

Easter 2012

- The Lord is Risen!
 - On the week of Passover each year, the Christian church celebrates the occasion of Christ's passion, death and three days later His resurrection
 - We take a Sunday to acknowledge the Lord's death and resurrection because it truly is the foundation of our faith
 - Without Christ's death, we have no hope of forgiveness for our sins
 - And without His resurrection, we have no reason to believe that His promises of eternal life can be trusted
 - But almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus, God in the form of Man, voluntarily placed Himself on a Roman cross reserved for criminals and traitors and permitted the Romans to crucify Him
 - Jesus Himself talk this truth to the disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection

[Luke 24:44](#) Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

[Luke 24:45](#) Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,
[Luke 24:46](#) and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

- Many of us remember this account from the reciting a confession of faith common to many churches
 - Jesus suffered, died and was buried...on the third day He rose again...
 - The storyline is simple and yet profound
 - God the Son voluntarily left His place of authority and honor to become man so that He could suffer and die in our place
 - The Just dying for the unjust
 - We call this propitiation: the sacrifice of Christ's life in place of ours

- All of us can marvel at God's mercy and grace, and we can accept the notion of propitiation without much question because it is simple
- But for some Christians, the concept of propitiation leaves a few unanswered questions
 - You've probably heard it said that there is no such thing as a dumb question, only dumb people who miss an opportunity to learn because they don't ask
 - This is exactly my philosophy...especially in the context of our faith and pursuing study of God's word
 - There are no wrong questions,
 - There are no topics that are off limit
 - There is no reason to hesitate in pursuing answers when our goal is grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ

A little girl asked her father, "How did the human race come about?" The father answered: "God made Adam and Eve and they had children and so all mankind was made." Two days later she asks her mother the same question. The mother answered: "Many years ago there were monkeys, and we developed from them." The confused girl returns to her father and says: "Dad, how is it possible that you told me that the human race was created by God and Mama says we developed from monkeys?"

The father answers: "Well dear, it is very simple. I told you about the origin of my side of the family, and your mother told you about hers."

- There are no dumb questions, but I didn't say there are no dumb answers!
- Today, we celebrate Christ's propitiation for us, so I wanted to explore two questions I frequently receive concerning the concept
 - First, how does propitiation actually work? How can Christ's life and death save us from God's wrath and from the penalty of Hell?
 - How can one man stand in the place for so many?
 - And if Christ is taking our place in death, why doesn't He have to spend eternity in Hell?
 - Those who die without having placed their faith in Christ's sacrifice will suffer eternal separation from God

- So if Christ died in our place, why did He spend only three days in Hell?
- We'll begin with the basic workings of propitiation
 - The Apostle John wrote in 1John 4:9-10

[1John 4:9](#) By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

[1John 4:10](#) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- God's love for His children is best seen in His willingness to send His Son to be a propitiation - a sacrifice in our place - because of our sins
 - All of us have sin, we all have been born with a nature that is sinful
 - I'm always amused by the debate over whether we are naturally good or bad
 - Are we born inherently good but then the world turns us bad?
 - Or are we - as the Bible says - born sinful and corrupt from the start, but by God's grace we can be made good
 - I'm amused because anyone who has ever raised a two-year old knows the answer to that question
- A simple way to understand the nature of sin is to remember that men are not sinners because we make a decision at some point in life to sin
 - On the contrary, we act in sin because we were born sinners with a sin nature
 - We begin life with a sin nature that is offensive to God and leads us to act in ways contrary to God's word
 - This is why the Bible says that we cannot hope to restore our relationship to a Holy and Just God on the basis of our good works
 - No amount of good works can correct our sin nature and make us right with God

- One of us may accomplish more good works than another
- But we're striving for an impossible result
- It's like two men throwing rocks at the north pole
 - One of them might throw farther than the other, but they both will fall way short of the mark
 - The small difference in performance makes no difference in the larger picture
 - God's standard for entrance into Heaven is perfection, a test we fail on the day of our birth
- That's why Paul says in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- Our sin nature leaves us permanently in debt and expecting only eternal judgment
 - As Paul tells us

[Eph. 2:1](#) And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, [Eph. 2:2](#) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

[Eph. 2:3](#) Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

- Paul says that the church used to be children of wrath by their very nature
 - This is the state of every person from the day we are born
 - We enter the world as creatures built on a genetic pattern, the pattern give to us by our parents
 - As the Lion King movie would say, some of us come from the shallow end of the gene pool
- Each us inherit who we are in the flesh from our parents, but the Bible tells us that we are also inheriting the a spiritual nature

- This spiritual nature is one that traces back to the first man, Adam
 - His sinful nature has been passed down as well
 - We can't escape it....but we can be rescued from it
- But Notice that Paul tells the Ephesian church that they formerly walked in this state of disobedience and wrath?
 - How did they escape God's wrath
 - In Eph 2, Paul goes further to say:

[Eph. 2:4](#) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [Eph. 2:5](#) even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

[Eph. 2:6](#) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

[Eph. 2:7](#) so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

[Eph. 2:8](#) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

[Eph. 2:9](#) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- While our good works cannot repair our separation from God, the Good News of Easter is that God made a way possible for us through Christ's death
 - By His grace, He saved us through our faith in that sacrifice
 - Our faith is that Christ's death in our place was an acceptable sacrifice on behalf of our sins and it pleased the Father
 - Christ bore the wrath of God in our place
 - And God credits those who believe with Christ's righteousness
 - And at the point of faith, God replaces our sin nature with a new nature
 - We are given the Spirit of God, which leaves us with a new nature that is pleasing to God

[Rom. 8:14](#) For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

[Rom. 8:15](#) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

[Rom. 8:16](#) The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, [Rom. 8:17](#) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

- But how can the death of one man accomplish so much for so many?
 - Paul explains that mystery in Romans 5

[Rom. 5:12](#) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned –

- Paul reminds us of a simple principle of life: we all die
 - The death rate for all human beings is 100%
 - And the Bible teaches that we all suffer the penalty of physical death because of the sin of one man, Adam
 - Adam's sin spread to all men, in the sense that we inherited his nature
 - And since we inherited his nature, we also inherited his penalty of death
 - Therefore, all around us we see the reality that one man's actions can condemn the entire human race
 - So Paul explains that the solution God offers through Christ works in a similar manner
 - Christ's sacrifice was a single act of righteousness that satisfied God's wrath for sin
 - And now God is willing to credit us with that payment

[Rom. 5:15](#) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

[Rom. 5:18](#) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

[Rom. 5:19](#) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

- The principle of propitiation in Scripture is based a spiritual exchange
 - Christ lived a sinless life because He wasn't born of Adam, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit
 - So He didn't inherit a sin nature
 - Having died sinless, His death was not payment for His own sin
 - Therefore, it could become a payment acceptable to the Father for others
 - Then by our faith, God assigns us credit for Christ's sinless life while assigning Christ the wrath we deserved

[Rom. 5:6](#) For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

[Rom. 5:7](#) For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

[Rom. 5:8](#) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- So we understand the great exchange of propitiation: Christ stood in my place receiving the wrath of God while I receive His righteousness credited to me
 - But if Jesus took my place in receiving God's wrath for sin, why did Jesus rise three days later and ascend to the Father in Heaven?
 - Shouldn't Jesus need to spend an eternity in Hell for my sin, since that's the penalty I would have paid?
 - The question itself makes a false assumption about the purpose of Hell
 - The question assumes that men spend eternity in Hell for the same reason convicts go to prison: to pay off a debt to society
 - This is a wrong assumption
 - Convicts may spend time in prison paying off a debt but that's not the purpose for Hell
 - Remember what we've learned about why our good works cannot save us
 - Good works don't erase our sin nature
 - And as long as our sin nature remains, we are under condemnation

- And so neither can suffering in Hell change our sin nature and leads to please the Father
 - The punishment of Hell is eternal because our nature remain eternally sinful
- So Christ didn't enter Hell to serve our time
 - His death on the cross was sufficient by itself to pay the price for our sin and set us free from any penalty
 - And the righteousness of His life was credited to us by faith and the deposit of His Spirit in us became our opportunity to please the Father
- So why did Christ spend anytime in the grave?
 - Because His mission included preaching to those spirits in Hell and escorting the OT saints who were held in Abraham's bosom awaited Christ's resurrection

[Eph. 4:8](#) Therefore it says,

I "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
 HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
 I AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

[Eph. 4:9](#) (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

[Eph. 4:10](#) He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- When Christ ascended into Heaven, He left behind gifts for men, the spiritual gifts given to believers
 - And he escorted a host of captives up to Heaven
 - The OT believers who died prior to Christ's sacrifice couldn't enter Heaven prior to Christ's sacrifice
 - So Luke 16 Jesus tells us they were kept in waiting in a place of comfort, called Abrahams' bosom
- Upon Christ's death and resurrection, He retrieved the OT saints and brought them into Heaven upon His ascension
- We who believe are assured of the same journey, to spend an eternity with Christ because He was our propitiation by grace, through faith