

The Propitiation for Our Sins

Hebrews 2:17-18

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, May 29, 2022

Well, this morning, if you want to open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, we're continuing our study of a book that's been called the companion to the book of Romans because it covers the same theme, but from a different angle, because whereas Romans talks about the necessity of the Christian faith, Hebrews talks about the superiority of it. And whereas Romans says, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Hebrews tells you that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. That's the idea of this book. And therefore you don't need to go back to the old covenant anymore. It's just not necessary, because this is all you need. The idea in this book is that the law is good, but God's grace is better. And the word of Moses is wonderful. It's amazing, but the words of Christ are miles above it. In fact, I've told you before that the word "better" appears 13 times in this book, in order to show you that we have a better hope, a better covenant, a better testament, better promises better sacrifices, a better country and a better city than anything we ever had before in the Old Covenant. And the word great appears seven times to show you that in Christ, you have a greater salvation, a greater high priest, a greater tabernacle, a greater reward, a greater cloud of witnesses and a greater shepherd because Jesus is just greater, greater, greater than anything we've ever seen before.

And to show you that in our passage this morning, if you would, read Hebrews two starting in verse 10 with me. It says these words,

For it was fitting for Him for who, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise." And again, "I will put my trust in Him. And again, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given me."

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death, He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subjected to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

We'll stop the reading there. But as you look at that, you can see that Jesus is the focus of this passage. And He's the one that the author is talking about. Because verse 10 says, "For it was fitting for God to perfect the author of salvation through suffering." And that's a reference to Christ. God prepared Jesus to be our Saviour through pain is the idea there. Why? So He could sanctify us in verse 11, bringing many sons to glory in verse 12, render the devil powerless in verse 14, and finally make propitiation for our sins in verse 17, which means that He could satisfy the wrath of God toward our disobedience.

And just to say a few words about that, when you think of all the things we've studied so far in our series, in this book, it might be safe to say that the wrath of God may be one of the most interesting ones. Because it's seldom ever talked about today, except for in conservative circles. Just like it was with the devil, and the doctrine of demonology that we talked about last week, you just don't hear about God's wrath much. Because everyone wants to talk about His love nowadays, not His wrath, and then they want to talk about His grace, but not His justice because they see God as a sweet old person who would never hurt a fly. There was actually a book written recently that was published on the subject in which it pictured God as a grandmother, who stayed home in the kitchen, made cookies all day and called everyone sugar. It'll be okay, sugar. It sounds better in my southern accent, but I'm not going to do that. You don't have to worry about it sugar, there's no reason to be upset sugar. That book went on to sell a million copies and was made into a major motion picture. Because that's the modern-day notion of God. We look at Him as a grandmother who wouldn't hurt a soul.

One reason we think that way is because we develop such a low view of holiness today. We don't think God should ever get mad at us. We've not done anything wrong. We're just perfect little angels. And another reason we think that way is because anytime you mention the wrath of God, it brings some people back to the legalistic churches they came from where everything was about hellfire and brimstone all the time. And they don't like that; it's not the right way to preach, so they shun it. But having said that, I want to point out that you do need to talk about hellfire and brimstone sometimes, and you do need to talk about His wrath because the gospel doesn't make sense without it. Without that, what did Jesus die for? So we have to be crystal clear on this point.

Psalm seven, verse 11. It says, "God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day." And that's a fascinating verse because it says, not only does God feel indignation, but He feels it every day. And not only is He upset with sin, but He's upset every moment. Why? Because we sin every moment. That's why He feels that way, because we fail Him every day. He set His law, we broke it. He set His law, we broke it. He set the law, we broke it. Romans two verse five says that because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you're storing up wrath for yourself on the day of the wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. And that's a powerful reminder as well, because the idea is that not only do the last people make God angry, but they store up His wrath as they do so. And the idea there is that as they sin and sin and sin. God's wrath grows and grows and grows, until it hangs over their head like a net waiting to drop the moment they die. One Puritan describe it as a spider's web waiting to break if they don't turn to Christ. And it might help to say a little more about this, because we're going to be talking a lot about Christ today. So it would be good to get His thoughts on the matter of wrath, because when you open up the Scripture, you find Jesus said more about the wrath of God than anybody in the New Testament. Isn't that interesting? The one who came to die for it talked about it more than any other figure. And one of the times He did so was found in Luke 16. So if you would, keep your finger in Hebrews, and turn back with me to Luke 16. I just want to show you a couple of these to set a flavor for what we're going to talk about today. But Luke 16, is known as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

It is a very interesting story from Jesus because He calls one of the people by name. Because of that, some scholars don't think it was a parable. They think it was actually a story because there's no other parable that does this. I'm not really sure about one way or the other with it, because it doesn't tell us, but if you look in Luke 16, verse 19, it says this about this account. It says,

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed

with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming in licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, "Father, Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame."

Now, there's a lot that can be said about that. But it does tell you quite a bit about the rich man's heart that he's in hell. And he's looking up asking Lazarus to come help him from heaven. He's a pretty hard hearted guy, but the gist of the story is clear, and that is that there are two men here who live two different lives, so that when they die, they go to two different places. One goes to heaven or Abraham's bosom, while the other one goes to Hades or hell. And not only does he go to hell, but he stays in hell. And not only does he suffer there, but he keeps suffering and suffering and suffering and suffering, because God's wrath is never satisfied on him. Verse 26, actually says that a great chasm had formed between him and Lazarus. The word *chasm* means that a large Gulf or an open space that can't be crossed, because when you die without Christ, this is what happens to you, you're judged and the judgment doesn't stop. And when you pass away without the Lord, this is what you experience, you're punished, and the punishment just keeps going. In fact, the chilling thing about this story is that Jesus doesn't say much about heaven in here. It doesn't give you as much description about the place where Lazarus goes, because that's not the focus, the focus is on hell to remind you that whatever you do, you want to avoid that place. Stay away from it. It's so bad that the rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back in order to warn his brothers not to go there. And if you look in verse 31, this is how the power of the story ends. It says, "But Abraham said to him, 'If they do not listen, if your brothers don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" In other words, the human heart is so wicked, that even if you show them a miracle, and give them a resurrection to warn them about hell, they won't believe it, they'll only laugh at you. Because they'll say hell is not that bad. It's a place where I'm going to party with my friends. We're going to scoop coal and laugh about it. The point of the story is that no, you're not. Hell is a very terrible place.

And it brings us to another parable where Jesus talks about this, if you want to turn over to Matthew 25. Again, we're talking about the one who died for the wrath of God. So it's very important to see what he thought about the wrath of God. You can find this in the parable of the sheep and the goats. In Matthew 25, it's a very interesting portion of Scripture because it comes after the Olivet Discourse where Jesus talks about the end of the world. He tells you what will happen when He returns to set up His kingdom. And here's what will take place in Matthew 25. Starting in verse 31, it says,

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them one from the other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world."

And then down in verse 41.

Then he will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."

And then down in verse 46, it says, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

I just wanted to skip around a little bit to give you the gist of this, but as you read that one thing that jumps out at you is that the goats experienced a similar thing to the rich man, didn't they? They went through the same ordeal, because verse 41 says they go to a place where they are cursed, and that means they're condemned. God looks at them and passes judgment and says you're getting just what you deserved. Verse 41 also says they were told to depart from His presence, and that means they were told to get out of my sight. The very thought of them make God sick, which is just as concerning, because it's one thing to have man say that to you. It's another thing to have God's say that to you. It's one thing to have your friend tell you, get out of my sight because I can't stand you. It's another thing to hear that from the Lord. But that's what's going to happen on this day. Verse 41 says that this place is prepared for the devil and his angels. Verse 46, also calls it eternal, because it will last forever. But the idea of this parable is that in the end, there will be a separation. And when Jesus comes, there's going to be a great divide. And as I've told you before, it won't be between conservative and liberal, it won't be black and white, it won't be male and female, it will be saved and lost. And that's it. It will be those who know Christ and those who don't, because the ones who don't will suffer the wrath of God. That isn't me saying that, that's Christ saying that; those aren't my words, they are His words spoken right here in this passage.

This is important because this passage and others show you this is all so different from the way people look at Jesus today. It's nothing like the visions of Him as a sweet old grandmother baking cookies all day. There's no cookies in this passage. Because He's all of this as well. He's a judge and a king. He's a Lord and a Ruler. He is the high and lofty One who is seated on the throne of heaven. And make no mistake, He will punish the wicked. But not only will He punish them, He'll also save them if they come to Him and believe.

And that leads us to our passage in Hebrews, if you want to turn back there. This is what you find in the book of Hebrews when it says this in chapter two verse 17. This is talking about Christ, remember, and it says, “Therefore He [or Christ] had to be made like His brethren and all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Now, I'll say a few words about this in a moment, but a key word here is the word *propitiation*. It's an unusual word. We don't mention it that often. It's a Greek word, *hilaskomai*. It is not mentioned that often in the Bible, but it refers to the act of taking away the wrath of God by making a sacrifice. Because the idea is that God is angry with your sin; He is upset with it. So this is what Christ has done, He came to die for it. Isn't it amazing that the same Lord that's going to separate the sheep and the goats would do this? Isn't it amazing, the same Messiah that would punish the rich man would act this way? But it means that He went to the cross in order to satisfy the wrath of God on your behalf.

In fact, when we looked at this last time, I told you, there's really more to it than that, because this word could literally be translated *mercy seat*, because it's a term the translator of Scripture made up in order to refer to the covenant that sat on top of the seat that sat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, where the high priest would go once a year on the Day of Atonement to sprinkled blood for the sins of the people. That's all wrapped up in this term. The significance to that event is that if that was the only time of the year he did that, then it was the only time the priests paid for everybody's sin. The rest of the time in Israel, the people were responsible for making sacrifices for their own sin. So when they failed, they approached the temple, and they offered a sacrifice to cover it. But

except for this one time. And this one time, someone else did it for everybody. And with that in mind, the author of Hebrews says that this is what Christ has done for you at the cross, writing to a Jewish audience, he gives a Jewish word picture they could understand. And he says that Christ has mercy seated for you. He went into the presence of God, walked behind the veil into the Holy of Holies, and He sprinkled His blood. It really would have struck home with the Jews because they knew a lot of priests, but they didn't know one who died for them. And they knew a lot of sacrifices, but they never knew of a sacrifice. It took care of all sin everywhere at all times. That is what Christ has done.

And it also says in this passage that Jesus did this as our merciful high priest, and that means he did this to show mercy to you. He acted this way in order to show you how much God cared because he didn't have to do that. There's nothing forcing Christ to make such a sacrifice on your behalf, but He did it anyway because He loves you. And it says He did this as your faithful high priest. And that means he did this to be loyal to you so that when you keep sinning and sinning and sinning and failing and failing and failing God, if you cry out to Him, He forgives because He is faithful. Christ would never fail His own people. And no text demonstrates this better than this one. Because when we were at our time of greatest need, this is what He did, He made propitiation. You guys just want to pray right now and close the sermon. I mean, this is a wonderful text. We haven't even looked at it yet. So why don't we do that right now. In Hebrews two, starting in verse 17, we're going to look at three steps Christ took in order to be the propitiation for our sins, and each one of them is going to build on each other. And I think each one of them is really going to bless your heart as it did mine this week.

The first one is that Christ became a merciful and faithful high priest for us. So the first step Jesus took to become the propitiation for our sins, is that He became a merciful and faithful high priest. And that means that He was placed into a position where He was the mediator between us and God. That's what a high priest did. He put himself in the middle position, to reconcile us with the Father. And if you look in verse 14, it says it this way, it says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death, He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subjected to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

When you go through this passage, one word that keeps reoccurring, it's a small word, you almost don't notice it, but it's the word *for* or *therefore*. It comes up eight times in this chapter, because the author is building an argument, he's making a case, to say that Jesus became a man, the one who did all these amazing things in Hebrews chapter one, and was greater than the prophets and greater than the angels, and greater than the nations left all that behind to do one thing, and that is to save you. He starts off chapter one as God, He ends up chapter two as the God man. He starts off the beginning of this book as a King, and a Lord and a Ruler. And He ends this chapter as a suffering servant. Quite a transition. And in order to explain that here, verse 17, starts off and says the word *therefore*, which takes you back to verse 16, where it says, "For assuredly, He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham." And what that means is that Jesus didn't become a man for angels. He didn't come down to the earth to save them because they didn't need it. They never sinned. Angels never did anything wrong. But you did, I did. That's why He came down. And in order to do that, it says He had to be made like His brethren. And that means He had to be made like us. Because Jesus wasn't born as a plant or an

animal or a fish when He came to save us. He didn't come into this world as a star or a planet or a mountain, He came as a human being to die for human beings. Because we're the ones who needed it.

And this phrase, *all things*, if you look in the verse 17 is in the emphatic position in Greek, it comes to the front of the sentence, to highlight the fact that Jesus did not become a man in some things, but all things. He didn't experience the human race a little bit, He experienced it a lot to the fullest. I told you last time He died at the age most scholars believe around 33, so He could experience everything to the fullest. The same phrase, *all things*, is used in Hebrews four, verse 15, to say Jesus was tempted in all things just as we are yet was without sin. And that means that His temptation was complete, it was total. There was no area of life where He was not tempted. There was no point where He was not confronted with sin. And it's the same way with this. Jesus experienced humanity to the fullest. Just as we are hungry, he was hungry. Just as we become thirsty, he became thirsty. Just as we grow weary and tired and faint and we want to quit and give up and throw in the towel. Jesus felt all of that because God, the Father, took Jesus' divine nature and placed it into a physical one that was just like ours. He didn't come in splendor and awe and majesty. He didn't come with might and power and glory, He didn't come with a silver spoon in His mouth. He came to be born in a manger. And verse 17 says he did it for this reason, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest, in all things pertaining to God.

Now, this phrase, high priest, it may not be familiar to you, but remember, this book is written to the Jews, the Hebrew people, and it was one they were very, very familiar with. Because the high priest is the one who oversaw all the priestly affairs of the nation of Israel. He's the one who ran all the ins and outs of the temple and the Levites, and the whole sacrificial system, because the Jews had priests, and then they had a high priest. They had leaders, and then they had a spiritual leader who sat on top of it all, because he was his job to talk to the Lord on behalf of everybody. Which is what made the office so special, because he didn't just talk to God for himself, he did it for the whole nation. He didn't just speak to the Lord for his own needs, he went to the Lord for their needs, which is why they had a lengthy screening process to get in. They wouldn't let just anybody become a high priest, they had to meet a few qualifications: he had to be a descendant of Aaron, not just of Abraham. But he had to come from a specific branch of Abraham's descendants a line of Aaron. He also had to be born without defect, or any physical deformities. So he couldn't have any blemishes like a shriveled limb or something like that. He had to keep away from dead bodies and unclean objects. He had to be chosen by a lot from the other priests to make sure there was no favoritism. And he couldn't start until he reached around the age of 30. There's been a little debate about that age. But that was kind of the average age someone began serving in the priesthood, according to numbers for its why Jesus didn't start his ministry till he turned 30. John the Baptist didn't start till he turned 30, there was a precedent there. And this is why scholars tell us there weren't too many high priests in the whole history of Israel, due to the screening process, according to tradition, there were only about 78 men who served in that role from the time of Solomon's temple all the way until the time Herod's temple was torn down. But the reason that Jews were so picky is this was kind of as close to God as you could get in the world of Israel. It was as high up as you could be, because the way it works is that it was it was God, the high priest, and then the people.

One of the most important things he did in his whole career was to lead over the proceedings on the Day of Atonement. One of his most important tasks was to oversee all the affairs that took place on their biggest holiday of the year. Because on that day, it was his job to go into the temple in order to make a sacrifice for the sins of every Jew. It was his role to take the blood of the Lamb, sprinkle it on the mercy seat, and lay it on the Ark of the Covenant, in order to ask the Lord to forgive them.

Now we'll talk about that some more in a moment, but the significance here is that he didn't do that for some of them, he did it for all of them. And he didn't sprinkle the blood for a few of the Jews or just a handful of them. He did it for all the people. But the author uses it here to say this is what Christ did for us as well. He took the blood of the sacrifice, and He spilled it on the mercy seat, in order to forgive us for our sins because He is our high priest. This idea of a High Priest, it's very important because it's a major theme in the book of Hebrews.

It's a point that's going to come up over and over and over again in this letter because the idea is that Jesus is the mediator between God and man. Now He is the one who stands between Yahweh and His people, so that it's God, Christ, and then the rest of us. It's the Father and the Son as equal, totally united, fully one, having the same essence and being in nature and glory, coming down to earth in order to associate with ordinary people like you and me. This is why He's called merciful here. There's no other reason Christ would do this, except to show you mercy. It means He is compassionate. He's kind. Jesus is tender and gentle because He doesn't rough you up when you come to Him. He doesn't push you away when you draw near. Some of the high priests did that in Israel, but not this one. Some of their leaders were very rough and hard on people but not Christ. It's also why He's called faithful here. That means He is loyal because He won't abandon you and He won't reject you and your moment of greatest weakness.

As the hymn says, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear," because that's what Jesus is in Hebrews two, He is your friend now. Some of you may be thinking, God is your enemy this morning. He's not if you know Christ. And you may be thinking, God is some divine bully up there playing chess and throwing lightning bolts at your head, not if you know this man. But the reason He could do all this is because He was made like His brethren in all things. And let me tell you why this is significant today. And that is because this means this is how you get to God. Now, you can just come. And this is how you can make things right when you sin, you can just call out to Him through Christ. You don't have to do a bunch of other things. First, you don't have to perform a bunch of works. You don't have to give a million dollars away to charity or something like that. You can just ask him to help you and forgive you, and He will do it because He is your high priest. He came in order to make the way to God simple, not hard. He came to make it uncluttered, which is important to remember because a lot of people don't look at the Christian life that way. When they sin, they feel like they get to do things like go to confession and take the mass and keep the sacraments and pray the rosary and visit the priest and go on a pilgrimage to Rome. You don't have to do that now. When you sin, you can repent and He will receive you. Amen. When you fail, you can believe in His grace and mercy and He will take you back. No questions asked. What was the whole point of the cross? That's what it was about.

I know some of you need to hear that today because you are struggling with sin. And you need to you need to be told that because you're feeling beaten down and discouraged. Because all throughout this week, you keep sinning and sinning and sinning, and you keep failing and failing and failing and getting knocked down and standing back up again and getting knocked down and standing back up again and getting knocked down and standing back up again. So it's a vicious cycle. But the good news is that Jesus knows that. He understands this is hard for you. That's what He died for. He came to give you victory.

Isaiah 55, verses six and seven, says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, for He will have compassion on him." And I love that verse because you can almost hear the hesitation of the Jews and their unwillingness to come to God because they're afraid God will reject them. And so the Lord reminds them that He

won't if they will return. God won't reject them if they come back to Him, because He will have compassion. First John one, verse nine says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And that is very helpful because John says that there are two steps to forgiveness, If you confess you will be forgiven. And if you repent in Christ's name, you will be cleansed. And that's it. Nothing in there about the rosary, nothing in there about the mass, just those things.

All of this brings us to another step that Jesus took in order to be the propitiation for our sins. And that is that He was tempted in all things. So the first one is that He became a merciful and faithful High Priest for us. He didn't come to show judgment, He came to show mercy. He didn't come to rough you up when you fail, He came to do the opposite. He came to pick you up and build you up and dust you off. If we understood that, it would change the way we see God when He came to draw you near. And that brings us to another step Christ took in order to be the propitiation, and that is that he was tempted in all things, which means that he was attacked by every sin so He could pay for every sin. He was assaulted by all the things that we are and He triumphed. If you look in verse 17, it says this, and it says, "Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered..." We'll stop the reading there.

I've told you before that we don't really know who wrote the book of Hebrews. But a lot of people think Paul did. And if you ever wonder why they think that, it's because of passages like this one. It has so many prepositions and adverbs in it and Paul loves prepositions and adverbs. He was very passionate about that in his writing. And you can see that here in verse 17, because it says, "Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in all things," that's one prepositional clause. "So that He might become our High Priest," is another one, or that's an adverbial clause "In order to make propitiation" is a third one. But everything kind of rests on this idea. Jesus left heaven and came down to earth to provide this propitiation; everything centers around that in the passage.

And as I showed you already, that word conveys the idea of wrath, or someone who pays for God's anger, but I want to say some more about it to kind of give you some colour to what it means. This word, if you want to write this down your Bibles, was used in another time, in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. When the tax collector says in Luke 16, "I believe. God be merciful to me a sinner!" That word *be merciful to me* is literally *hilaskomai*, or propitiation. Because the idea is that the tax collector was a money man. He knew how finances work. And He understood that if you have a debt, you had to pay it. And if you owed somebody something, you had to settle the score quickly, or else there would be trouble. And that's what he had with God. He had a great debt with God. He was so great that he didn't know how to fix it on his own. So he came to the temple, beg for mercy, beat his chest, and asked the Lord to provide propitiation, payment in full. A lot of tax collectors or merchants at that time, would write *paid in full* at the top of their ledgers to make the point that you know all accounts are settled. That's what Christ has done. He has settled your account with God.

Verse 17 picks up on this when it says this is what Christ did at the cross. He paid for your sins. And as I told you before, this Greek word has a lot of Hebrew connotations because it refers to the Day of Atonement. And I just want to read a little bit about that to you. This is an account taken from Leon Morris, his book on the atonement, but it describes what a Jew would have thought about when he read this word propitiation. Let me just read this to you. It says,

Throughout the seven days before the Day of Atonement, the high priest had several things to do in order to keep his hands busy, as he was involved in presenting the blood, burning the incense, trimming the lamps, and doing everything that was expected of an ordinary priest to do in the temple. In the same spirit on the night before the Great Day of Atonement, the animals to be used in the sacrifices were brought before him, so he would be familiar with them. It would be a personal sacrifice; he would actually encounter those animals. On the third and seventh day he was sprinkled with the ashes of a heifer in case he had unwittingly contracted some uncleanness, which neither he nor anyone else knew about. On the evening, before the Great Day, the high priest had a light meal because a heavy one would encourage sleep and he was not going to get any. A group of priests would also keep him awake all night, lest any impurity might affect him. He spent the entire evening on the day before reading and expanding scripture, or else hearing someone else engage in these pious practices. When it was morning, he immersed himself in water. On this day he would wash himself five times every time he changed his robes, he would go back behind the veil, wash his hands, change clothes, and then come out again. In addition, he washed his hands and his feet 10 times. After his immersion, he put on his golden robes, and offered the daily burnt offering and then the offering for the Day of Atonement, which consisted of a bull.

And this is the part that we're interested in for our passage. It says,

After killing both animals, a bull and a goat, the high priest took coals from the altar and a sensor of gold and he put two handfuls of incense into a ladle. These he took into the Holy of Holies, the sensor in his right hand and the ladle in his left, into the Holy of Holies. He set the sensor down between the two poles used to carry the ark, and then he heated the incense on the coals, so that the whole place was filled with smoke. He prayed after doing so and came out quickly lest he put Israel into a terror. The people understood it was dangerous to go into the Holy of Holies. And they would be frightened if he did not reappear soon. Now he took the blood and went back into the Holy of Holies. And then he sprinkled it once upwards and seven times downwards, counting as he did so. One on One, two on two, three on three. This he did not as though he were trying to sprinkle upwards or downwards, but as though he were wielding a whip. Next he slaughtered the goat. There he, there had been two goats set aside for the day of atonement. One reserve was reserved for sacrifice, while the other was called Escape Goat. Because all of Israel's sins were placed on him and he was allowed to escape into the wilderness to demonstrate that their sins were gone. The unlucky goat was killed in the same manner as the bull and his blood sprinkled on the ark in the same way. After doing so, he proceeded to mix the blood of the bull and goat together. And the next bit of the ritual is rather complicated, because he took some of the rest of the mixture and sprinkled the horns of the golden altar of incense with it, along with the other objects behind the veil. There is a curious Jewish tradition, that tells us that the stream of blood later found its way to a channel that flowed into the Kedron Brook, where it was sold as manure to gardeners, although we have no way to confirm that was truly the case.”

And he goes on and on to talk about the scapegoat. But I just want to stop there and say that was quite an event when it was a very sobering occasion. I've often wondered what it would be like to be the high priests on a day like that, I think it would be overwhelming. Because as you read that, you know, he didn't get any sleep, he had to wash his hands and feet over and over again, slaughter a bull, which is a very large animal, then turn around and slaughter a goat. It's a smaller one. But he had to do with everybody's eyes on him because they knew if he got anything wrong, there would be trouble. And tying this into Jesus, the author of Hebrews says, “He became our

merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God in order to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” And then it says, “Since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered.” And the connection there is that just as the high priests had to be ready, in order to sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, Jesus had to be ready. And just as the high priests had to stay up all night and wash his hands and change clothes, Jesus had to be tempted.

The word *tempted* there means to be tried or tested with something or put under intense scrutiny. Depending on how the word is used, it can refer to a soldier in bootcamp, how he goes through the gauntlet in order to see what he's made of, or an object in a fire that's put under pressure in order to see what would come out of it. Because that's what Jesus' humanity did for Him, it put Him under pressure.

We've talked about various passages that describe Christ's suffering in previous weeks. And I don't want to repeat anything here. The one thing that always sticks out in my mind is Isaiah 53 because he calls Him a man of sorrows. And the reason he calls Him a man of sorrows is because sorrow really did define Him. It was like a title that hung over his head. There was not a day when Jesus was not sad about something, and there was not a moment that He was not full of grief and anguish. Because He was tested. Psalm 22 takes it even further when it calls Him a worm and not a man. And I don't know about you, but I can't think of anything lower than a worm. I can't think of anything worse than that, because they're low to the ground. And that's how Jesus was when He came to Earth. And the author brings it up here to remind you that this is what qualified Him to make propitiation for you, and that is that He was tempted. But He overcame it. He was treated like a man of sorrows, He was treated like a worm. And yet He triumphed because He never did anything to disobey God.

One of the things the law said an animal had to be in order to be a sacrifice was that it had to be without blemish. Just like the high priest had to be without any defects, so too the animals. Leviticus 19 verse 20, says that you cannot offer a sacrifice with a defect for that's not acceptable to you. And the idea is that you can't offer a sick animal or a blind animal or a crippled one, because all of that is worthless. And it was the same way with Christ. He was none of those things. The Jews even had officers in the temple who would screen the animals that would come through in order to make sure they were acceptable to the Lord. If there were blemishes, they would turn them away. And if there were faults, they would make you go and find another animal. Over time, that process became liable to abuse and taking bribes. But initially, it was a good thing because it showed you how seriously God took the offerings. He wouldn't accept them unless it was the very best you had. And that's what God gave you in Christ. He gave you his very best. Jesus was perfect in every way.

One commentator said that Jesus' main work was to bring God and sinners together, so in order to present the Godward side of things, He was perfect, but in order to present a manward side of things, He was tempted and invited to live in a sinful, fallen world because that's what we do. We live in a fallen place. And Jesus triumphed over it all. And maybe to tie this all into the idea of wrath, I mean, the reason this happened is because God takes him seriously, doesn't he? He doesn't mess around with it. If you want proof of that, you can just look at the sacrificial system in Israel and remember that He set that up in order to deal with sin. All the bulls and goats and lambs that were killed day in and day out, week in and week out, were done to remind you that He hates it. He can't stand it. Because it was His way of showing you that every time a lamb was slain, He hates sin. And every time a bull was killed, He hates sin. And every time a goat was put to death, He hates it. When the day of atonement rolled around, you saw that He really hated it. It was just hatred, hatred, hatred being poured out on those animals, wrath upon wrath. And that's what Christ experienced on the cross. That's what He went through at

Calvary. But He could do all that because He was tested. He could bear the wrath of God in our place, because He triumphed over sin in every way.

And that brings us to one more step Jesus took in order to be the propitiation for our sins. The first one, just to review these other ones. The first one is that He became a merciful and faithful high priest to us. Secondly, He was tempted to show how righteous He was. He did that in order to show you that it wasn't just anyone hanging on the cross. For you, it was the perfect Lamb of God. It wasn't just any man dying, it was the spotless Messiah.

But thirdly, and this one kind of brings it all together. The third step Jesus took in order to become the propitiation for our sins, is that He did it to come to our aid, which means that when He saw a sin, He didn't stand back and watch and do nothing. Instead, He came running to help us. And as you can see, by looking at this, the rest of this passage kind of serves as the closing words of Hebrews and some have said, these are so important, they could serve as the conclusion to the book. Because the first two chapters are kind of like one long preview. And verse 18 puts it all together this way, when it says, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." You could put that section in capital letters in your Bibles and highlight it and put a gold star beside it. Because this is what will cause Jesus to do everything else from this point forward, He would do it to come to your aid. And the word aid here is the Greek word that means to help or assist. He came to relieve you when you were in distress, and provide comfort. But not only that, it means that He did it by running to you. This word didn't just express the idea of giving you aid and helping, but doing it in a hurry. We have several doctors in our congregation who have told me there's a big difference between being a doctor at your family practice, and being a doctor in the emergency room. Because in that situation, you're in a hurry. And nothing goes slow. Because when a patient comes into the ER, it's all hands on deck, every second counts. That's what this word refers to. This is what Christ did for you. He came running with all hands on deck.

There are some misconceptions about this because when you read some of the authors, some make it sound like Jesus was not all that willing to go to the cross. I mean, he struggled with it in the Garden of Gethsemane. Sweating drops of blood, He said, "Father, take this cup from Me. Not my will, but Yours be done." And that's true. There was a wrestling match going on there. It was a little bit of a struggle. But at the same time, that's not the full picture. Because in John 10 Verse 18, Jesus says, "No one has taken my life from me, but I lay it down of my own initiative. And that means when Jesus went to the cross, He really wanted to go to the cross. And when He was crucified, He truly wanted to make the sacrifice. It was a voluntary, free decision on his part. Other ones make it sound like there was a battle within the Trinity, and there was some kind of struggle going on because the Father wanted Jesus to go, the first person in the Trinity really wanted it to happen. But Christ wasn't so sure. So they had to argue about it. But that's not true either. In John four verse 34, Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me," which means that what God wants, Jesus wants, and what He desires, Christ desires. Because He came running.

And just to say a little more about this verse, you know, if you notice the word tempted, it's repeated twice here to emphasize the fact that it was Jesus' temptations, or His testings that enabled Him to do this for you. Because the idea is that this is why He comes running to help you. This is why He's eager: because His temptations were intense. And therefore, when He sees you being tempted, He chases after you. And when He sees you experience the same turmoil that He went through, He comes to your aid, because He can't help Himself. He has a great compassionate heart, because He knows what you're going through. Also, the word *able* here is thrown into the

middle of the verse, to show you why he can do this in the first place. He can help you this way, because He is able; He truly can help with your sin problem, because He knows what He's doing. He saved other souls, He's been doing it for years. Going back to the image of a doctor, I mean, nobody goes to the doctor, or at least it's not very common to go there and say that I hope he can maybe help me. That would probably be not very wise; you should go and say, I know he can help me. He's competent. It's the same way with Christ.

I don't know about you, but one passage that I'm reminded of when I read this one is the parable of the prodigal son. We've been talking a lot about parables this morning. It's kind of a constant theme. So I thought I would mention this one. But in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, it tells a story about a son who asked his father for his inheritance early. And then he took it and ran away and squandered it. Remember that guy? He spent it on loose living and terrible things, until he became so poor that he had to crawl back home and beg for forgiveness. And when he did that, the most shocking thing about this story is that it said that the father ran to meet him. He didn't wait to meet him. He didn't walk to meet him. He didn't stroll or jog, or stride, he ran. And the reason that's so fascinating is that it was not socially acceptable for a man to run in the first century. They didn't do that. Jewish men wore these long flowing robes, that you would trip over if you did that. So they were supposed to walk everywhere they went, except for the case of an emergency. And that's what the Father thought this was, he thought it was an emergency to see his son come home. So he threw all proper conventions aside, and he rushed out to meet him. At that time, a typical Jewish father, under similar circumstances, would be expected to shun his son for spoiling his inheritance like that. And if the Son came back, the village would expect him to beat him and whip him and strike him and possibly kill him. But the last thing he's supposed to do is run. In fact, that passage says that Jesus said that parable in front of the Pharisees, and you can almost hear them snorting as he said it. Who would do that? What kind of idiot is this guy? What kind of father would run to a son like this? So it shocked him even more when Jesus finished the parable by saying, that's what God is like. That's what the Lord does. That's how God the Father treats sinners today, who spurn their inheritance, and take it and go away and squander it and then come back home asking for forgiveness, He runs after that. He sprints in their direction. You can almost see the Pharisees' jaw hanging on the floor, because they didn't look at God like that. That wasn't how they viewed the Lord. God doesn't shun people first. He doesn't beat them first. He doesn't whip them first. He welcomes them with open arms, which means he'll do the same thing today for you if you want Him to. God will treat you this way if you come back to Him.

That's why he sent Christ. He sent him to save you not judge you. He brought Him to forgive, not punish, which means you can have this forgiveness today and experience it for the first time. If you will just believe Jesus went to the cross to give you propitiation. He did it in order to take the wrath of God upon Himself, which shows you that the issue and salvation is not whether God will come to you, but whether you'll go to Him. The problem is not whether He's willing to save, or He's willing to forgive, or He's willing to pardon because He is. This passage has made that abundantly clear. The cross made that clear. The question is, are you willing to receive His free gift of grace? Friends, God runs to sinners, other gods don't. Buddha doesn't, Muhammad doesn't, the gods of Hinduism don't; our God does. He rushes to their aid. Luke 15, verse seven even says, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. And that means that every time a sinner repents, a party breaks out in heaven. And every time you turn from your wicked ways, all of paradise rejoices because God loves it when that happens. And you need to remember that; you don't have to go to hell today.

We started the sermon off talking about hell. In fact, next week, we're going to do a survey of the doctrine of hell, because I think we need to really understand that doctrine as a church. But the point is, you don't have to go there. God has provided a way out if you will trust in Jesus Christ. So will you do that today?

The story is told at the time a judge sentenced a young man to pay \$2,000, for shoplifting in a court. And then he did a most unusual thing, because the judge took out his checkbook, and he paid the fine to the bailiff, and afterwards, the bailiff asked him, "Why did you do that?" And the judge said, "That's because the child was my son, and I love him." In a sense, that is what God has done for you in Christ. The judge has paid your fine, the Lord has given you salvation if you trust in Him.

Let me close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to take these things and drive them home to our hearts. Heavenly Father, we thank You this morning for this free gift of grace that we've been talking about this morning. It's a gift that amazingly enough is talked about over and over and over again in Scripture. You would think maybe we would be told the gospel one time in the Bible, and that would be it. Or maybe you would talk about it a few books and then not talk about it in others. But Father, you talk about it all the time because we keep forgetting it. Lord, you are such a wonderful Father to us to forgive sinners like us, to run and open Your arms to be like the father and the prodigal son. Lord, all we can do is just put our hands over a mouths and say thank you for your free gift of grace. Lord, I do pray that you would use these words, this passage, this idea of propitiation as an encouragement to us to remember that when we do fail, there is hope. And when we do fall down, there is a Saviour. Thank you, Lord, for being such a thing for us. Also, Lord, thank You that You do not take our sins lightly. All our sins are an offense to You. But that's what the cross was about. It was the payment of offense. May we go out this morning and live life according to this, Father, as Grace Fellowship Church. There's a lot of things we could be pointed towards. And there's a lot of doctrines we could build ourselves upon. But this is the one we want to make the foundation of everything. Christ saves sinners; He forgives them. And may that be imprinted on all our minds today as we go off from this place. If there are any who are lost today, would they ever be reminded that salvation is free. It cost You everything. It is very expensive, but on the other hand, it is free in the sense that we believe and we receive it. Would they be encouraged to come to the Saviour this morning we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.