

Good Friday Preview: The Atonement is Bigger Than You Know

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Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

The Covidence ladies are here. Some of you are literally in the other room right now being loud, being very loud, by the way, while I'm recording this podcast.

And then you're going to listen to this podcast. Maybe you'll hear yourself laughing because I can sure hear you laughing. Just kidding. I love that they're here. I walked in kind of in the middle of their stuff.

And man, second to walking in and seeing your little kids happy to see you when you get home, it's walking in and seeing all these women that you really do love and appreciate in your church all circled in your living room.

[1 : 44] And, you know, like it's the room smelled really good. Everybody had all their shampoos and their, you know, all the things. And so I walked in and saw all these ladies that I really sincerely respect and appreciate.

And also, you know, you know, it's just nice. It's nice and a bunch of levels. So anyway, what am I going to say? Well, I am recording this podcast because today.

I go and do this thing where I get stretched out and like it to me, it's going to be hard to not do this long term.

I go to stretch you kind of a place and I get stretched out. And that's really helpful with all the stuff I've got going on.

Anyway, I feel like I've talked too much about that. Uh, but as I, as I was getting stretched out, you know, there's nothing for me to do. I'm just there getting manipulated and it's kind of like a chiropractor, but it's stretching.

[2 : 49] Anyway, um, I'm thinking, well, okay, I need to get my plan together for Good Friday. And, um, at some point in the middle of the stretching, I thought, you know, I've been doing all this reading and studying on the kind of development of sort of how the church began to understand what the atonement meant, what the cross meant.

It's like, I really haven't shared a lot of that with the folks at Providence. And it seemed to me that what if we just did something kind of unique this time?

And what if we did a bit of a more of a academic approach to Good Friday? Um, I think you probably know that like one of the things that I struggle with is the, the proper role of emotion in Christianity.

Certainly there is an appropriate role, but also it can become sort of ham fisted and manipulative and so forth. And I'm not trying to like decouple emotion from Good Friday, but I, I do think that maybe just as a change up, you know, a cleansing of the palate, maybe we could be a little bit more academic, at least on the front end.

And, and, and just make sure that we really understand what's going on there. So I thought what I would do tonight is, uh, can you hear the girls?

[4 : 27] Anyway, I thought what I'd do tonight is kind of walk you through how the early church started processing the atonement.

And I want to do that because, um, I think that it's important for you to understand that if I were to say, Jesus did a lot more than just justify you before God, that's not me being weird.

That's, that's just me being consistent historically and biblically, by the way. So I thought I would walk you through some of this, but the big kind of aim here is if you're listening to this, I'm recording

it on a Monday night.

If you're listening to this on Tuesday, you should come to the Good Friday service. It's going to be a different kind of Good Friday service and you should come. And it's going to be longer than I thought it was going to be.

And, uh, that's going to be okay. I think you're going to really appreciate it knowing you. Okay. So let's walk through kind of how the early church viewed the atonement.

[5 : 33] So we probably have to start with Irenaeus. Uh, this is one 30 to two Oh two. And he thought of the atonement of Jesus kind of being the culmination of what he called recapitulation.

Basically his understanding was that Christ was retracing Adam's steps and succeeding where Adam failed and he lives a perfect life and dies obediently.

And by dying, he reverses the curse of sin. Irenaeus also talked about this idea that Satan had somehow won control over humanity in the fall and that it is the death of Christ that ransoms humanity, essentially pays a ransom to humanity, or sorry, essentially pays a ransom to Satan to free humanity from the devil's grip.

And this, you know, these guys are not, by the way, everything I'm going to say has scriptural grounding. The question isn't, are these ideas biblical? The question is, what level of emphasis should we have for them?

Everything we're going to talk about in this conversation is true at some level. It's just a question of, is it, is it primary? Is it secondary? See, that's the big thing that I really want people to understand that the cross of Jesus doesn't just make you acceptable before God.

[7 : 04] There's a lot going on there beyond that. And so one of the texts that you could look at for Irenaeus' theory of recapitulation and ransom is Mark 1045.

Well, and, you know, you move from there to, say, Clement. Here we're talking pretty much the same time as Irenaeus, 150 to 215 or so.

And Clement of Alexandria thought of Christ's life as a moral example, inspiring believers to emulate his love and his obedience, his sacrificial love.

I don't think that Clement was arguing that this was the central thing. I don't know much about Clement, to be honest with you. But certainly, to the extent that, like, we don't make that the main thing, it's a true thing.

We see that all throughout Scripture, that we are told to act in a certain way because of the way that Christ acted specifically at the cross. I'm thinking of when Peter tells us not to return reviling with reviling because Jesus, Isaiah 53, was like a lamb silent.

[8 : 25] He didn't do that, but he entrusted himself to God. And so there are lots of places, actually, where this moral influence theory emerges in the New Testament. Now we have two additional aspects of the atonement that aren't routinely talked about.

One being that, in a way, Jesus is the second Adam. Totally biblical idea. And that he retraces the steps of Adam, winning where he had lost, where Adam had lost, and winds up, you know, sort of falling asleep at the cross and waking up with a bride that was born from his side, just like Adam. That's kind of the way that these old guys talked about it. And that now Jesus and his church are set out to fulfill the original creation mandate, ruling and subduing by being fruitful and multiplying. And then you have Clement's theory, which is the moral influence and example theory, which is also, you know, it also bears out biblically.

I think that what has happened in my lifetime is that justification, the fact that Jesus offers himself as a guilt offering for our sin to satisfy God's wrath against our sin, and that aspect of the cross has risen to prominence for some good and bad reasons.

[10 : 00] But, and maybe we'll get to that. So there's already two kind of aspects that you may not normally think of related to the atonement. Origen, we're still in the same basic time period, 184 to 253.

He explored cosmic dimensions, portraying Christ's death as a victory over demonic powers. These early ideas had a lot to do with dealing with Satan.

Now, one might argue that in this particular cultural context, the main enemy was Satan and not sin. Okay, so that's another area you have to think about when you're thinking about theories of the atonement.

It's like, well, what's going on in the culture at the time? And what was going on in the culture at the time was, sure, all these people were just as sinful as we were, but their main thing was, you know,

Nero.

Their main thing was sort of the, boy, I can't think of his name. The main, not Nero. Anyway, you know, their main thing was persecution, both from the Jews and the Gentiles, the Romans.

[11:14] And so you have to kind of ask yourself, like, is what's going on in the development of the theory of atonement somewhat culturally influenced? Their main view was not so much the enemy within, but the enemy without, which was probably true.

And it's probably how we would think if we were under Diocletian, is who I was thinking of, you know, persecution. Now, that's the early church, and then we can move on into, like, the medieval period, beginning in, you know, say the, let's say the 1000s.

A lot of this is where we begin to get into more of the justification type framework through a man named Aslem, Anselm, Anselm of Canterbury.

He started to begin to think of justification as actually mostly about satisfying God's wrath. He wrote a book called *Cura Deus Homo*, Why God Became Man.

And he argued that sin offended God's infinite honor and incurred a debt humanity couldn't repay.

[12:36] See, this is starting to sound more familiar. This is how we typically talk about the gospel. And only as God-man, Jesus Christ, could he offer a satisfaction to God.

His voluntary death was sufficient uniquely because of his divinity to restore or satisfy or propitiate divine justice.

You might hear the word propitiate sometimes. That just means, like, to satisfy God's sense of justice. Again, we can definitely say this is biblical, right? Now, there's culture going on here too, though, because in the previous era, the main enemy was the attacker, you know, the persecutor, the synagogue of Satan, the Nero types.

And so, in that view, the main kind of accomplishment of justification has to do with overcoming the enemy. And all of that's true.

But then Christendom takes over, and now you begin to see a cultural shift from the enemy without to the enemy within. And this more of a justification-centered understanding of the gospel comes to the fore through Anselm.

[14:03] He has this idea of God as Lord, and he has honor. These are all feudal kind of, you know, as a feudal society, not futile.

I realize my enunciation is often quite poor. Feudal, F-E-U-D-A-L. There was a feudal context to the society at that moment. And so, casting God as Lord, which isn't wrong, you know, that's biblical, whose honor demanded restitution.

Christ comes to satisfy this sin debt incurred by people like you and me, and enables thus God to forgive sinners without compromising his justice.

See, now we're in this medieval kind of explanation of salvation, which is still primarily our explanation of salvation.

Critics would later note that Anselm's focus on divine honor could obscure God's love, but his theory of atonement definitely shifted, especially in the Western church, toward this sort of honor-established propitiation, justification kind of model.

[15:26] While in the East, so, you know, Asia and Africa, you still had this view of Satan as the main problem.

So now we have Satan as the main problem, and sin as the main problem. And the cross, Jesus is accomplishing all of this stuff. No one is arguing about whether any of this is biblical.

It's all biblical. It's just that what seems to happen, especially in the internet age, is people are dumb, and Christian publishers are like, well, we can't do the level of nuance.

I guarantee you, like, the podcast I'm doing right now is basically never done for most churches. Because it's confusing.

It involves a layer of complexity. And truthfully, I don't know if I could do this podcast if my congregation wasn't generally well-educated, you know, at multiple levels, like generally well-educated, biblically well-educated, and so forth.

[16:34] I feel like I can bring this stuff to you without it being, you know, a stumbling block. So, you know, there's this split that we see now, Eastern world, Western world, one having to do mostly with power, the power of the devil, the power of demons, and so forth.

And on the other side, you have the power of sin, issues of guilt and shame, and so forth. It's very much of an inward focus. You can think of it like, in some ways, very masculine and feminine split.

Women are typically far more aware of what's going on inside of them, and men are typically far more aware of the threats that are going on outside of them. And maybe I'm not right about that. I don't know. I don't want to go out on a branch too far on this conversation. You know, if you want to listen to this kind of level of complexity and, you know, nuance, you're going to have to deal with me being kind of, you know, half right, retreating from an idea that entered my head and so forth. I'm not going to write scripts for these things. That's going to completely ruin the point of this. So, around 1079 or so, you know, late thousands, Peter Abelard counters again with the moral influence theory.

[18 : 13] This is essentially a recapitulation. Sorry, that's the wrong use of the word because that's unnecessarily confusing. It's just bringing back up origins or, I'm sorry, Clements' ideas of a moral influence.

And you begin to have, I guess, you begin to have around 1100 A.D. initial splits between conservatism and liberalism, believe it or not.

But his concern was essentially to not portray God as the kind of God who would need to be satisfied, whose justice would need to be satisfied, but just to really understand the grandpa kind of God, which, you know, is the God that you see in a lot of Methodist churches today.

So, that split is actually really old. He responded to Anselm's theory of atonement or satisfaction by saying, that makes God sound like he's mean.

And in reality, what's going on here is Jesus is just showing us the way. Who's the guy?

[19 : 28] Girard. Girard would have grabbed hold of his understanding of the atonement. Rene Girard. His understanding of the atonement would be Abelard influenced.

Just this idea that Jesus, the atonement is not some kind of literal appeasing of God's sense of wrath. It's just a modeling of an escape from a way out of an off-ramp from the scapegoat blame mentality that was, you know, causing so much problems in society.

I don't know how many of you have read or are familiar with Girard, but that's kind of Girard. Okay, so now we are moving now into the mid-14 to 1500s, and we start to deal with the Reformation and their view of the atonement.

Some would say that the Reformation brought new clarity. Others would say it brought new controversy to the atonement theology. A lot of guys like Luther and Calvin built on Anselm, but reframed the discussion around God's wrath and human guilt.

Luther's emphasis was that Jesus bore God's judgment against sin. See, now you're hearing stuff that is more familiar to you.

[21 : 00] And he secured forgiveness for believers. Luther's focus is on the atonement and lining with justification.

Calvin systematized, in particular, penal substitution, teaching that Christ endured God's wrath. So Calvin's perspective was especially focused on sort of what hell is.

So hell is the eternal payment for an eternal offense. You sinning against an eternal being means his offense is eternal.

And that your sin against an eternal being registers eternally. And so to pay for that sin, you must suffer eternally.

And Calvin was saying, well, now we have Jesus, who is an eternal being, who is paying the eternal offense of sin. And Calvin's drawing from Isaiah 53 and Romans 3.25.

[22 : 04] He portrays Christ as the propitiation who satisfies God's divine justice. So, you know, this is the gospel that you're used to hearing.

Penal substitution clarified how a holy God forgives sin. It resonates with the reformed emphasis on grace and scripture. Penal substitution. Penal substitution. The question is not, well, the question splits here.

Because there are some who argue that it portrays God as vengeful. Or that it divides the Trinity with the Father punishing the Son. And then others would be largely concerned with just, you know, this being the main point of the gospel.

So, Luther didn't, for instance, Luther didn't limit his view of the gospel. I think this is the key thing where I wind up with all this, if you're wondering.

He held penal substitution as central, but he didn't limit the gospel to that. He celebrated Christ's victories over Satan. He celebrated Christ's accomplishment over, you know, fulfilling the law.

[23 : 20] And so forth. And this is, I think, actually, we need to get back to that. I think we have gone too overly focused on justification. In my opinion, justification is the perfect.

An overemphasis of justification creates a docile people who are easily controlled. Because everything is always about their sin. And it's not that simple. It's just not.

We have enemies. Those enemies need to be dealt with. And they're not all internal. And so justification seems to be the perfect sort of gospel summary for the highly effeminate, neurotic, self-focused.

But it seems to simultaneously maybe give them particular sorts of encouragement while leaving the less introspective, less neurotic, more of a taking ground kind of person.

It sort of doesn't have a lot for them. And the truth is, is that when you read the New Testament, you see it's in the Old Testament, you see that the gospel's got plenty for both. So now we're ready to talk about the Christus Victor theory, which emphasizes Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan.

[24 : 44] Early foundations, Irenaeus, Origen. And then in 1931, Gustav Eileen's book, Christus Victor, reintroduced the theory in arguing that it was the classic view.

Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death is the classic view. And he has his scriptural text. None of these people lack scriptural texts.

Like, they all have them. And one of his is John 12, 31. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. We saw this in John 16, last Sunday.

You know, in this world you will have trouble, but I have overcome the world. So Olin's framework for Christ's work was, it was a divine conflict, not a legal transaction.

You get that? Like, that's essential. And that's what we're going to explore on Good Friday.

Normally, Good Friday services explore legal transaction.

[25 : 49] Nothing wrong with that. That's biblical. But what is also biblical is divine conflict. That Jesus' death on the cross didn't simply propitiate God's wrath.

It somehow or another made open mockery of Satan and his demons and put them to shame and, in fact, bound them in some way or another, establishing victory over them.

So you've got, obviously, John 12, 31. And John 16, 33, where Jesus talks about his power over the world.

Hebrews 2, 14 is a really key verse. You know, it talks about in Hebrews that we have been subject to lifelong fear that is due to our, a lifelong fear that is a kind of slavery that is due to our fear of death.

And Jesus comes and beats up the one that has the power of death. The old joke in the Oswald home is, is if you ever get thrown into prison, you go up to the biggest guy the first day and you punch him in the face just to establish your dominance.

[26 : 58] And we've created a multitude of variants on that joke. But, you know, there's something to be said that that that's, that's a Christian idea. It's a Christ-centered idea to some degree that we, the Bible does, in fact, depict the cross as a battlefield where Christ's obedience undoes Satan's claim over humanity.

I mean, not to go too far astray, but the biblical way of thinking is, is when you eat a meal with someone, you're fellowshiping with them.

You're agreeing to their terms. You're agreeing to their way of life. And so that's why we don't eat with the Gentiles. And so when you go to Genesis 3 and you see them eating with the devil, it's, it has this sense of almost like a, a dark, evil Lord's table with Satan presiding over it.

And they're, they're participating in his covenant of death. This is stuff that's been talked about forever. So there are various values to this Christus Victor theory.

It creates an atonement concept that is far bigger than the individual. It integrates Christ's victory with his incarnation and resurrection. And it, it, it doesn't depend so much on judicial models, which are legitimate, but also not everything.

[28 : 30] Okay. Okay. Now let's wrap up here by, I want to talk about a particular guy who is doing work in this field.

And that would be Jim Hamilton. He's a biblical theologian, I think still at Southern, also a pastor. And he argues in his book, God's glory and salvation through judgment, that Genesis 3 15 is the Bible's first gospel.

And that is a Christus Victor type gospel. Genesis 3 15, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Talking about the offspring of Eve.

And Hamilton sees this as the Bible's foundational plot line. God curses the serpent, promising that a seed of the woman will rise up one day, crush evil despite suffering.

And this sets the stage for redemptive history, you know, as we know it. Jesus fulfills this promise, obviously. He's, his death, the bruised heel, defeats Satan, the crushed head.

[29 : 37] And we see this in John 16 11 and Revelation 12 9. And the cross becomes this climactic moment where God's judgment on sin secures salvation.

And the reason why I like that so much is I think it just grabs everything. It grabs justification. It grabs recapitulation. It grabs Christus Victor.

It just sort of creates this narrative unity that says the whole Bible is about this promise. The very first promise after sin. Genesis 3 15. We got Abel to Abraham to David.

God preserves his seed culminating in Christ. You know, I was thinking about how Rachel, back in Genesis, she has this son and it's this huge answer to prayer.

And she names him Joseph, which is in the Hebrew, Yosef, which is more, add on, you know, add to. The word Joseph means to add to, to continue, you know, to continue to carry something on.

[30 : 40] And how you've got all these Josephs in the Bible and they always step up in a moment where a thing is about to fail and become ruined for lack of, you know, resources, generally speaking.

And then a Yosef, a more, an adder appears. And he carries on. He provides in some way. And, you know, Joseph, the father of Jesus, is that guy in the Gospels.

And then Joseph, who now we know as Barnabas, is that guy in the early church. And there's like lots of these guys. And the idea seems to be that, like, God has this plan.

And every once in a while, someone has to step into that plan to keep it going. And those are the Yosefs. Those are the Josephs. But the plan always culminates in Jesus going to the cross and killing, defeating Satan.

And Hamilton's view, in this sense, aligns with the Christus Victor theory by framing Christ's work as a triumph over Satan, sin, and death. But includes the legal payment because he's talking about sin and justification and so forth.

[31 : 51] And so this perspective, I think, integrates atonement with God's kingdom purposes. Jesus liberates creation, not just man.

Everything. He liberates everything. Revelation 21, behold, I'm making all things new. So I'm going to figure out a way to do all this without all the qualifications and so forth for Good Friday.

But if you're wondering what Good Friday is going to be, I'm going to try to give you a larger view of the Gospel, probably with a bit more emphasis on Christus Victor.

And so Good Friday is going to be a little different this time. It's not going to focus mostly on your sin. It's going to focus mostly on Satan.

And, well, we'll see how that goes. But the nice thing, and just as a last word, guys, what's going on theologically at Providence is an extension of what we would think of as the basic terms of covenantal security.

[32 : 59] See, I don't have to, like, I don't have to dance for my supper every week. I can do things that are a little outside of expectations. I'm not trying to feed the machine so the machine feeds me.

There's a commitment that's, you know, extant in this particular church between the pastor and the people. It's been a commitment that's, you know, not that far away from a decade long at this point. And what you get when you get that commitment is you get, like, a modicum of creativity that winds up being a real blessing to people. And I bring that up because, like, if you want to know what you have to do with your marriage, it's that.

It's that. And what you have to do with parenting. Create an unquestionable level of commitment so that you can escape the performative and enter into the innovative.

And anyway, so we'll see. We'll see if that works out. I think it'll be interesting, if nothing else. Jesus has done so much with his cross is the big point.

[34 : 13] It's not just one thing. It's definitely not just about you or me or even our sin. Think about how weird that would be to frame this enormously glorious, massive thing around just people's sin.

Like, is that really a sufficient explanation? The Bible doesn't pretend that it is. The Bible talks about all sorts of explanations, including confounding the wise in their own wisdom, shutting up Satan, finding the devil, taking away the power of death, and so forth.

So I'm going to try to figure out today's Monday. I'm going to try to figure out how to talk about this more coherently on Friday. All right, folks. Well, that's all I've got for you this evening. I will let you go think about these things. Looking forward to seeing you on Good Friday. We'll be right back.

We'll be right back.

[36 : 10] Thank you.