

Evangelistic Sermons

(Doctrinal Series)

by

William Edward Biederwolf

Grand Rapids Michigan

MESSAGE THREE -

THE ATONEMENT

TEXT: "Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

I am going to talk to you tonight about the atonement of JESUS CHRIST, the central and the fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion. The latest attempt to discredit the Christian faith and to explode the whole system of Christian doctrine has just been made in Germany. They can hatch out more devilry along this line over in Germany than in most all the rest of the civilized world together. This time one of them has written quite a book to prove that no such person as JESUS ever existed.

Well, it takes a pretty brave man to fly in the face of what we know like that. But it only goes to show that it is still true that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." You might as well try to argue the sun out of the sky. You don't need a Bible to prove that JESUS lived and walked among the cities and the hills of Palestine.

No, I'm not going to quote Josephus, for if I did some wild eyed atheist would jump up and yell out "Interpolation." And so I'll give you the benefit of the doubt about that passage if you think there is any.

But what about Tacitus? A historian is mighty careful to tell the truth, no matter whether he is a Christian or an infidel; that's his business. He lived just after CHRIST and in a long paragraph tells about Him and says He was put to death by a decree of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. The unbelievers of later time worked callous spots on their brains trying to prove this celebrated passage unauthentic. But Edward Gibbon, one of their own kind, the great scholar of the Roman empire, came along and said, "Boys, it's no use; the passage stands every test; it's as genuine as any passage ever penned."

Publius Lentulus in a letter to the Roman senate, describes JESUS as a "man of stature somewhat tall, his hair the color of a chestnut fully ripe, plain to the ears, whence downward it is more orient, curling and waving about his shoulders; his forehead plain and very delicate; his beard thick, in color like his hair; his eyes grey, quick and clear."

Two thousand years ago, they led this man out to die. His death warrant was found by the French

army written on a brass plate and signed by John Zorobabel, Raphael Roboni, Daniel Roboni and Capet.

This is the man of whom the text says, "**Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**" That sentence at once surrounds the death of CHRIST with a peculiar and distinctive significance. Other men have laid down their lives for the truth; other men have been stoned and beaten and crucified by the godless gang, but never has it been said and never could it be said of any other man that he put away sin by the death he died.

Paul says that He who knew no sin was made to be sin, that is, - made to be "**a sin offering**" - an offering for sin - in our behalf. The death of CHRIST has some relation to sin and a relation such as no other death ever had.

"The fellow who can't see the doctrine of the atonement in the Bible can't see anything." I want to help you to see it tonight, to help you to understand it and to appreciate it, and if you'll listen to me now with an honest mind, I think I can do it. I can help the most of you. Some of you I can't help because you don't want to be helped. Some birds shut their eyes whenever the light shines and some men are just like them.

"The owlet, Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings across the noon,
Drops his blue fringed lids and shuts them close.
And hooting at the glorious sun in Heaven,
Cries out, "Where is it?"

Now it's mighty important that you be right on this subject; if you are not, it means to be lost forever. I don't mean that any human mind can fully grasp it, but if you'll lift your eyelids of prejudice and partiality and false teaching, I can show you enough light to bring you into right relations with God through the Cross where CHRIST put away your sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Now what do we mean by the atonement? More theological battles, I think, have been fought around this great truth than all the rest of the Christian doctrines put together. I've several shelves of books in my library on the Atonement, and I have read them all, and studied them, and blue-penciled them and have weighed their explanations and waded through their theorizations, but after all I've never found so easy a way to understand and appreciate the atonement as just to come with an honest mind and open heart to the Word of GOD and read what GOD has to say about it.

What does the atonement mean?

It's a very ancient word, and means "at-one-ment;" it means the reconciliation of those who have been estranged. So Shakespeare in "*Richard III*," makes Buckingham say to the queen, "Aye, Madame; he desires to make atonement between the Duke of Gloster and your brother."

And so the atonement of JESUS CHRIST was GOD's plan to bring about a reconciliation between Himself and the estranged sinners of this world. You've got to begin with sin. Make

light of that and the Cross becomes a tragedy, and the Word of GOD from Genesis to Revelation a mess of meaningless jargon. Mrs. Eddy says: "Man is incapable of sin," - Yes she does: she says it on page 415 of the 1904 edition. But John says: "**If we say we have not sinned, we make Him (God) a liar.**"

And so either GOD or Mrs. Eddy has been a little bit economical with the truth. And so, of course, Christian Science is without atonement in any Bible sense of the word. But GOD says every man has sinned and He says "**The soul that sinneth, it shall die.**" He told Adam and Eve not to do a certain thing. But the devil tried to make Eve believe that she misunderstood GOD. He wanted to put her wise; he's a shrewd old fellow, and he's been working that game on the human race ever since. So he got Adam and Eve to disobey GOD. But GOD said in the day you disobey "**thou shalt surely die.**" And what happened when they sinned? Why, just what GOD said would happen. The very minute they sinned, they died.

Now Adam and Eve could not understand death in the physical sense like we do because they had never seen anyone die. They had never seen anyone turn pale, roll back their eyes and, gasping for breath, fail to get it. They had never heard the death rattle in the human throat or looked upon a human body that lay cold and stiff and marble-like in its ghastly pallor, and they must have understood it as some sort of interference with their relations to GOD. And that is just exactly what happened. In the very day they sinned, they were severed from GOD; alienated and cut away; they were left "**having no hope, and without God,**" and that is death.

Physical death of course followed, but separation from GOD was the point of emphasis when GOD said. "**In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.**" You congratulate yourself because you are not a great sinner, but the smallest sin, my friend, has an exceedingly fine edge, and it has done its work, - it has severed between you and GOD.

That is all, but that's enough, and you are a condemned soul tonight just as much as the prisoner who sits in his cell waiting the hour of his execution.

There's no comfort in such an assurance, but I pray GOD it may arouse you. Go on in your sin and your separation from GOD. Go on in your dances, patronize your indecent stage, build your palaces, roll on in your limousines, plunge into your worldliness of every sort, but just keep repeating all the time to yourself: "I am a sinner under sentence of death; the condemnation of GOD is upon me. Condemned! Condemned! Condemned!"

And you want to know of course - GOD pity you if you don't - if there is any way to get back to GOD; to make peace with Him and be reconciled. And I tell you: "Yes," GOD Himself has furnished it. The remedy is in JESUS CHRIST dying on Calvary to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. It is the Atonement.

Here's an old skeptic who laughs at the doctrine. He says, "You don't think I'm fool enough to believe in this thing you call the Atonement, do you?"

"Well," I said, "I would like to give you credit for not being fool enough to deny it until you can furnish more reason for doing so than most people can who talk like you do."

When a man denies the Atonement do you know what he does? He does five things:

1. He flies in the face of the written Word of Almighty GOD. From Genesis to Revelation, the Atonement runs through the Bible like the scarlet thread through all the cordage of the British navy. Take the Atonement out of this blessed book and as a solution of the problem of life it's of no more value than a last year's almanac.

2. He controverts the testimony of the universal instinct of the human soul. Expiation through vicarious sacrifice runs like a golden cord through all history, all poetry, all prose and song; you can see it in Thor's hammer, in Brahma's wounded foot, in the cry of Prometheus bound, and everywhere.

3. He denies the testimony of the world's history. You try to write history and leave out JESUS CHRIST as the atoning Son of GOD and see where you come out. Hume tried it, and so did Gibbon, and others have tried it, and the mighty march of civilization was like a riddle to them until they gave CHRIST His proper place in the program.

4. He gives the lie to human experience. When some old hot air skeptic comes along and proceeds to rip up the scriptural doctrine of the Atonement, I say: "Old skeptic, what else has ever charmed the drunkard from his cup, or wooed the gambler from his cards, made the libertine pure and the thief an honest man?" And I say: "Until you can bring along something that will make me a pure, holy man and keep me that way, that will do for this old sin-cursed world what the gospel of JESUS CHRIST has done for it, I'm not going to espouse your man made, hell-inspired systems of belief, but I'm going to nail my hopes to the Cross of CHRIST where mother nailed hers and where millions of others of the brainiest and best of the world are nailing theirs today.

5. He flies in the face of all reason and sense. I know the infidel arguments that are put against the doctrine of the Atonement. I've read them all, and I have yet to find the first argument that will stand the test of intelligence and common sense.

I say, Mr. Infidel, "What are your objections to the Atonement?"

I. "Well," you say, "it wasn't necessary. What was the need of CHRIST suffering? If GOD is love and full of goodness, why can't a man just confess his wrong and be forgiven, just as an earthly father forgives his child without demanding satisfaction in the payment of a penalty? GOD," you say, "ought to be as merciful as man."

Well, what you need, Mr. Infidel, is a brain tonic when you talk like that.

Now listen: It was necessary. Some people say if GOD couldn't have saved us through CHRIST, He could have done it some other way. I don't believe it. GOD says it was necessary for JESUS to die, and that settles it for me. "**Christ must needs have suffered,**" the Bible says, and I don't believe GOD would ever have allowed Him to suffer so; I don't believe He would ever have let the godless gang spit in His face, and the howling mob to smite Him: I don't believe He ever would have allowed His blessed Son to stagger along the Via Dolorosa underneath the weight of the mighty Cross they tied upon His bleeding back fresh from the scourging of the Roman

governor, until tired and exhausted, He stumbled and fell and they cursed Him and smote Him and cried: "Ha, Ha," and when they came to the place of His death they hurled Him down on the cross, and I can see the spikes as they go into His flesh, one into His right hand and another into His left, and a third through both His feet, and I don't believe GOD would ever have let them do it if He could have saved the world by a method less costly. It was necessary.

Why can't GOD forgive like an earthly parent?

For three reasons.

1. If He were nothing more than a father, He's got a mighty big family and He must deal with each member of it in a way to protect them all.
2. He's more than a father. He's a moral governor and He's got to have concern for the rectitude of His government. The interest of the moral universe is at stake. Suppose you set up an earthly court on such a principle and all hell would turn loose on the State.
3. GOD is a righteous and a holy being as well as a loving one, and He's got to act in harmony with ALL the essential attributes of His divine character. And the Atonement instead of belittling the mercy of GOD magnifies it, because what in His righteousness and justice He exacts, in His fatherly love He provides.

You've got to keep the whole character of GOD in mind in dealing with these questions.

"Well," says the old infidel again, "I can't see how the suffering of CHRIST can expiate the sin of a guilty man so GOD can let him go free. I don't believe in substitution."

Well, I might tell you that that's GOD's business and not yours, but I won't.

Now listen and I'll help you to see it if you've got anything to see it with. But do not flaunt your little thimble intellect in the face of GOD because there are divine depths that human plummets cannot fathom.

When a rebellious sinner shakes his puny fist in the face of GOD and goes about in his sin, smashing the divine law right and left he brings GOD up against a serious proposition. GOD could annihilate you in a second if He wanted to. But He does not. He ought to. There are people here tonight who ought to be in hell for the way you are treating GOD. We'd all be there if it wasn't for His love. And so infinite love searched the depths of infinite wisdom for some plan by which four things could come to pass.

First - That the guilty sinner might be spared.

Second - That he might have his heart broken and become good.

Third - That the principle of justice in GOD's essential nature should be honored.

Fourth - That His holy law should be vindicated and His moral government honored and upheld.

This plan love found in the Atonement and up in the skies GOD the Father and GOD the Son talked it over and GOD said: "Oh CHRIST, will you help me do it? It's going to mean an awful

thing for you, but will you come and help me to save them?" And JESUS said: "**Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O God**"

And in that mystery of mysteries, the incarnation, the Son of GOD became man, and in both His human nature and His divine He appeared once in the end of the age and went up to Calvary's Cross and "**put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**"

"Oh," you say, "JESUS couldn't have suffered a penalty equal to what was due the sins of all of us."

No, of course He couldn't and no one ever said He did. It was not a commercial transaction; it was a moral satisfaction. And His divine nature gave a costliness to His sacrifice and a value to it when accomplished which it pleased GOD to accept as in eternal harmony with the demands of the situation. And you have the audacity to sit down there and say that GOD didn't know as much about what was right and consistent with the moral order of the universe as you do.

Now notice one other thing.

GOD so honored the moral law of His government that He wouldn't let JESUS come into humanity without sharing the consequences of humanity's sin.

And CHRIST not only came into humanity and into all that sin had brought upon it, but He identified Himself with it and both in His life and in His death He called humanity into such a union with Him as made Him the real representative and federal head of His people. And so we hear Paul saying, even while he marvels at the wonders of atoning grace, "**If one died for all, then were all dead.**" The Atonement throbs with reason if you've got a mind to see it.

"Oh," said an old infidel the other day, flaunting his fool judgment in defiance of GOD's plan, "I don't believe in your slaughter-house religion!" Well, I tell you now, if you are ever saved and kept out of hell, it's going to be by this very same plan which came out of GOD's superior judgment and out of His great heart of love and upon which you pour contempt.

There's no other way. If you are ever redeemed it won't be by corruptible things such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of JESUS CHRIST. "When JESUS died on Calvary, He made it possible for you to come and be saved." And I should think instead of stabbing the Son of GOD with your heartless sneers, it would break your heart and bring you to the foot of the Cross in tears.

"See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did ever such love or sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

It ought to break your heart and this is the other great glory of GOD's marvelous plan. Wherever it is heard it touches the heart and makes men good as no other thing could do. You talk about punishment being reformatory. It usually leaves a man worse than he was before. You can pound some men to death and never reform them. But there's a better way.

Have you ever heard of Bronson Alcott, the Concord philosopher, who maintained the discipline of his school by suffering punishment himself for his disobedient pupils? It worked every time. It touched the boy's heart and made him good.

I read one time the story of Kazainak, the robber chieftain of Greenland. He came to a hut where a missionary was translating the Gospel of John. He wanted to know what he was doing, and the missionary told him he was making letters and that with letters words were made, and that by the use of those words the book he had before him could speak. Kazainak thought that was very wonderful and asked that the book might speak to him.

The missionary read the story of CHRIST's sufferings and His death on the Cross, and immediately the robber Chieftain said, "What has this man done? Has he robbed anyone? Has he murdered anybody?" "No," was the reply. "He has robbed no one, murdered no one; He has done nothing wrong."

"Then why does he suffer? Why does He die?" asked the robber Chieftain.

"Listen," said the missionary, and then he told him the story of the Cross, the story of the Atonement and the meaning of the sufferings of JESUS and when he had finished, the hard-hearted robber, whose hands were stained with his brother's blood, wept like a child.

The Atonement was for all. But don't say because CHRIST died for all therefore all will be saved whether you repent and believe or not. Suppose this tabernacle was full of sick people and I offered a remedy to every one who was able to walk down this aisle and get it, and if you were one of them, and didn't have enough faith in my word or enough confidence in my ability and no gratitude in your heart to come, you could lie back there and rot in your disease before you would be saved.

JESUS paid the price for everybody. But GOD says if you don't repent and believe and accept Him, you'll be damned, and that's all there is to it. The Atonement is sufficient for everyone and it is offered to every one. But just because CHRIST made atonement for you, don't think you can live in sin and do as you please and then expect to walk up in the day of judgment and demand a share in the atonement CHRIST made for a believing and an obedient sinner.

You can accept Him now, but at the judgment it will be too late.

One day a man came nearly being killed upon a public highway, but a certain judge of the court saved his life. The very next day the man was arrested and taken before this same judge for trial and when he recognized the judge, he thought he would get mercy sure, and he said, "Judge, don't you know me? I am the man you saved yesterday," And the judge said, "I recognize you; but yesterday I was your savior; today I am your judge."

Some people preach what they call the Moral Influence theory of the Atonement. They find the full meaning of the Atonement in the beautiful example CHRIST gave us as an inspiration to holiness and character building. But is that enough? Indeed, not. If that were all, then I ask where is your hope? For if that is all, then both GOD and the Son of GOD are guilty of mocking our infirmity, for there isn't an earnest man in the world, not even the best Christian that lives, who

doesn't kneel down by the side of his bed after each day of effort to imitate CHRIST and say: "Have mercy upon me, Oh, GOD, for I have this day come short of the glory of GOD."

If you'd begin today and be absolutely perfect the rest of your life, which is supposing the impossible, you might have a right to enter Heaven if your past record wasn't there to appear against you, for you've done enough sin in the past to lose your soul a million times over.

I read of a man who had a dream and he dreamed that his morality and his good deeds were to make a ladder by which he could climb up into Heaven. Every time he did a good deed, when he gave anything to the preacher's salary, when he went to church, when he gave a coin to a beggar; every time he did any good thing a rung was added to the ladder. At last the ladder lacked only two rungs of being complete and when these were in, the gate of Heaven was to swing open and he could enter in.

And when these two good deeds were done he stepped upon them and sure enough the gate rolled back, but right there in the middle of the way stood JESUS CHRIST who looked out upon him and said as He pointed His finger straight in his face, **"I am the door... he that entereth not by the door... but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."**

No sir, your morality alone will never do, and nothing else will ever do except faith in what JESUS CHRIST has done for you and then a life that is on the square with GOD and man.

You can climb up by your morality, your culture and all you've got on GOD's earth, but you're a thief and a robber if you turn away from CHRIST and expect to climb into Heaven without Him.

CHRIST wants to save you and has done the best He can do, but you are like the young man whose godless dissipation and sin had broken his mother's heart and sent her to her grave. The first night after the funeral - you know what an awful night it is, after the hearse has backed up and the coffin has been carried away and you sit dumb with grief in the old home from which the light seems to have gone out; you feel as though you would die - that night the old father sat broken-hearted by the fireside and his dissipated godless son came down stairs and picked up his hat.

The father said. "Where are you going?"

"I am going down town," was the answer.

"Oh, my boy," he said, "don't go; this is the first night mother has been out of the house and I am so lonesome: sit there where mother used to sit and stay with me tonight."

But he said, "No. I've got an engagement," and as the old man plead with him. he said, "Step aside for I am going out." And the old man threw himself on the floor before the door and said, "My son, if you pass out of this house tonight you will have to go over my body to do it."

And with a curse the boy trampled his father's body beneath his feet, opened the door and went out into another night of sin.

And so I say to you tonight, if you go to hell, you will have to go over every prayer that's been offered for you; over every tear that's ever been shed for you; over every sermon you've ever heard; over your mother's grave and over your baby's coffin, some of you; but more than all this you'll have to go over the body of the crucified CHRIST who throws Himself before the door of hell and begs you to stay back.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
