

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 34 – THE NEW COVENANT]

Last time we looked at Jesus fulfilling and living up to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant on behalf of Israel.

- ◆ Now we come to the primary reason for Jesus joining us in our humanity, to pay the penalty for mankind's sin.
- ◆ If the incarnation was a humiliating event for Jesus, imagine submitting Himself to the ordeal of the crucifixion.
- ◆ If anyone has any lingering doubts about God's motivation in joining us in our humanity after witnessing the life Jesus lived on our behalf, they should be quickly brushed aside when they learn the ends to which God was willing to stoop in order to prove His love and to restore relationship with His creation.
- ◆ Contrary to some depictions of God's nature, we see the true revelation of the love that burns for His people.
- ◆ ***Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT) Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. 7 He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. (Miracle of the incarnation) 8 And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. (Miracle of the atonement).***
- ◆ If the incarnation was about God drawing near to man, the atonement was about God providing the way for a sinful mankind to draw near to Him.

We now turn our attention to the astonishing events surrounding the atonement.

- ◆ Jesus knew the ordeal He was about to face. He inspired Isaiah 52-53. He chose to join humanity when the cross was the method of execution. He walked the streets of Jerusalem and saw on a distant hill the crucified silhouetted against the sky.
- ◆ Yet Jesus did not balk at what lay before Him.
- ◆ The apostle John reveals Jesus' motivation.
- ◆ ***John 10:17-18 (NLT) "The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily.***
- ◆ We see this extraordinary love voluntarily displayed by the Son of God in order for us to be drawn back to God.
- ◆ Jesus was simply echoing His own teaching, ***Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13).***

We pick up the story at the last supper.

- ◆ The people had welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem as though He was a conquering king.
- ◆ Little did they realize the strategy the conquering king was going to employ to set them free?
- ◆ It was not the way of force, but of weakness; not war, but peace; not hatred, but love.
- ◆ Jesus takes off his robe and washes his disciple's feet symbolizing in dramatic fashion the difference in approach of His kingdom as opposed to the approach employed by the kingdoms of this world (John 13:1-17; Luke 22:24-27; Philippians 2:1-8).
- ◆ Here is the King of Kings washing the feet of mere mortals.
- ◆ As Jesus explained to the resistant Peter, there is a need for all sinners to be washed clean of their sins and the one about to do so is kneeling here before you (John 13:6-9).
- ◆ Jesus moves back to the table and using simple everyday food items, bread and wine, introduces the New Covenant.

The question needs to be asked, "Why was there a need for a New Covenant?"

- ◆ Simply because the first one was not effective! Why?
- ◆ ***Jeremiah 31:31-33 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.***
- ◆ God the faithful husband was fulfilling His side of the agreement in being their God, but Israel was not living up to being His holy people through their disobedience and faithlessness.
- ◆ Hence the need for a New Covenant which would bring about the desired result from both the side of God and the side of the people.
- ◆ Because of human weakness, God knows Israel is unable to fulfill their side of the agreement, so now in a remarkable display of grace, God would provide from within Israel a faithful man to fulfill the covenant agreement from the side of man.
- ◆ But now not only for Israel, but also for the whole world.

Now back to the last supper. To understand what is happening here, one has to go back to the introduction of the Mosaic Covenant.

- ◆ Earlier we spoke about Moses being the word, the logos, prophet or spokesman of the Old covenant who mediated the covenant between God and the people.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 34 – THE NEW COVENANT]

- ◆ He was the one who went up on the mountain to receive the covenant from God.
- ◆ Not only did Moses mediate the covenant, but you may remember he also stood between God and the Israelites and mediated a settlement when God threatened to wipe out the Israelites after the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:1-14), and when Aaron and Miriam dared to assume Moses' position of prophet/priest (Numbers 12:1-15).
- ◆ Now we see the literal Word, the Logos of God assuming the role of mediating the New Covenant as one who stood as a go-between, between God and man.
- ◆ **Hebrews 8:6 But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.**
- ◆ As both God and man, Jesus was in the unique position of fulfilling the covenant from both the side of God and the side of man.
- ◆ As we read last time, it was God in the flesh literally fulfilling the promise made to Israel, **"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Leviticus 26:12).**
- ◆ As mediator, Jesus had to fulfil all of the covenant promises God had made to the people, while at the same time responding on behalf of the Israelites for them to be a holy people (Exodus 19:1-8).
- ◆ Through His perfect obedience to the law, Jesus fulfilled the Israelites side of the agreement of being a holy people.
- ◆ He was the Lamb of God without blemish. He was the bread of life, the unleavened bread without sin.
- ◆ These were the requirements if Jesus was indeed to be our sacrificial atonement for sin.
- ◆ **Up to this point in His life, Jesus was primarily fulfilling the role of King and Prophet, living a perfect life, overcoming the devil, teaching about the kingdom of God, revealing the Father.**
- ◆ You may remember while Moses performed the role of the prophet/priest, Aaron preformed the role of liturgical priest, those functions associated with the tabernacle and sacrifices.
- ◆ Jesus of course assumed both of these priestly functions.
- ◆ Now the time has come in His ministry for Jesus to assume the role of High Priest.
- ◆ You will remember Aaron went into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement presenting the blood of the sacrificed goat on behalf of the people to God.
- ◆ However, now under the New Covenant, the High Priest, on behalf of the people, went into the holy of holies not with the blood of an animal, but to present His own blood.
- ◆ Jesus was not only priest but also the sacrificial victim.
- ◆ This is now God fulfilling His side of the New Covenant agreement of being our God, providing even for our unfaithfulness.
- ◆ Despite Jesus living a sinless life for us, sin is not given a free pass. Justice demands the price be paid.
- ◆ A sinful mankind still stands under God's judgment.
- ◆ But instead of requiring us to pay the penalty for our sin, a merciful God steps down from the judgment seat and assumes the sentence of death Himself.
- ◆ The most precious commodity in the universe, the blood of the Lamb of God is presented to the Father to cleanse humanity of their sins.
- ◆ And the Son as we read above, voluntarily, lovingly, goes like a lamb to the slaughter.
- ◆ This willingness to go **"like a lamb to the slaughter"** is referred to as His "passive obedience" while His life of obedience is referred to as His "active obedience."
- ◆ So we see the stage set for the reconciliation of mankind back to God through the dual ministry of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ He has lived the perfect life so His righteousness can be imputed to us, and secondarily, He is about to shoulder the burden of the sins of the whole world so justice is served.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**
- ◆ By combining His life of perfect obedience (active obedience) and His bodily sacrifice (passive obedience) on our behalf, Jesus has accomplished at-one-ment with God and mankind.
- ◆ Both His life and His death bring about this rapprochement. Both aspects are necessary for atonement to be effective.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 34 – THE NEW COVENANT]

It is now with this background that Jesus willingly submits Himself to the judgment of God on a sinful humanity.

- ◆ The Lamb of God voluntarily offers Himself to the wicked devices of the sons and daughter of men who defiantly mock, torture and finally murder the Son of God on the cross.
- ◆ In our determination to live independently of God, we see a rebellious humanity rise up in prideful arrogance and expose the deep-seated hostility towards God that resides deep in the human heart.
- ◆ Rather than seeing “sinners in the hands of an angry God” as portrayed in the famous 18th century sermon by Jonathan Edwards, at the cross, we see “God in the hands of angry sinners” (Hebrews 12:2-3).
- ◆ The cross not only exposes humanity’s deep-seated hatred of God, but it also reveals just how seriously God takes our sin.
- ◆ He doesn’t give us a free pass or simply excuse it; He chooses instead to suffer the terrible consequences Himself.
- ◆ ***1 Peter 2:24 “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”***
- ◆ Not only did Jesus go to the hell of the cross on our behalf so we wouldn’t have to, but also to magnify what an affront sin is to all that a holy God stands for.
- ◆ Sin places us in that God-forsaken spot alienated from God, something God does not desire, and something He has gone to great pains to display (Mark 15:34).
- ◆ However it is only because of Christ’s willingness to take our place on the cross that now allows God to offer humanity the gift of grace.
- ◆ Whereas before we lived under God’s judgment and the law that condemns, now that we have been liberated from the death sentence of sin, we now live in the freedom of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- ◆ In the prophetic words of the prophet Jeremiah, ***“For I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34).***
- ◆ Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of all humanity means God does not hold us accountable for those sins anymore.
- ◆ He is not going to ask us to pay that penalty a second time.
- ◆ However, as grace is a gift, it has to be received, and if any are unwilling to receive it, the option remains for God to reinstate it, but it is all together unnecessary.
- ◆ We will speak more of this later.

What should be humanity’s response to this remarkable act of grace?

- ◆ Just as God spelled out for the Israelites how they were to respond to His mercy and grace under the Mosaic Covenant through the sacrificial system, now Jesus spells out to His disciples how they are to respond to this supreme act of mercy and grace under the New Covenant.
- ◆ So using the simple everyday items of bread and wine, representing His selfless sacrifice on their behalf, Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper.
- ◆ And as the “cup of thanksgiving” signifies, the emphasis of the Lord’s Supper is not performed to placate an angry God, but to remind us of God’s love and faithfulness in His willingness to provide an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- ◆ It is God who performs the saving work, He is the one who provides the sacrificial lamb, He is the one who atones, He is the one who justifies, He is the one who forgives, He is the one who welcomes us back with open arms.

Our response should be twofold.

- ◆ First, to remember Jesus’ great saving work on our behalf. As Jesus said, ***“Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24-26).***
- ◆ To whom does the credit for salvation go? Jesus Christ.
- ◆ We bring nothing to the communion table that is why we come with empty hands.
- ◆ ***Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.***
- ◆ The Israelites, the Pharisees, and many other groups down through history have tried self-salvation through their own works.
- ◆ It didn’t work then, and it won’t work now. God intended it this way, ***“lest anyone should boast.”***

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 34 – THE NEW COVENANT]

- ◆ Salvation purely and simply is a gift of God through faith.
- ◆ From start to finish, this sacrifice is entirely an act of God's grace, an expression of His love for us.
- ◆ And secondarily, to be thankful for His saving work. That's why Paul calls it the "***the cup of thanksgiving***" (***1 Corinthians 10:16***).
- ◆ It is only fitting then that we raise up the name of the One who the Father Himself has exalted above every name for the sacrifice He was willing to shoulder in order to redeem mankind.
- ◆ ***Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,***
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.