

**Series: “The Wonder of the Cross” Good Friday, April 14, 2017 Pastor Dave Sattler**

**Texts: Mark 15:33-37; Romans 3:22-26; Hebrews 2:14-17, 1 John 2:2 & 4:9-10.**

**Title: “Propitiation: Where God & Humanity Meet” Sources:** NIV Life Application Bible; Strong’s Concordance; Commentaries: Alan Cole, Douglas Moo, Peter O’Brien, John Stott; Books: Andrew Purves & N.T. Wright & Walter Elwell. Sermons: Mark Peters & Mardi Dolfo-Smith.

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**<Slide> Review & Introduction:**

- Good morning, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- It’s been our intention the past few weeks to showcase for you the Wonder of the Cross.
- For Christ-followers, the cross symbolizes the great turning point in world history.
- When God redeemed us — bought humanity back. [MP, M26/17]
- As Pastor Mardi said last Sunday, Q: “Good Friday [or, Great Friday] is D-Day — the day Christ won the victory over Satan, evil, death, & all its powers.” [MDS, A8/17]
- With all that important stuff going on, it’s rather easy, this side of Easter, to take a triumphant view of the cross. And to feel with Harold St John, who once said,
  - Q: “The Cross of Christ means nothing until it takes your breath away!”
- **<Slide>** Still, we mustn’t miss the opaque nature of Good Friday. When Jesus cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!” , what is really going on there?
- I don’t think it’s a question.
- That He would suffer and die for humanity came as no surprise to Jesus; He knew all along what lay ahead. The OT foreshadowed it. Multiple times, Jesus spoke of His pending death — though precious few of His disciples seemed to get it. Or accept it.
- What darkness, what agony, what anguish is Jesus feeling in His heart right at that moment before He breathes His “last”? (Mk 15:34/37)
- Surely He feels the intense pain of abandonment, the vast weight of all the world’s sin.
- The Father turns away from Jesus. He has to. The gravity of sin always separates — pulls apart, alienates. And Jesus is there hanging on the cross. In isolation.
- Total physical, mental, spiritual breakdown. Alone.
- Perhaps this is why Jesus dies quicker than the average crucifixion victim.
- So, how do we approach the cross? What should we make of it?
- This icon of 1st Century Roman propaganda, meant to raise the hair on back of one’s neck in fear, is somehow turned upside-down into something earth-shatteringly good.
- Seems a paradox. And a mystery. And it is.
- **<Slide>** ILL - I grew up with a particular pseudo-understanding of the Cross.
  - Had some truth to it, but it was only a fraction of the big picture: that Golgotha was the place where God, angry at the human race because of sin, carried out our punishment on His innocent Son, Jesus. Who seemed, at least to my young mind, to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Poor guy, that Jesus.
  - I even had the verse memorized:
    - ❓ 1 John 2:2: “[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins.”
    - ❓ Before I could say, ‘Ron Sedelbauer, Dennis Vervegaert, Jack McIlhargey,’ names of some of my favourite Canucks in the 1970’s, I could pronounce, “propitiation!” And, I knew what it meant: God so mad at us that He killed His Son. Or, so I thought.
- **<READ>** PRAY: “Lord, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit. We’re hungry to hear from You.”

## **Text Outlines:**

### **1. <Slide> Our Merciful and Faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:14-17)**

- Let's begin with a look at Hebrews 2:14b-17:
- 14b ... [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might **make atonement for** the sins of the people.
- Propitiation means “to make atonement for” or “to turn aside God's wrath.”
- Difficult to get our heads around unless we understand a bit about the ancient world.
- Israel's sacrificial system, and that of its pagan counterparts, was predicated on this concept: “one turned away wrath from a deity with an offering of blood.” [Purves]
- Fellowship with the gods was restored through blood sacrifices.
- <Slide> You can read more about it in Exodus 25 or Leviticus 16.
- On the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur], the high priest on behalf of the people, would enter the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle [or later the Temple], where the ark of the covenant resided.
- To invite God to have mercy on their sin, blood from a bull was sprinkled on the cover or lid of the ark, made of gold, called the “mercy seat,” flanked by angels on either side.
- In Cf. Ex 25:22, God says, “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law [at the mercy seat], I will meet with you ...”
- Through the blood of this sin offering, the high priest cleansed the sanctuary and so prepared the place and the people to meet with God.
- The writer of Hebrews suggests this annual ritual was now superseded by the more perfect blood offering of Christ on the Cross, that now serves as the final atonement, the all-sufficient sacrifice — the propitiation for our sins.
- In effect, the cross is our new mercy seat, the wonderful place where God meets humanity.
- And thus, through Jesus, new access to God is made possible.
- For at the cross, Jesus is both the High Priest and the perfect blood offering Himself.
- <Slide> APP - This morning, perhaps stuck in your head is the idea that God is far off —
  - Distant, and impersonal. Or, God is angry and out to get you.
  - Or, disinterested — too busy [He's got a lot on the go] to care about your life.
  - But, truth is: we are never far from God's love. This is beautifully demonstrated through Jesus Who become human, to be with us — our merciful and faithful High Priest: to live, to die, to rise again — to extend forgiveness and the offer of loving relationship from God to all humanity!
  - This may be the greatest of all life-truths: the God of the Universe is entirely accessible. No matter where we go, or how deep a dark place we find ourselves in, we cannot flee from God and His love. And, no matter who we are, or what we've done, we're never exempt from God's mercy poured out in Jesus.
  - When we open our hearts, God always has room in His heart for us, to meet us right where we are.

### **2. <Slide> God's Justice (Romans 3:22b-26)**

- Next, we'll look at Romans 3:22b-26 ...
- 22b 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. 25 God presented Christ as **a sacrifice of atonement**, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.
- Justice is in the very character of God; it's in God's nature to be just.
- And so God presents His Son Jesus as a “sacrifice of atonement” — our propitiation, so that now, He may justify “those who have faith in Jesus.” (26) And we're released from sin's domination over us.
- How does this happen?
- God cannot tolerate sin. It has no part of Him. He cannot let sin go. Yet humanity could never satisfy its punishment. We can never measure up.
- So, God had a dilemma on His hands: His love runs deep, but God's holiness and justice prevent Him from sweeping our sin under the carpet. In God's economy the only worthy representative had to be human; and the only worthy blood had to be divine.
- **<Slide>** However, nowhere does the NT use the idea of the Father punishing His Son at the cross. That concept of propitiation, the one I grew up with — God exacting His anger on innocent Jesus by nailing Him to the cross — is a pagan idea.
- In the Christian Story, satisfying God's wrath is not about anger or rage, but justice.
- And, God's infinite benevolence.
- What happened on Good Friday is something spectacular, too staggering, so lofty I cannot fathom. That's what makes God's grace and mercy in Christ so appealing.
- It defies the best illustration I can give. But I'll try. It's one I've told before.
- **<Slide>** ILL - Going through my late father's tool box the other day I came across ...
  - His old ball peen hammer. Appropriate for Good Friday.
  - And tied to a memorable story from my childhood ...
  - It was the spring of 1985 ... I got a girlfriend, the weather was beautiful, and I had my driver's license about a month.
  - One of the first times I asked my father to borrow his car, he flashed the smile, the wink, & the nod and tossed me the keys. I felt all big and grown up.
  - **<Slide>** But that didn't last long.
  - Later that evening I found my way home in the cab of a tow-truck — my father's 1974 candy-apple red VW Beetle on the lift, a ticket from the RCMP in hand, and my pride trailing even further behind.
  - Thinking my parents were in bed, I tried sneaking up the stairs.
  - But, there was my father sitting in the chair in the dark, at the top.
  - He wheeled around, and justifiably upset, He declared these painful words,
    - ☐ Q: “We'll deal with this in the morning.”
  - I awoke the next day to the pound of a ball peen hammer. And when I staggered down to the carport, I saw a sight forever etched in my mind: greasy & sweaty, my father and his friend were pounding out the front quarter panels of the car I had smashed up the night before. With smiles on their faces.
  - Grace. Out of love, Dad did for me what I could never do for myself.

### 3. <Slide> The Father's Deep Love For Us.

- 1 John 4:9-10:
- 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** [the propitiation] for our sins.
- These are the precious words of the apostle John, a very old man at the time of writing.
- Keenly aware of the spiritual battle, John knows the “accuser” (cf. Rev 12:10-11) loves to saddle Christ-followers with false guilt — causing them to think ‘I’m not good enough,’ ‘I don’t deserve to be forgiven,’ or somehow make them feel the need to have to try and pay the price for their own sin.
- <Slide> APP - Lately I’ve had a number of conversations with friends ...
  - Both Christian and non, who find themselves feeling somewhat lifeless — living under a dark cloud of shame and guilt.
  - A wrong teaching, the damning words of an authority figure or loved one, or something they’ve done wrong, hidden in their deep dark past, has been crippling them. They’re stuck. And it’s hard for them to see Jesus or receive, by faith, all that He’s done for them.
- A spiritual father to many, John reminds his ‘children,’ who may be feeling unloveable, condemned, lost in their sin ...
- Q: ‘Look to Jesus. Your sins are covered. Walk in this hope,’ John reassures.
- God’s love is not the after-thought of a holy, angry deity. Far from it!
- The God of the Christian Story is not first holy, then loving; no, the Christian God is both perfectly holy and perfectly loving.
- When we gaze deep into the cross of Christ its core message is two-fold: 1) We see that we are all sinners in need of a Saviour. Jesus had to die for us. And, 2) We see that, in Jesus, the God of the Universe loves us more than we could ever imagine.
- God’s wrath is His holy response to sin. But, out of love, God took sin and all its effects on Himself. This is propitiation — where God and humanity meet.
- <Slide> I appreciate how N.T. Wright puts it, Q: “When God looks at sin, what he sees is what a violin maker would see if the player were to use his lovely creation as a tennis racquet. But here is the difference. In many expressions of pagan religion, the humans have to try to pacify the angry deity. But that’s not how it happens in Israel’s scriptures. The biblical promises of redemption have to do with God himself acting because of his unchanging, unshakeable love for his people.” - *The Day the Revolution Began*, p 132
- <Slide> APP - Here’s the point: the grand story of history is all about God’s undying love.
  - Those poignant words of Charitie Bancroft’s old Irish hymn still ring true:
    - ☐ Q: “Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea; a great High Priest, whose name is Love, who ever lives and pleads for me.
  - Despite our large-scale idolatry, unfaithfulness, and turning away, God remains absolutely faithful to His promises and is steadfastly committed to our rescue. So much so that God sacrificed His Son.
  - God’s driving force, history’s ‘Game-Changer’: He loves humanity.
  - And not just humanity, God loves me!
  - No one’s seen a love like this — not in a million universes!

- o Jesus: Love personified.
  - o He loves me so much He takes on Himself a punishment He did not deserve but only He could pay. For me. I deserved to be beaten and mocked.
  - o Really, my mocking voice could be heard Good Friday among the scoffers.
  - o As Martin Luther aptly put, Q: “I carry in my pockets the very nails that crucified Jesus.” It’s our sin that put Jesus there.
- And I am forever grateful that that friend of mine, JESUS, loves me that much.
  - Enough to go through something as terribly physically, mentally, and spiritually afflicting as that Cross. Just for me. Jesus does what I could never do for myself.
  - Forgiveness of sins. Beauty for shame. Hope for my hopelessness.
  - New life. I shall forever worship Him. Amen.

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### <Slide> Communion Reflection:

- I invite the Communion Servers to come now to take their places at the stations.
- In a moment you can come and take a piece of bread and dip it in the juice to remember Jesus’ work on the cross — becoming the propitiation for our sins to make it possible for us to have access — to commune with, to meet with the God of the Universe.
- The cross, in all its wonder, is where we meet God.
- And it reminds us who we are and just Who God is.
- God says today, like He says on that first Good Friday, Q; ‘There at the cross of my Son Jesus, I will meet you. If you come to me.’
- This is the call of Jesus. Q: ‘Come! Broken. As you are. You needn’t bring anything to try and impress me. I know you. I made you. I know all about you. And I love you more than you could ever imagine. The gap between sinful You and holy God has been cleansed by My precious blood,
  - o Q: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” (Cf. Is. 1:18)
- And Jesus beckons, Q: ‘Chin up, my friend. The Way is open. Just come.’