

Benefits of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:34–39; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 7:25; 1 Pet. 3:21, 22; 1 John 1:9.*

Memory Text: “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (*Hebrews 7:25, NIV*).

Key Thought: To examine the priestly work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary in order to show that it is part of His work of salvation in our behalf.

The finality of the Cross is not threatened by the indispensable work of mediation of Christ for us in the heavenly temple. Without Him the infinite richness of grace would not be at our disposal as a gift from God. Believers receive the fullness of the redemptive power of the Cross through the mediation of Christ. All the benefits of the Cross are at our disposal through faith in His atoning sacrifice.

“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth” (*Isa. 45:22, NIV*). That's the message of Christ's death on the cross. And that redemptive efficacy is available to us through Christ's work of mediation. This week we'll examine the wonderful benefits of Christ's high-priestly ministry in order to better understand God's saving grace.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 13.*

Resurrection and Ascension

The doctrinal significance of the bodily resurrection of Christ is of utmost importance, because without it there is no forgiveness of sin, no salvation, and no hope of eternal life.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:16–18. How closely does Paul link atonement with the resurrection of Jesus?

The death of Christ would not have had any atoning or forgiving power had it not been followed by the resurrection of the Lord. Consequently, we should not restrict the atoning work of Christ to a single event within God's plan of salvation. The Cross and the Resurrection are two parts of one inseparable work of redemption.

How would you explain the close connection between the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Christ's work of intercession? *1 Pet. 3:21, 22; Rom. 8:34–39.*

Jesus took to heaven our glorified human nature, thus opening the portals of heaven to the human race. His resurrection and ascension mean, first, that He finished the work He came to do on earth (*John 17:4, 5; 19:30*). Second, through His resurrection and ascension, Christ permanently united to God those who will put their faith in His sacrificial death. No power in the universe could separate them from God. Since Christ removed the barrier of sin, God's love constantly and eternally will flow to His people. Third, the ascension of Christ also testifies that His defeat of evil powers on the cross was final. After His ascension, He was enthroned as co-Regent with God, sitting at His right hand, "with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (*1 Pet. 3:22, NIV; see also Heb. 10:12, 13*). He will remain with the Father until His enemies are subjected to Him. Then He will return to save those who are waiting for Him (*Heb. 9:28*), thus consummating His work of salvation (*Phil. 2:10, 11; Rev. 17:14*).

What hope does Christ's resurrection from the dead offer you? That is, in what ways does His resurrection guarantee that death does not have to be your final end? If it is, who can you blame but yourself? Why not make the choices now that can spare you from the biggest mistake you could ever make?

Mediation of Christ and Atonement

What is the relationship between the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross and His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary? *Heb. 7:25; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2; 4:10.*

The death and resurrection of Christ make possible the mediation of Christ before the Father. Christ's mediation means that human sin and guilt are not irrelevant before the Lord in heaven. It's only through Christ's work for us that we receive the benefits of His sacrificial death. Guilt and sin continue to be part of the human experience in the sight of God. That makes the role of our Mediator before the Father an indispensable element in the plan of salvation.

In the Bible the mediation of Christ before the Father is never separated from His atoning sacrifice. The sacrifice was offered on behalf of the human race, but its forgiving power continues to be effective in behalf of those who, in response to the invitation of the Spirit, repent and are converted. Forgiveness is mediated from God to us through Christ (*Eph. 4:32*). But it is also through Christ that repentance reaches the human heart (*Acts 5:31*). It also is effective for the forgiveness of sins committed by believers after conversion, because even after conversion sin can beset us. In such cases, John says we have an advocate who can represent us before God and through whom we can be forgiven (*1 John 2:1, 2*).

It is perhaps for that reason that Hebrews 2:17 uses the verb *to make atonement (NIV)* in the present tense, suggesting that Christ's work of reconciliation continues in His high-priestly ministry. This means that although on the cross Christ obtained salvation for all, through His work as Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary He is applying the benefits of the Cross to those who believe in Him. Without the mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the atoning effectiveness and power of the Cross would not be available to sinners. His mediation is rooted in the Cross. This mediation is not a supplement to Calvary but is in fact the unfolding of the meaning and significance of God's forgiving power, an unveiling of the depth and permanent atoning power of His sacrificial death.

Have you sinned, even after you've accepted Jesus as your Savior? If so, what comfort do you get from knowing that Christ is mediating God's forgiveness on your behalf in heaven? Why is that knowledge so important for us to have?

Mediation of Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary

What do the following texts tell us about what Christ is doing for us as our Mediator in heaven? *John 16:23, 24; Acts 5:31; Eph. 1:3; 2:18; Heb. 1:2; 4:16; 13:20, 21.*

If the death of Christ could not be separated from His resurrection, neither should we separate His enthronement and mediation after the Resurrection. The forward-looking purpose of the Resurrection was His installation as our High Priest. Jesus finished His sacrificial work on the cross and is now working as King and Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The movement from humiliation to exaltation indicates a further development of His work as Redeemer. This does not affect the finality of His atoning sacrificial death (*Heb. 10:12*) but, rather, reveals more benefits from it.

Christ began His intercessory work immediately after His enthronement, and this event had a direct impact on the church. As a result of that work of mediation, “Christ’s toiling, struggling ones on earth [His disciples] are ‘accepted in the Beloved.’ Eph. 1:6. Before the heavenly angels and the representatives of unfallen worlds, they are declared justified.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 834. This objective justification of Christ’s followers in heaven was immediately accompanied by the outpouring of the Spirit. Jesus promised the disciples that He will request from the Father another Counselor (*John 14:16, 17*), and at Pentecost Peter interpreted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as indicating that Christ had begun His intercessory work on behalf of those who believed in Christ (*Acts 2:33*).

The good news is that Jesus is still working on behalf of His people. Peter stated that Christ must remain in heaven “until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (*Acts 3:21*). There are prophecies that still need to be fulfilled, and then Christ’s work before the Father will end. The ultimate restoration is still in the future, and Christ’s intercessory work is leading toward it. We are still living within salvation history, between His ascension and His return. The time between those two events is filled by His mediation and the fulfillment of the mission of the church.

Read Revelation 8:2–5. What is the meaning of the imagery there? More important, what hope do those verses, a reference to Christ as our heavenly Mediator, offer you, who at times might feel that God cannot accept your prayers?

Mediation of Christ and the Preservation of Life

How does the mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary impact the natural world? *John 3:35; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:3.*

Earth probably would be as desolate as Mars if not for the Cross of Christ and for Christ's mediation before the Father. As indicated already, sin had a negative effect on the natural world; it became an expression of the rebellious nature of sin. And yet, God did not abandon the natural world. The psalmist says, "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (*Ps. 145:9, NIV*). The way the Lord provides for the sustenance of the earth is interpreted to be a revelation of God's love.

If there is a particular element of God's creation that sin threatens in a direct way, it is the mysterious phenomenon of life on our planet. Out of His love, God decided to preserve the life He created in spite of its contamination with sin. Paul says, " ' "For in him we live and move and have our being" ' " (*Acts 17:28, NIV*). The preservation of our lives is not the result of mechanical laws working independently of God: "The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God, but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but the entire being is under the supervision of God. . . . Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM."—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 9. Although sinners deserve death, their natural life is preserved through God's grace, all made possible only through the Cross. Paul and Barnabas said to some pagans, " 'He [God] has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy' " (*Acts 14:17, NIV*). He "makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth" (*Ps. 104:14, NIV*). All of this is totally undeserved by His creatures and is an expression of God's loving grace through Christ (*Matt. 5:45, Luke 6:35*). God's kindness is not limited to those who serve Him; it reaches out to every human being.

Think about the implications of today's lesson: Everyone owes his or her existence to Christ's grace. How should this fact influence how you deal with other people? How does this fact help us understand the value of all human life?

Mediation of Christ and the Work of the Spirit

In order to understand better the dynamic nature of grace, theologians usually talk about *common grace* and *sanctifying grace*. From the Adventist perspective, common grace is the kind disposition of God manifested toward sinners in the preservation of life on the planet and in the work of the Spirit in the human heart calling us to repentance, confession, and conversion. Sanctifying grace is usually understood as the work of the Spirit in the heart of the person who accepted Christ as Savior. The death of Christ on the cross released an atmosphere of grace that surrounds the planet: “In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68. This is common grace, available to all who choose to accept it for themselves.

What did Christ promise the disciples, and what was the function of that gift? *John 14:16, 17; 16:8–11; Rom. 8:9–14.*

Jesus said to the disciples that after His departure He was going to send them the Spirit and that the Spirit would “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (*John 16:8*). This is common grace. It is the task of the Spirit to make sinful human beings fully aware of their sin, guilt, and separation from God. At the same time, He points them to the Cross of Christ as the only way out of their desperate condition. Without this work of the Spirit, the Cross becomes ineffective in itself. But it is precisely because of the Cross that the Spirit is active in the world, constantly pointing sinners to Jesus for their salvation.

Grace is not irresistible; that is, humans can reject it, and many do. Grace would hardly be grace (would it?) if it were forced upon people. The Lord respects the freedom of His creatures; nothing proves that better than the Cross.

In what ways do you find yourself resisting the prompting of the Spirit? Why do we do that? Why is this resistance, even in “little” things, so dangerous? Most important, how can we learn day by day to surrender ourselves to the promptings that come from on high?

Further Study: “The Saviour presents the virtue of His mediation before the Father, and pledges Himself to the office of personal Intercessor. By proclaiming Himself as our Intercessor, He desires us to know that He places in the golden censer His merits and efficiency, that He may offer them with the sincere prayers of His people. How essential, then, that we pray much; for as our prayers ascend to the throne of God, they are mingled with the fragrance of Christ’s righteousness. Our voice is not the only voice heard. Before it reaches the ear of God, it blends with the voice of Christ, whom the Father always hears.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 166.

“But so long as Jesus remains man’s intercessor in the sanctuary above, the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is felt by rulers and people. It still controls to some extent the laws of the land. Were it not for these laws, the condition of the world would be much worse than it now is. While many of our rulers are active agents of Satan, God also has His agents among the leading men of the nation. The enemy moves upon his servants to propose measures that would greatly impede the work of God; but statesmen who fear the Lord are influenced by holy angels to oppose such propositions with unanswerable arguments.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 610.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If God loves us and sent His Son to die for us, why is it necessary for Jesus to function still as a Mediator before the Father?
- ❷ Review the book of Hebrews. What does it tell us about the reality, and importance, of Christ’s mediation in our behalf in heaven?
- ❸ How does the reality of Christ’s ministration in heaven answer the question, What has Jesus been doing all these years since His resurrection?

Summary: After His resurrection and ascension, Christ continues His saving work through His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary. From there He mediates material blessings to human beings and preserves life on the planet. As our Mediator, He applies the full benefits of His atonement on the cross to those who respond to the invitation of the Spirit to find in Him their Savior.

Flower Blooms in the Desert

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Jasmine* grew up in Europe, but her family moved to her father's country in the Middle East when she was ten. She knew little Arabic and wasn't interested in learning, so she never mastered the language. By the time she was ready to enroll in high school, her Arabic was still so poor that she couldn't study in a government school. She would have to study in an English-medium school, and the only English school that offered boarding was the Adventist school. So her parents enrolled her.

"From the moment I stepped onto the campus, I loved this school!" Jasmine said. "Everyone was so friendly, I felt at home.

"I didn't know much about God, but I wanted to fit in. So I went to worship and Sabbath services, even though I was excused because of my family's religion. I love singing, and the Christian songs spoke to me. But I didn't listen to the sermons. However, God got my attention in other ways.

"The words, 'God is love,' were painted in the chapel. But in my mind God was vengeful and would punish me if I didn't follow Him. I wanted to know more about this Jesus. Who is He? Why is He different from the other prophets? I decided to attend the religion classes to find answers to my questions. There was so much I didn't understand. Sometimes at night I woke my roommates up to ask questions that swirled in my head.

"I went to every church service on campus, to Bible studies on Sabbath afternoon, and I even stopped people in the halls to ask them questions. I just *had* to know!

"But when I went home, my father suspected my interest in Christianity and told me I couldn't take Bible class anymore. I cried, but I obeyed, but I still attended church and sang in the choir, and I went to the Sabbath Bible studies. But my thirst for truth sent me back to Bible class.

"The principal told me that I could get into serious trouble for being there, but I told him I wasn't attending the class; I was just using the room for a study hall—during Bible class! I pretended to study, but I listened.

"I am still learning, but I know that I want to follow Jesus all the way. My mother knows that I want to be a Christian, and she's OK with that. She wants to learn more about Jesus too.

"Last year I should have graduated, but I failed one of my classes. What a blessing! Another whole year to study the Bible and learn more about Jesus! I can't be baptized in this country, but one day I will stand for Christ in the baptismal waters. I can't wait!

"Thank you so much for your mission offerings that support the Adventist school where I learned about Jesus."

JASMINE (not her real name) lives in a country that is unfriendly to evangelism. CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN is editor of Mission.