

# Session 4 • The Cross of Jesus

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Hello and welcome back to Session number 4 in our series of Knowing what you Believe. This time we're going to be talking about the cross of Jesus Christ, and this is a such an incredibly important subject for reasons that should be obvious to just about everybody.

If someone were to just come up to you randomly and ask you to explain what did Jesus really accomplish on the cross? You could simply say, well, forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. And you would be absolutely correct. And there's certainly nothing wrong with that answer. It's a good answer. It sums up the beauty and the majesty of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

However, as we get deeper into the writings of the New Testament, we find that the biblical authors used some very specific words that give us greater understanding of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

There are 4 particular words that I want to highlight in this session and those words are these:

- Propitiation
- Redemption
- Justification
- Reconciliation

Propitiation, Redemption, Justification, and Reconciliation.

I know those might sound at first like theological words, but they're actually in the New Testament text. And I'm going to show you the verses where those words are used and we're going to talk about what they mean.

And it is my hope and goal that when we're finished with this session, you're going to have a better understanding of the benefits of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Let's begin with the first word, and that is Propitiation.

## PROPTIATION

This word actually appears in 4 different passages in the Bible. We find it in Romans, Hebrews, and then 2 times in John the apostle's first epistle.

So let's start by asking the question. What exactly does that mean? I mean, I know that propitiation is not a word that you or I use on a regular basis. I can't remember the last time I used that word in conversation. It is truly a biblical word, but it's full of meaning, and it's important that we understand it.

## PROPITIATION

to appease or pacify by removing wrath

Propitiation means to, appease or to pacify by removing wrath. And the very first place this word appears in the New Testament is in Paul's letter to the Romans, and it goes like this:

### **Romans 3:23-25a (ESV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

Oh, there are 3 very important things that we see in this passage. First of all, we see that Jesus is the one whom God put forward as a propitiation.

### **Romans 3:23-25a (ESV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in **Christ Jesus, whom God put forward** as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

So that means that the emphasis, the motivation, and the effort to take away the wrath of God was put there by God Himself. It was He who initiated the desire and the impetus to turn aside His own wrath. It says here that God put Him “*forward as a propitiation...*”

And here's the next thing We notice. It was “*by his blood,...*”

**Romans 3:23-25a (ESV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation **by his blood**, to be received by faith.*

Remember this, when the Bible speaks of the blood of Jesus, most of the time it's referring to His life, because the life of a being; an animal, a person, a human, is in the blood. We see this in the Old Testament.

So when the Bible says that God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood, it means by His life. In other words, by giving His life, by sacrificing His life, the wrath of God was turned aside on our behalf.

And then the last thing that this passage emphasizes is how this all becomes active in the life of an individual. And it's those last few words: *“to be received by faith.”*

**Romans 3:23-25a (ESV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, **to be received by faith**.*

So the wrath of God is turned aside in the lives of those who receive Jesus and what He did on the cross by faith.

Alright, the next occurrence of the word, propitiation, takes place in the Book of Hebrews. Here it is. Chapter 2, verse 17 says,

**Hebrews 2:17 (ESV)**

*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, (and here it is) to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

And you'll notice there that the author of Hebrews likens the work of Jesus to the Jewish high priest who would go in on behalf of the people, into the Holy of Holies, with the blood of the sacrifice, so that there might be forgiveness of sins.

Now, we are being told that Jesus, in that same way, took His own blood and made propitiation. In other words, by His life, turned aside, the wrath of God. The wrath of God has been expunged, if you will. It has been resolved as it relates to the sin that we committed, that stirred up the wrath of God. It's such a beautiful picture.

And then the final 2 verses where the word, propitiation appears are in John's first letter. Let's look at the first one from 1 John, chapter 2. John writes,

**1 John 2:1-2 (ESV)**

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (and then, look at this) He is the propitiation for our sins, (in other words, He's the one who turns aside the wrath of God) and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

So John reminds us in this passage, and it is such a powerful passage, that when we do sin and we do sin, we need not fear. We need not be afraid of the wrath of God because Jesus has removed that wrath by offering Himself in our place.

I get emails from people quite often who will relate to me some kind of moral failure in their life; some act of sin for which they feel very guilty and very regretful. And they will sometimes say to me: am I being punished because of this act of sin? And what they're really asking, is God pouring out His wrath upon me for this act of sin?

Well, John is telling us in this first passage that we've looked at here in the first epistle of John, that when we do sin, we have this constant advocate with the Father. He names Him, "*Jesus Christ the righteous.*"

**1 John 2:1-2 (ESV)**

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

And then he goes on to say He has removed the wrath of God. And he says that in relationship to sin; sin by believers. People who have accepted Jesus Christ but still fail from time to time. He's reminding you and me, the wrath of God has been removed. You don't need to fear that anymore.

And so we're told elsewhere, if you sin, you go to the Father in confession and repentance, and you know that you are forgiven. And what a beautiful relationship that creates for you and me with the Father, because we don't walk in an attitude of fear. Afraid that a sword is going to just fall out of the sky and smite us because of our sin. We're not afraid of that.

Now, that doesn't mean God doesn't discipline those whom He loves, but discipline and punishment, our two very different things. The Bible does say that God disciplines those whom He loves, but the wrath of God has been expunged. (Hebrews 12:6)

Let's look at the next passage from 1 John. It's in the fourth chapter, and it goes like this:

#### **1 John 4:10 (ESV)**

*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

In other words, the one who took away the wrath of God. But what I want you to really notice about this passage in 1 John is that the motive, the intention of God sending His Son to turn aside His own wrath is love.

That's why the passage begins by saying, “*In this is love*” that God sent His Son to turn aside wrath on our behalf. What an incredible expression of love.

Well, in each of these passages, you can see that Jesus is the One who turns aside the wrath of God for you and me. Here's the question that we should be asking.

#### **WHY IS PROPITIATION EVEN NECESSARY?**

Why is propitiation even necessary?

Well, let me show you a quote from one of my favorite authors, John Stott. He writes this:

“The wrath of God...is His steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.” - John R.W. Stott

“The wrath of God...is His steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.” - John R.W. Stott

So wrath is God's natural response to the sin of mankind. And yet that wrath has now been turned aside, propitiated, removed, satisfied by the work that Jesus has accomplished for you and me on the cross.

Let's go ahead and look at the next benefit of the cross of Jesus. And it is summed up powerfully in the very next word that we're looking at, which is Redemption.

## REDEMPTION

The word comes from the ancient Greek marketplace, and it's found in several places in New Testament writings.

As we look at these various passages here about redemption, I want you to take note of the extraordinary blessings that come our way as a result of the redemption that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

And the first benefit is expressed in this passage from Luke's Gospel. Chapter 21, verse 28 says:

### **Luke 21:28 (ESV)**

*Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

*Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, (in other words, look up) because your redemption is drawing near.”*

The Greek word that is translated, redemption here, means a release affected by payment.

## REDEMPTION

a release effected by payment

In other words, if someone wanted to purchase something and they said, I will want to buy what you have right there. The owner of that thing would say, fine, I will release it to you once you've made payment. And so the first person who wants to purchase whatever that is, makes the payment. And that affects the release of that item into the hands of a new owner. All right, so that's the basic idea of what this word, redemption means.

So Jesus says, when all of these things begin to take place, look up. That means your redemption is drawing near. So He's telling us that something powerful is going to come to fruition. And even though Jesus accomplished our redemption on the cross, we have not received the full benefit of that redemption yet. It is going to be given to us when Jesus returns. At this point, we've only received a down payment.

But here's what's interesting, the Greek meaning of the word redemption as it's used here in Luke Chapter 21 actually carries a further sort of an inference, and it's the idea of not just a payment being made, but in this case, a payment by ransom. Isn't that interesting?

And of course that just makes total sense when you read these words, spoken by our Lord Jesus.

**Mark 10:45 (ESV)**

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

So isn't that fascinating? The idea of paying a ransom is bound up in the meaning of this single Greek word. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he uses the word redemption this way.

**Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV)**

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

And you'll notice that at the very end of that passage, the apostle Paul cites this blessing of our redemption, and it's forgiveness. "...the forgiveness of sins."

**Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV)**

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

And then let's take a look at the next occurrence in Romans where it says:

**Romans 3:23-24 (ESV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

Wow, I mean, talk about a blessing. We "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption..."

**Romans 3:23-24 (ESV)**

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

Okay. We have 2 words remaining here that we're going to look at. They're going to speak to us about the benefits that we receive through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The next one is, Justification.

**JUSTIFICATION**

And this was a favorite word of the apostle Paul. He cites it quite a bit, and in the Book of Romans, especially. Let me show you. From Romans chapter 4. Paul wrote:

**Romans 4:24-25 (ESV)**

*...Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*



*...Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Okay, so this is an important word in the New Testament, but what does it mean? What's the definition of justification?

## JUSTIFICATION

to acquit

Well, it means essentially to acquit, and I think we all know what that means, and is the act of pronouncing someone not guilty. And that is what we have through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross because He bore your guilt. Now because you've put your faith in Him, God declares you not guilty.

Let's look at Romans chapter 5.

### **Romans 5:16 (ESV)**

*And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.*

*And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.*

You'll notice here that he's kind of juxtaposing this justification that we have through Jesus with condemnation that we have through the one man sin. And he is referring to Adam there. And so he's basically saying that through the sin of Adam, we received condemnation, but through the sacrifice of Jesus, we now have justification, or if you will, acquittal. Acquittal of guilt.

And finally, Romans chapter 3, where it says:

### **Romans 3:28 (ESV)**

*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

You see here the word justified is being used to describe how someone has right standing now with God. And so Paul is reminding us in this passage that our

right standing with God has nothing to do with keeping the law, which is his way of saying nothing to do with effort or moral goodness on your part.

Here's the cool thing. You and I have this beautiful relationship with God where we are in right standing with Him. We're not opposed to Him. He is for us. There is a good relationship now between us and our Heavenly Father that was given to us as a gift, not something we earned, but something that was imputed.

It is the beauty of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, that we now stand justified, again, in right standing with the Father.

Okay, now we come to the final New Testament word that we're going to be looking at as we look at these benefits of the work of Jesus on the cross. And the final word is reconciliation.

## RECONCILIATION

I think most of us know what reconciliation means. Paul wrote this in the Book of Romans.

### **Romans 5:11 (ESV)**

*More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

*More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

I talked about this in the last word that we looked at, how our relationship with God is now good. This is where it begins to really take shape because reconciliation, as you know, means the restoration of a positive and affectionate relationship.

## RECONCILIATION

the restoration of a positive and affectionate relationship

Whereas we were estranged before, now we've been reconciled. And of course this was necessary because our sin caused the breach between us and God. This is actually talked about in the Old Testament, in the Book of Isaiah. It says:

**Isaiah 59:2 (ESV)**

*...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

*...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

Well, this was mankind's condition before faith and now things have radically changed. Here's how the apostle Paul explains it in Colossians chapter 2.

**Colossians 1:21-22 (ESV)**

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, (and notice here the benefit) in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

Wow! Those are things that we don't often think about on a day-to-day basis, and that is how we are seen in God's sight, but Paul explains it here.

**Colossians 1:21-22 (ESV)**

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you **holy** and **blameless** and **above reproach** before him,*

He says that in God's sight, because of what Jesus did and because we've put our faith in what He did, He now sees us as “*holy...blameless and above reproach...*” That is how the Father sees you. And I want you to take those words very seriously.

If you're one of those people, and I've talked to a lot of them who really struggle with yourself image. And especially believing yourself, perhaps unworthy of God's love, I want you to consider memorizing this passage from Colossians chapter 1, verses 21 and 22. Because this really needs to get into your heart that God sees you as holy. He sees you as blameless. He sees you as above reproach in His sight.

Not because of anything you've done, not because you've been sinless, or made good decisions, or always had a great attitude, nothing to do with those things, but because of what Jesus did on the cross on your behalf.

The last thing we want to mention here as it relates to reconciliation is the ministry of reconciliation that has now been passed along to all of us. Let me show you this from 2 Corinthians. Paul writes:

**2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (ESV)**

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Wow, this is such a great reminder. We forget sometimes that the reason that people in the world, and I'm talking about people who are lost now. The reason they are so uncomfortable with you and with the Gospel message that you bring, when you start talking about Jesus, when you start talking about death, when you start talking about heaven, the reason they're uncomfortable with that is because they haven't been reconciled to God.

That difficulty, that uncomfortable aspect of their relationship to God has not been resolved. It hasn't been reconciled, and so they're sensing. I truly believe that unbelievers can sense that estrangement. They can sense that distance between themselves and God, and it makes them uncomfortable.

And so we come along all happy go lucky talking about Jesus. Hey, do you know Jesus? Can I tell you about Jesus? And we wonder sometimes why people say, listen I don't want to hear about it. Just don't talk to me about this stuff.

Well, the reason they're uncomfortable is because reconciliation for them has not been activated by faith. And so all of the issues, the hostility, the distance, it's still there, and they don't want to think about it.

But what we see in this passage is that we have been given this ministry, literally this message of reconciliation, to go to people and say, do you feel

distant from God? Do you feel like there's an edge, a hostility? If you find yourself in a church, do you feel completely and totally out of place?

Well, we can explain that, that's because sin has caused that distance to take place between God and mankind. But we have the precious privilege to share with people that through Jesus Christ, that distance, that estrangement, that hostility can be done away with if they would come to Jesus, confess their sins, and turn to Him as Savior. It's such a beautiful thing.

And that's what happens when people accept their lost condition and come to Jesus and receive what He accomplished through His sacrifice on the cross.

Well, next time we're going to be looking at The Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Until then, God bless you.