be stripped of its condemning power – through the death of a substitute.

Now, the leader of all the priests was The High Priest. And he was special in two ways:

1. He wore different clothing to the other priests. For example, he wore a turban on his head – and on the forehead part of the turban was a metal plate that said 'Holy to the Lord. And he wore a strange piece of clothing called 'an ephod'. And on each shoulder an onyx stone was attached. And he wore a waist-coat-type breastpiece with 12 different precious stones attached.

2. But more than special clothing – once a year on the Day of Atonement he would offer attempt to achieve forgiveness for the entire nation for the previous years worth of sins...

1. After thoroughly cleansing himself, he would get all dressed up in his gear.
2. He would take with him a bull and two goats.
3. He would lay his hands on the head of the bull – and confess all his personal sin, passing on his own sins.
4. He would lay his hands on the goats – and confess all the sins of the whole nation of Israel, passing on their sins. He was representing the entire ‘people of God’.
5. He would kill the bull and one of the goats. Then he would take in some of the blood and enter into The Most Holy Place. He’d walk up to the Golden Ark – which represented the very throne of God. And he’d sprinkle the blood upon it. And he would ask God for forgiveness 1. For his own sins (using the bull’s blood) and 2. For the sins of the entire nation (using the goat’s blood).
6. Then he would release the living goat – a scape goat - into the wild. If the sacrificed goat took the condemnation of the sins of the people, the released goat took the shame of the sins far far from the people.
7. Once the whole thing was done, what relief came over the people. They would go to bed that night saying, ‘Our sins have been stripped of their condemning power!’

But what was happening here? In short, the High Priest was the Go-between. He was the mediator between the people and God. The people could not approach God because of their sin. But the High Priest dealt with that sin through sacrifice. And the High Priest – representing all the people – went into the deepest presence of God, the Most Holy Place, and restored the broken connection between God and his people.

5 THINGS JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST DID

1. JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST OFFERED A SACRIFICE FOR SINS.

Hebrews 7: 27 - Unlike the other high priests, Jesus did not need to offer sacrifices ... first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Hebrews 9:12 - Jesus did not enter by means of the blood of goats and goats; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

Like the earthly High Priest, Jesus offered up a sacrifice to deal with the sins of people. But notice four differences...

1. The earthly high priest would have to do this every year! In contrast, Jesus did it once – and never needed to do it again.
2. The earthly high priest would offer a sacrifice for his own sins, but Jesus never needed to offer a sacrifice for his own sins, because he lived a sinless life.
3. The earthly high priest would deal with the sins of Israel – and just his generation. But Jesus was dealing with the sins of the whole world – and for every generation!
4. But most significantly, the earthly high priest offered an animal or two as sacrifice – but Jesus offered himself. He was the sacrifice. His death on a cross was an equivalent of a sacrifice on an altar!

Interestingly, the death of Jesus accomplished what both the goats accomplished. Like both goats, he took our sins upon himself. Like the first goat, Jesus on the cross took our sins upon himself – and experienced the condemnation and punishment our sins deserved. And like the second goat, Jesus on the cross removed our shame – taking our sins far far away from us!

2. JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST PRESENTED BLOOD BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD

Hebrews 9:22, 24-26 says it best:

22 Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. ... 24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 ... He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

1. Christ entered heaven. The Most Holy Place on earth represented the Truly Most Holy Place – the very throne room of God in heaven.
2. And that throne now as blood sprinkled on it. Jesus (metaphorically speaking) presented his blood, the perfect sacrifice to deal with the sins of the whole world.
3. Notice that phrase – ‘at the culmination of the ages.’ The three most significant days in the history of the universe are firstly, the day it was created, secondly, the day the human race fell from God, and lastly that day – the culmination of the ages – when Jesus sprinkled his own blood on the throne of God in heaven! The day sin was dealt with!

3. JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST SAT DOWN ONCE HE OFFERED THE SACRIFICE.

The book of Exodus goes into great detail about the furniture in the tabernacle/temple: tables and lamps, altars for sacrifice, and altars for burning incense, copper basins and golden arks. Of all the furniture there was NO chair. That's because the high priest's work was never done. Even after

the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, sacrifices would carry on on a daily basis, and the Day of Atonement would come around in 365 days once again. The sacrifice was not enough to really save people.

That's why it's so surprising to read this in Hebrews 8:1...

1 Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.

See that? After the sacrifice, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Why's he sitting? One reason is that unlike the high priest, Jesus was not just a man – he was the perfect God-man. And that means that he co-rules the world with his Father. But there's another reason he sat: he was finished. His work was done – once and for all. Totally completed.

Moments before Jesus breathed his last on that cross, he cried out 'It is finished!' This means that the offering of his blood was accepted by the Father. It means that his work of saving us was done. That's the difference between religion and Jesus. Religion says, 'Do'. But Jesus says 'Done!' But what exactly had Jesus done? Two things, which make up the last two points under what Jesus our High Priest did...

4. JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST ACHIEVED OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD.

Remember how the high priest wore a metal plate on his forehead engraved with the words, 'Holy to the Lord.' Well that wasn't entirely true of Israel's high priests was it? If it was they would not have had to offer a bull just for their own sins. The reason God put this into the tabernacle worship system is that it was pointing to Jesus, the one of whom it could truly be said, 'Holy to the Lord.' Jesus is the only man who ever lived who was perfect. He never sinned. Not even once!

Hebrews 7:26 says this about Jesus:

'Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.'

Remember how the high priests of old would lay their hands on the innocent animal – and there was a kind of exchange happening: the sinfulness and unholiness of the people would be transferred to the animal, and the innocence and 'holiness' of the animal would be transferred back to the person. Well, this is what Jesus achieved on the cross: our sinfulness and unholiness was taken up by him, and he gave us in it's place his own innocence and holiness.

It's as though he put his engraved metal plate upon us: Holy to the Lord! Now – God accepts us not because of our own holiness (we aren't very holy at all) – but because Jesus has transferred his holiness to us. We're made as acceptable to our Holy God as Jesus is acceptable to God. In short, Jesus has achieved our total acceptance by God!

5. JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST ACHIEVED OUR ACCESS TO GOD.

Hebrews 10:19-22 says this best...

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...

Remember that when Jesus died on the cross, something mysterious happened. More or less at that time, the foundation of the temple shook, and it caused the thick curtain that concealed the Most Holy Place to tear open. It was God's way of saying: 'What Jesus has just done on the cross means that people can now come right into the Most Holy Place.'

Before it was just one man – the High Priest – and just once a year. But now – because we wear the headplate saying 'Holy to the Lord' and because we enter with the blood of Jesus on our hands, we have 'confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.'

Wow! We're not just accepted by God – we also have access to God. Despite our sinfulness, God has made a way for us to enter right into his Presence, drawing close to God. Imagine the shock of the ancient Jews to see hordes of people, fallen and broken and imperfect people, confidently entering the Most Holy Place. Imagine the surprise to see you exiting – still alive! – and with a smile on your face, the smile that shows you've been with God. Well – that's what Jesus has achieved for us – our access to God.

You know one of the biggest spiritual misconceptions in our culture? It's the belief that good people get to God, and get to heaven. But can't you see – none of us are good enough. God is holy – and we have sinned. Does that mean there's no hope of us getting to God and heaven then? No, the gospel saves the day. It declares that it's not good people who get to God and into heaven; it's forgiven people! So the big question is: Have you yet received Christ's forgiveness? If you haven't – this is about the best day of the year to do it!

BUT WHAT IS HE DOING RIGHT NOW?

He is doing three things...

1. RIGHT THIS MOMENT JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST IS CARING FOR US.

Exodus 39, which is the original description of what the high priest was to wear...

6 Upon the ephod they mounted the two onyx stones in gold filigree settings and engraved them like a seal with the names of the sons of Israel. 7 Then they fastened them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, as the LORD commanded Moses.

On each of his shoulders he wore an onyx stone. Each stone was engraved with 6 of the 12 Israelite tribes. But why on his shoulders? It reminds me of another prophecy about the coming Messiah:

'On his shoulders rests the government of the world.' In other words Jesus our high priest carries us in leadership. He is in charge of us. He is responsible for us. He has purposes for our lives that he plans to bring to pass. He is overseeing us right now. You need some guidance, and leading? Jesus your high priest is ready to help.

But there was some other details about his apparel of interest, also in Exodus 39...

8 They fashioned the breastpiece—the work of a skilled craftsman. 10 They mounted four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there was a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; 11 in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire [ai] and an emerald; 12 in the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; 13 in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. They were mounted in gold filigree settings. 14 There were twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes.

See that? 12 different precious stones – attached to his chest, right over his heart – each stone engraved with a name of a different tribe of Israel. He doesn't chest carry us on his shoulders. He carries us close to his heart. We're valuable to him. We're precious in his sight. In the same way there was a different stone for each tribe, so we have a special place in his heart. He is thinking about us right now. You wondering whether Christ really cares for you? Know you need not doubt that.

Hebrews 2:15 reminds us that he doesn't only carry us as our leader, and care for us as precious, but that he empathizes with our weaknesses and temptations...

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Jesus is not just perfect and holy. He knows what it feels like to go through the pressures, the vulnerabilities, the agonies, the frustrations, the temptations we go through as human beings. Because just over 2000 years the Son of God became one of us – entered into the full human experience. You wonder if Jesus really understands? Well, now you know – he doesn't just hand out advice and instructions like a detached technician – he heals you through his wounds. The very next verse tells us what this means for us...

16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

He carries you in leadership. He cares for you – you're a precious stone. And he feels with you and for you. So come to him. Tell him of your temptations. Pour out your frustrations. Ask him your questions. Lay your disappointments and fears at his feet. Let Jesus the high priest go to work in guiding you, healing you, lifting you up.

2. RIGHT THIS MOMENT JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST IS CLEANSING US.

Hebrews 9 says it so powerfully...

13 The blood of goats and bulls ... sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ ... cleanse our consciences ... so that we may serve the living God!

Fascinatingly, blood was not just sprinkled on the ark. Blood was also sprinkled on the people who needed forgiveness. These people had sinned, and were stuck. They did not know how to deal with the guilt that plagued their conscience. So the priest would sprinkle them as a way of saying, 'You're clean. You can start over with a brand new slate.' Obviously, this was just a ceremony, so it didn't really set their conscience free.

But now, there is one – Jesus our high priest – who still sprinkles his conscience-cleansing blood upon guilty sinners who come to him for forgiveness, who come to him, saying 'Have mercy on me.' He doesn't want us to get stuck in the whirlpool of introspection, where every time we think of drawing close to God, we're reminded by a recent or past sin that we still feel guilty of.

If that's you – you carry a sense of guilt and unworthiness because of a past failure – you can come to the High Priest now. Let him apply the blood to you by his Spirit. Let him touch your conscience and cleanse it, so that you can get back to the wonderful privilege of enjoying and serving God.

There is another analogy – the analogy of the scape-goat – that comes into play when you're feeling plagued by feelings of shame and unworthiness. Let him be the one who carries your shame away. Far far away. As Psalms 103 puts it: 'As far as the East is from the West, that's how far he has removed our sins from us.'

3. RIGHT THIS MOMENT JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST IS PRAYING FOR US.

Hebrews 7:24-25 says it like this...

24 ... Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to rescue completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Right now – Jesus is praying for you. He is interceding for you. He is praying down God's will over your life. One passage of Scripture (John 17) reveals the kinds of things he's asking on our behalf. He's asking that our faith will withstand the trials and temptations that come our way. He's asking that we would experience a supernatural joy – even in the face of persecution and hatred from people who can't stand what we believe. He's asking that we will withstand the attacks of the devil.

He's asking for the transformation of our characters so that we reflect his own character. He's asking that God's Word would become a real and living force in our lives. He's asking that we would enjoy the unity that comes from loving each other.

Ever feel so alone? Like no one knows what you're going through? Well – you were wrong. In that very moment Jesus was praying for you! And no matter what mountain you're looking up at right now – whether depression or cancer or the loss of a loved one or the worry about the decisions of a family member or the crushing weight of debt – know that Jesus is praying for you. Right this very moment.

CONCLUSION

What did Jesus do – past tense? He offered the ultimate sacrifice himself. He presented his own blood before the very throne of heaven. And he sat down – because his work was done. What work? The work of achieving for us acceptance with God. The work of achieving for us access to God. And what is he doing right now – this very moment? He is being our high priest: caring for us, ready to cleanse our consciences, praying for us.

As a Christfollower, you can rejoice! In the words of Hebrews 9:24, Jesus has 'entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.' He is in heaven 'for us'. Jesus is the go-between. Jesus is for you.

IT IS DONE!

John 12

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

All of Jesus' life and ministry led up to this moment when he declared what he was on earth to do. He was there to die on a cross to restore man to God. Mark Driscoll reminds us that crucifixion was invented by the Persians and was the most horrendous and despicable and disgusting and distasteful way to die. The Greek philosopher Cicero was quoted as saying, "That crucifixion is such an all together horrific thing, that decent Roman citizens shouldn't think about it. And they shouldn't hear about it because it isn't fit for good, decent, noble people."

To really understand the cross is to be horrified. It is so altogether horrifying that we actually invented a word to describe crucifixion: excruciating, which literally means 'from the cross'. Death by crucifixion was such a horrible way to die that we had to create a word to explain its horror.

But the actual crucifixion didn't even come close to the level of suffering that Jesus really experienced that day. In order to understand Jesus' suffering at the end of the gospels, Tim Keller, in *The Reason for God*, says we must remember how he is introduced at their beginning. Jesus was not created. He was not only around when everything was created, but took part in creating it. For all eternity he had lived in a relationship of absolute intimacy and love. At the end of his life, he was cut off from his Father – for the first time in eternity, he was separated from his Father and the Holy Spirit. There may be no greater emotional pain than the loss of a relationship one desperately wants. As Keller points out; if a mild acquaintance condemns or criticizes someone, and says they never want to see them again, it is painful. If a friend or dating partner does the same thing, it is significantly more painful. If a spouse does this, or a parent (especially to a young child), the psychological damage is infinitely worse.

Keller asks who can grasp what it would be like to lose not just spousal love or parental love that has lasted several years, but the infinite love of the Father that Jesus had from all eternity?

1 John 4: 9-12

God is love.⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

God is love. We know how much he loves us because he spared nothing to reunite us with him. Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love towards us. As he breathed his last breath, he cried

'DONE!'

What had he done? He had fulfilled the payment of our debt in full. Not only so but he gave us his righteousness. He exchanged our filth for his perfection before his Father. And now?

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are —yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

As believers we can approach him in full confidence that he will receive us and grant us mercy and grace. Likewise, non-believers can approach in full confidence that with repentance and accepting

Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they will receive full pardon for their sins and have Jesus' righteousness imparted onto them. This is what Jesus achieved for us on the cross.

If you have not yet taken the step of becoming a Christfollower, in the words of 1 Timothy 2, 'There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man – it's Jesus Christ.' He is the go-between. It's not good people who get to God or into heaven, it's forgiven people! And forgiveness comes through Jesus – no other way. In all Israel there was only one high priest – and today there is only One High Priest for the whole world!

Everything we've learnt about what Jesus did on the cross is to be more deeply appreciated. And everything Jesus our High Priest is now doing is to be more deeply applied to our lives.