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CHRIST'S MISSION ON EARTH

By

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Why did God send His Eternal Son to earth 2,000 years ago? What was Christ's mission on earth? What impact does His mission centuries ago have on our lives today?

This study was written more than 20 years ago and posted on an early version of the *GraceLife* Blog.

An Angel Announced Christ's Mission

The angel of the Lord explained Christ's mission well when he spoke with Joseph, Mary's husband. "She shall give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Salvation from sin is a primary mission of Jesus. That's interesting in light of much of today's teaching and preaching in churches that sin is not a problem and salvation is not necessary. They apparently want us to believe the reason Jesus came to earth and died no longer has any meaning or purpose. [There are some preachers who teach that Jesus did not die. They say he just "fainted" and His disciples revived him later.] They either believe Christ's stated mission is no longer true for our modern society or the Bible didn't mean what it said. I'm amazed at how today's ministers and Bible teachers handle the inspired Word of God. In my opinion, they are playing fast and loose with Biblical truth and will have much to answer for when they face Christ in Heaven.

Christ Explains His Mission

Jesus explained His mission to the twelve apostles. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) If anyone had a right to be served, it was Jesus. He is God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. Millions of angels serve Him night and day. However, when Jesus came to earth, He came to serve others and give his life as a ransom for sinners. [The word "ransom" is *lutron*. It is a noun from *luo*, "to loose." *Lutron* is a ransom or a price paid for redeeming captives, loosing them from their bonds and setting them at liberty. In Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, it applies spiritually to the ransom Christ paid for delivering people from the bondage of sin and death. You can read Old Testament background on ransoms in Exodus 30:12, Leviticus 25:24 and 51, and Numbers 35:31-32.]

John Writes About Christ's Mission

John the Apostle wrote the Gospel of John. He also wrote 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and The Book of Revelation. In 1 John 4:9-10, he wrote: "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. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." That's mission! God the Father sent God the Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. [The words "atoning sacrifice" are from the Greek word *ilasmōn*. It means to propitiate, expiate. The sacrifice of Jesus is shedding His blood, both as the victim and the high priest. We'll get into a study of sacrifices later in this book, but you can do some quick reading of the following chapters to gain a background on the use of sacrifices in the Bible: Exodus 12 and 29, Leviticus 1-6, Numbers 28, Hebrews 9-11.]

Paul Writes About Christ's Mission

Paul also had a great deal to say about Christ's atoning sacrifice. In Romans 3:23-26, he wrote: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Several verses later, Paul wrote: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:9-11)

Notice how grace and justice are significant parts of Christ's mission. Let's go back to the Greek word for "atoning sacrifice" ["propitiation"] for a moment. *Ilasmon* is akin to the word for merciful (*ileos*). It is also part of the word for the mercy-seat (*ilasterion*). The mercy-seat was the lid or cover of the ark of the Covenant. The high priest sprinkled the blood of an expiatory victim on it on the Day of Atonement. The Lord promised to be present on it

and commune with His people on that day. What Paul did in Romans was apply the name to Jesus Christ. He assured us that Christ is the true mercy seat, the reality that the cover of the ark of the covenant typified. It means a place of conciliation. Jesus is the place where the sinner deposits his sin and He is the means of expiation. He is everything in salvation. He is the mercy. He is the justice. He is the sacrifice. Christ is our all in all!

Greek Insight To Christ's Mission

Here are some thoughts on the word from an expert in the Greek language, Dr. Spiros Zodhiates.

"What the Jews called the Kapporeth (Gr., *hilasterion*) was the principal part of the Holy of Holies. Later it was even termed as "the house of the Capporeth" [1 Chr. 28:11]. Philo calls the Capporeth "the symbol of the mercy of the power of God." The *hilasterion* of the OT referred to in Heb. 9:5 was actually the cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, in Eng. called the mercy seat. It was sprinkled with the blood of the victim slain on the annual Day of Atonement. We must point out, however, that the translation "mercy seat," symbolically referring to Jesus Christ, is an inadequate translation of the Gr. word which is rather equivalent to the Throne of Grace. The *hislasterion* means the propitiating thing or the propitiatory gift, that which causes God to deal with us mercifully. This is the connotation given by Paul to the word in Rom. 3:25. Here Paul depicts Christ as the lamb slain whose blood cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7). In heath religions the people who sacrificed or did anything to appease their god appeared to be or believed that they were manipulating him. In Christianity, however, it is never people who take the initiative or make the sacrifice, but God Himself who, out of His great love for sinners, provided the way by which

His wrath against sin might be averted. Jesus shed His blood and became the way to the Father for sinners.

The effect of Christ's work on the cross is the salvation of the sinner, who then becomes capable of fellowship with a holy God. In the OT, through the system of sacrifices, God taught the way by which a sinful man or woman might approach Him. Sin means death, which basically is separation from God. The sacrificial system was a way whereby God provided the means of approaching Him through escaping sin and its basic consequences. Through it another died in the sinner's place. This was never another man, but an animal. The individual Israelite was instructed to bring an animal for sacrifice whenever he approached God; the family was to kill and consume an animal at the yearly observance of the Passover; the nation was to be thus represented by the high priest annually on the Day of Atonement when the blood of the offering was sprinkled upon the mercy seat (*hilasterion*) on the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple. At the end of the Old dispensation, Jesus appeared as the offering that was to take away "the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In God's plan there was a progression: one sacrifice for one nation, one sacrifice for the world--Jesus Christ. The way to God's presence is now open to anyone who will come, a fact symbolized by the rending of the veil of the temple (which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple) at Christ's death. When we come to the Apostle Paul's use of the word *hilasterion* in Rom. 3:25 (where the word may be the adj. *hilasterios* instead of the neut. noun *hilasterion*), it is scarcely possible that he conceives of the Messiah as a "mercy seat" or "covering of the ark," sprinkled with blood--His own

blood. What the Apostle Paul refers to with the word *hilasterion* is the means of gaining the favor of God through Jesus Christ. There is a fundamental difference, however, between the illustration that he brings by referring to the Levitical sacrificial system of the OT and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the OT, it was the people who selected the animal to be sacrificed. However, in the NT, it is God the Father who provided ahead of time (*proetheto*, 2d aor. mid. indic. of *protithemi*, to place before or ahead of time) for the whole world what the sacrifice of the individual was for himself in contrast to that of the high priest of Israel.

God foreordained the Lord Jesus to become the Lamb whose slaying was predetermined before the world began (Rev. 13:8). That Paul does not refer to the actual physical covering by the use of the word *hilasterion* is indicated by the fact that he does not use the def. art. What he means, however, is that like the covering of the ark, the mercy seat in the OT having been sprinkled with the blood of the victim became the proof of sacrifice offered. Likewise, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood on the cross, we have the proof of the better sacrifice that God chose to make on behalf of all humanity. Furthermore, the sinner could benefit from that sacrifice, not through repeating it himself, but through faith. Believing and accepting the actual bodily sacrifice of Jesus Christ in shedding His blood is a spiritual exercise of man which is sufficient to satisfy the justice of God. In this passage it is called "constant righteousness" (*dikaiosune*), which is what God requires. since the punishment of sin is death, God permitted the sacrifice of Jesus, which removes the believer's sin. This is an

adherence to His own principle. The word *dikaiosune*, justice or righteousness, is used by Paul in Rom. 3:21, 22, 25, 26. In Rom. 3:24 the verb *dikaioo*, to justify, is used. What is stressed when speaking of Christ's being the means of our propitiation or the demonstration of God's mercy toward us is that this is done by means of Christ's sacrificial death, the shedding of His blood in contradistinction to the blood of animals. No priest had ever before sacrificed his own blood for the sins of his people. Jesus Christ is not only the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world, but He is also our High Priest whose sacrifice applies not only to Israel, but to the whole world. As the blood of the animals sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant is simply an illustration of what the sacrifice (blood) of Christ does when applied to believing sinners, so is also the phrase in Rom. 3:25, "for the remission of sins." However, the word here is not the word that is usually translated "remission" (*aphesis*, but the word *paresis*), forbearance or passing by, winking at. Some theologians believe that this indicates that the work of the OT sacrifices did not result in the removal of the sins of the people, but in causing God to be merciful enough to overlook or not take into account their sins. That is why the sacrifices needed to be repeated. These sacrifices provided *paresin*, forbearance or toleration by God, but the blood of Jesus Christ provides *aphesin*, forgiveness or actual deliverance from sin and the nature of sin. However, the word may have been used because of the relative inefficacy of the OT sacrifices. Their efficacy was only temporary and in comparison to the eternal efficaciousness of Christ's sacrifice, they seemed as ineffectual. On the other hand, God's passing over the sins of Israel did not involve the sin nature of man, but simply the concrete sins of the individual

indicated by the word *hamartemata*. The acceptance of the OT sacrifices in connection with the mercy seat demonstrated the forbearance of God as indicated by the word *anochē*, forbearance, tolerance, with which this verse closes. To put it succinctly, through the sacrifices of the OT we have the demonstration of God's toleration of sin; however, through the blood of Christ we have the demonstration of the love and justice of God in that He took the initiative to send His Son into the world to shed His blood. Thus God's justice demands that sin must be paid for by death involving the shedding of blood and the radical change of the individual in turning him from that sin, delivering him from it and thereby bringing him into fellowship with Himself (Rom. 5:1,2)." (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, World Bible Publishers, 1992)

Christ's Mission in the Old Testament

Jesus shared His unique mission with the people attending a Sabbath service at the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of His earthly ministry. "The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Luke 4:17-21) Read a little further to see how the townspeople responded to this teaching. It's typical of religious people when they hear something that doesn't fit their belief system.

Jesus had a mission to people who were poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed. His mission was to tell everyone how God was prepared to show mercy and favor on all who would obey His Word. Jesus made it clear during His time on earth that God had not sent Him to the religious, but the needy. Today's religious crowd can't deal with that kind of teaching, so they change the teaching rather than allow the teaching to change them. As Christ told His disciples, "For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Christ's Mission in the New Testament

Jesus came to earth with a mission to bring people to His Heavenly Father. He revealed this when He prayed in John 17:3-4: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." The work Jesus completed was the mission God the Father had given Him to do.

Here's one more insight into Christ's mission. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." (Galatians 4:4-7) We see here the beautiful arrangement the Trinity has in saving people from their sins. God the Father sent His Son to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons. God the Father and the Son sent God the Holy Spirit into our hearts to make us sons and heirs. It's a wonderful mission; one we will thank God for the rest of our lives!

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