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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

One All-Sufficient Sacrifice



Atonement
By Derek Prince

Our theme in these sessions will be the atonement. Now, atonement is a word that's comparatively rare in contemporary English. And I question whether even many English people know what it actually means. So I want to begin by just writing up on the board the meaning of atonement. It's a very illuminating word. You see what that says? At one-ment. And that's the meaning of atonement. It's God and the sinner being brought to a relationship in which they are at one. It's a very, very vivid word.

I would say probably in English the normal word to describe that would be reconciliation, which is probably also the word that's used in at least most European languages.

There's a great difference between the word that's translated atonement in the Old Testament and the word that's translated atonement in the New. It's very important to understand that. Probably a good many of you are familiar with the fact that the Jewish people still celebrate today, or they've celebrated for more than 3,000 years, the Day of Atonement. How many of you know what it's called? Yom Kippur. You're familiar with that word? Kippur. Yom is day, kippur is kippur. And the essential meaning of that is to cover. So, in the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement which was the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar was a day of covering. Its sacrifices did not deal with the sin issue, they simply covered sin for one more year. And the next year on the Day of Atonement they had to deal with the sin issue again.

The New Testament's atonement is totally different. Let's look at two passages in Hebrews. Hebrews 10:3–4, speaking of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the writer says:

> "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year."

So far from taking sin away, from dealing with it, it reminded the people of the sin issue. And then he continues:

> "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."

The central issue is taking away sins.

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Now, in Hebrews 9:26 the writer speaks about what was accomplished by the death of Jesus. And this is in direct contrast to the Old Testament sacrifices. Hebrews 9:26, and we'll only read the second half of the verse, speaking of Jesus:

> "...but now once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

So when Jesus came and offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross, He put away sin. So there's a total difference between the Old Testament sacrifices which merely reminded people of the fact that the sin issue had not been dealt with, and provided a covering that was valid only for one year; and the New Testament sacrifice of Jesus which put away sin.

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus in John 1:29, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who," how many of you know, "who takes away the sin of the world." That's completely different from the Old Testament. Jesus took away sin. For that reason, after His death for those who have accepted His sacrifice, there is no further sacrifice for sins.

Before I became a preacher, and that was a long while ago now, I was a professor of philosophy at Cambridge in England. And then I began to study the Bible merely as a philosopher. I thought it was my philosophic duty to study the Bible. I didn't believe it but I thought I at least ought to know what I'm talking about. And in studying the Bible I met the Lord in a very dramatic, powerful and personal way. So that from that time until this time there are two things I've never doubted. First of all, that Jesus is alive. Second, that the Bible is true. I have never doubted that.

But, when I came to appreciate the Bible, I came to understand that it offers things that are not offered in any other work of human wisdom or literature anywhere. And it gives us two vitally important things: the diagnosis of the human problem and then the cure. You see, normally speaking, if a doctor can't diagnose a condition he cannot provide a cure. The diagnosis of the human problem is given by the scripture in one very short word of three letters. How many of you know what it is? Sin, that's right. Now, as I understand it, from my perspective, there is no book in the world, unless it derives from the Bible, that diagnoses the problem of sin. It is unique to the Bible. If we had nothing else from the Bible we should be eternally grateful for the diagnosis.

But thank God the Bible not merely provides us with the diagnosis, it also provides us with the remedy. And the remedy for sin is atonement. So we're looking in these sessions at the basic problem of humanity—and let's not be too general—the basic problem of every one of you and me, whether you recognize it or not. You can call it by a lot of different names. There's a lot of different so-called sciences in the world today that offer us lots of very complicated fancy names. But the root problem still remains the same: sin. And a person really is not able to deal with his life's problems until he's faced the reality of the root problem which is sin.

Thank God that the Bible not merely diagnoses our sin but it also provides God's perfect remedy for sin. The remedy is the cross, the atonement. When I speak about the cross I need to explain briefly I'm not talking about a piece of metal or wood that people hang around their necks or put up on the wall of a church. I've nothing against those but that's not what I'm talking about. And it's important to understand this right at the beginning. When I'm talking about the cross I'm talking about a sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf on the cross. The cross is a sacrifice. I think the majority of Christians probably have never realized to the full that what took place on the cross was a sacrifice. I'd like to look at about three scriptures in Hebrews, all of which bring this out. You'll notice that at the moment we're looking rather frequently at Hebrews because Hebrews is really the book that deals with Jesus as our high priest and with the sacrifice that He made on our behalf. Hebrews 7:27, speaking about Jesus and comparing Him, contrasting Him with the priests of the Old Testament, he says:

> "He does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself."

The word offer is the word for what a priest does when he makes a sacrifice. So, on the cross Jesus offered up Himself. That is to say He was the priest and He was the sacrifice. As priest He offered the sacrifice but He was also the sacrifice, the victim. He offered Himself. There was only one priest that was good enough to make that offering and there was only one offering that would be acceptable to God. And Jesus was the priest and the offering.

And then in Hebrews 9:14. Again, this is in direct contrast with the Old Testament. We'll read verse 13 as well.

> "For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Notice in the middle of that verse it says Jesus offered Himself without spot to God through the eternal Spirit. Actually, in every major phase of redemption every person of the Godhead was directly involved. It's worthwhile to consider that for a moment. At the conception of Jesus, at His incarnation, the Father incarnated the Son by the Spirit. When the ministry of Jesus began, Peter says in Acts 10:38:

> "God anointed Jesus with the Spirit."

When it came to the sacrifice, Jesus offered Himself to the Father through the Spirit. When it comes to the resurrection, God the Father resurrected the Son by the Spirit. And when it comes to Pentecost, the Son received from the Father the Spirit and poured out the Spirit on His disciples. It's as if, if I could say this reverently, each person of the Godhead is jealous not to be left out in the redemption of humanity.

And so here we have the statement concerning the cross, Jesus offered Himself as priest and victim to the Father without spot, without blemish, He was totally pure. He was the only acceptable offering because He was the only one without sin. And it says through the eternal Spirit. For me with my philosophic background, that's a very meaningful phrase. The first time I went to a meeting where I heard the gospel, at the end they made what they call the appeal. I'd never been in a place where anybody did that and it embarrassed me. They said if you want this thing, whatever it was they were talking about, I had no idea, put your hand up. Well, I thought how undignified to be asked to put my hand up in front of the church. I sat there weighing this thing in my mind and a miracle took place. I saw my own right arm go right up and I knew I had not raised it! Talk about emotionalism, I was frightened. Well, nothing further happened in that service but this strange jargon that they used, they said that there's going to be revival in the Assemblies of God on Tuesday night. Well, I didn't know what a revival was, never heard of the Assemblies of God but I thought I'm into this thing, let's see what happens. So on Tuesday night I went to the next meeting and the man preached on Enoch was not because the Lord took him. And he gave a very vivid description of Enoch's disappearance and how they sent for the tracking dogs and they followed the scent so far and then there was no more scent so they concluded he'd gone up. Well, from my logical background I could say that's logic at least.

Then they came to the close and I knew what was going to happen. Every head bowed, every eye closed, if you want this, put your hand up. Well, I thought to myself the last time somebody else put my hand up for me but I couldn't expect that to happen twice, I'll do it myself. So I put my hand up. After the sermon was over the preacher came and looked at me and I looked at him. I think he thought he had a problem on his hands. So he asked me two questions which I've never forgotten. The first one was, "Do you believe that you're a sinner?" Well, I had specialized in definitions so I quickly ran over in my mind all the obvious definitions of sinner. Every one of them fitted me exactly! So I had no problem, I said, "Yes, I believe I'm a sinner." Then he said, "Do you believe that Christ died for your sins?" I remember clearly what I said, I said, "To tell you the truth, I can't see how the death of Jesus Christ 19 centuries ago could have anything to do with the sins I've committed in my lifetime." And I really couldn't. It was a problem. Well, I think he was wise, he didn't argue with me because I was used to arguing and I could have out-argued him anytime. I suppose those dear people prayed for me.

But you see, here's the answer. It was through the eternal Spirit that Jesus offered Himself. The word eternal means out of time. What happened on the cross was a fact of history but its significance transcended time. And in that sacrifice Jesus comprehended the sins of all people of all ages: past, present and future. You see, the human mind can hardly comprehend and take in all that was involved through that one sacrifice of Jesus. But your sin and my sin and the sins of people not yet born all came upon Him through the eternal Spirit. He comprehended the entire sin of the whole human race upon Himself.

It's extremely important that we understand this and that we give it its proper place in our thinking as Christians. About three years ago I was with a Christian friend, a coworker, in Singapore. We were just having a casual conversation and he made this remark. He said the church has got so many items in its shop window that the cross is no longer noticed. And that really struck me immediately. Today you go into a Christian bookstore and you can get a book on anything. How to be a good wife, a good husband, how to cook, how to keep house, how to understand your own mentality. I mean, there is no limit. But none of those things work

without the cross. The cross is the only source of grace and power to make all the other good advice work.

How true that is about marriage. There's countless books on how to make a marriage work. I've written two myself. And thank God mine works. I'll tell you, when you read a book about how to make something work, find out if the person makes it work before you read the book. Because a lot of psychiatrists and psychologists who have been divorced two or three times are telling us how to make a marriage work.

What I'm trying to say is it's time that the church put the cross back in the center and not obscure it. God told the Israelites when they went into the Promised Land that when they built an altar they were not to put anything around it. They were not to put bushes or trees or decorations. It was to stand there stark, unobscured. And that's a lesson for us. We are not to surround the cross with anything, we're not to put anything on the cross or in front of the cross which would in any way obscure it. And the cross, in a way, is something very stark, as we'll be seeing as we continue with these lessons. In a way, it's a horrible scene. I don't believe any human artist has ever adequately depicted what took place when Jesus died on the cross. I don't believe that people would stand the sight. But it's the center. It's unique to the Christian religion. No other religious teaching, neither Islam nor Buddhism, nor any of the countless cults, have anything that corresponds to the cross.

Furthermore, the cross anchors Christian faith to history. Mohammed wrote his revelation in a cave. It's not tied to any particular situation or series of events. Philosophers speculate in the abstract. But the message of the cross relates to a specific incident in human history. And it either happened or it didn't happen. There's no third possibility. It's either true or it's false. If it's true it's the most important thing in human history.

When I became confronted with this and I realized that Jesus was alive in the 20th century, I said to myself the fact that a man died and rose from the dead and is still alive today is the most important single fact in human history. There is nothing else that can be compared with it.

What I'm saying is if we don't give the cross its rightful place, our faith loses its meaning and its power. And what we end up with is just a nice set of generalities or Christian ethic which is impossible for us to keep. No one will ever keep the sermon on the mount without the power of the cross in his life.

I have been praying for some years that God would restore or would enable the church to restore the cross to its rightful place. I believe the fact that I am teaching these classes is part of the answer to that prayer. I didn't choose this theme, it was requested of me.

Let's look for a moment in 1 Corinthians 1:25. Paul has said we preach Christ crucified. Let me ask you if you're a preacher or a teacher or a counselor, do you do that? Do you teach Christ crucified? If you don't, your counseling will sound nice but it will accomplish nothing in the long run. Because, the only source of power is the cross.

And then Paul says in verse 25 of 1 Corinthians 1:

> "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

The cross is the foolishness of God and the weakness of God. What could be more foolish than for God to permit His Son to be crucified by sinners? What could be weaker than the spectacle of a man hung up on a cross with his body lacerated and bleeding and dying in agony? But, Paul says, the weakness of God is stronger than men. The foolishness of God is wiser than men. The real source of strength and wisdom for the Christian is in the cross. And without the cross we can have a lot of good morality, a lot of good intentions, a lot of nice sermons; but we will have no results that are really significant.

Let's look to Hebrews 10:14 as we come to the end of this session.

> "For by one sacrifice He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

Notice again it's a sacrifice. Only once was it ever done, it never had to be repeated. And, it has perfected forever as far as what God had to do and Jesus had to do, it is perfect, complete forever. Nothing can ever be taken from it, nothing can ever be added to it. It's perfect forever.

But, the second part of the verse is in a different tense. In English we talk about the perfect tense and we talk about the continuing present tense. The second part is in the continuing present. Those who are being sanctified. What God has done is complete, perfect, final, never will it have to be changed or modified or added to. But our appropriation of it is progressive. It's very important to see that. Especially as I'm going to be teaching you the perfection of the work. You can sit there and say I don't

have it. To tell you the truth, none of us has it. I've studied and taught on this theme for more than 40 years. I'm still being sanctified. But notice it's for those who are being sanctified. It's for those who are coming progressively closer to God, receiving more and more of God into their being, getting further and further separated from sin and the world. It's for them that the revelation of the cross works.

Now I just want to explain as we close this session my program which God, I trust, will help me to carry out. In the continuing sessions I want to deal with three successive scenes. First of all, what the cross did for us. Second, what the cross must do in us, which is a very neglected theme today. And third, practically, how to appropriate what God has already done. Let me just say that once more. What the cross did for us, what the cross has to do in us, and finally, how to appropriate what God has done.

Sermon
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