

Five Words Tell the Story of Jesus' Stunning Accomplishments for Us

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Preached on: Sunday, February 19, 2023

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Five words tell the story of Jesus' stunning accomplishments for us. It's important to understand that when Christ laid down his life, he offered himself as a sacrifice to God just as every Old Testament sacrifice was offered to God. Hebrews 9:14 reads "who offered himself without spot to God." You think I want to emphasize that, the "to God" part? The sacrifice is offered to God. It's not first offered to us, it's offered to God.

The accurate way to think about this is Christ offered himself to God in our behalf. Offered himself to God in our behalf. Yes, he died for us but the sacrifice is always offered to God in behalf of another. This leads us to the all-important question: what did Christ accomplish by offering himself as a sacrifice to God on our behalf? What did he accomplish by doing that? Our Bibles answer that question with five extremely significant words. These five accomplishments are perfectly suited for our condition in sin. It's hand-in-glove. The five accomplishments and our condition in sin is hand-in-glove perfectly suited for us. Keep that in mind. It's perfectly suited for our condition in sin to supply what is needed to restore our relationship with God. Those five are forgiveness, propitiation, redemption, justification, reconciliation. Those are the five.

Beginning with forgiveness, forgiveness is the cancelling of our debt to the justice of God. Only God can forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins since sins are committed against him. The New Testament uses the illustration of the cancellation of debt to communicate to us the meaning of God's forgiveness. In Jesus' parable of the two debtors and the creditor, one debtor owed 50 denarii, the other debtor owed 500. That was a lot. Jesus said of both of those debtors, both of them had nothing with which to pay. One owed 50. How much does he have to pay? Zero. The other owed 500. Does he have anything to pay? No. Zero. The creditor forgave them both, cancelled the debt, forgave them both. He cancelled the debt. Spiritually they are not required to be punished to pay for the debt to God's justice which is death. That's forgiveness. They are not required to pay God's justice which is death. Now death's cancelled, not required to pay. That's forgiveness.

Another wonderful thing about God's forgiveness is that once he cancels our debt, he remembers our sins no more. Oh, is that sweet? You wake up in the middle of the night, Satan remembers them. Your conscience remembers them. God doesn't remember them.

Isn't that wonderful? Does that not cause you to fall in love with this God? With this God? That's right, God who remembers sins no more. That's forgiveness. Hebrews 8:12 says that "I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Now, in regard to forgiveness, there is a question of great importance. On what basis does God forgive? How does this happen? How can he do this? Now you see, every cult says God forgives, don't they? They all say God forgives. Every false religion says God forgives, right? Of course they do. But we must ask on what basis does he forgive? Now there's a wide range of fatally wrong answers to that question, and I will mention only one to illustrate. Some answer God is merciful and loving and based on his character he just forgives us as we should forgive others. That's the basis, it's his character. This apostate theology leads to the conclusion that Christ's death was not necessary in order for us to be forgiven since God just forgives period. That's a fatally wrong answer to that question as to on what basis does God forgive?

Now here's a thought question to introduce the next three things which Christ accomplished on our behalf, which will answer that question. Now, it's a bit of a trick. My question is a bit of a trick but in another sense it isn't. Can you explain the gospel without referring to forgiveness? What do you think, can you explain the gospel without referring to forgiveness? Now some of you have heard me do this before, some of you haven't, but this gets to the core of the issue. So some of us will say, "Well, of course not. You can't explain the gospel without talking about forgiveness." Really? Well, Paul did. Paul explained the gospel without talking about forgiveness. What? Yes, he did. Have you ever read the book of Romans? Does Paul ever mention forgiveness in the book of Romans? Well, he really doesn't but only in one place in passing. When he happens, he quotes Psalm 32 and as he quotes Psalm 32, there's one reference to forgiveness in Psalm 32. Beyond that, he never talks about forgiveness. Now, did Paul thoroughly explain the gospel? Oh yes, he did, absolutely he explained the gospel. So what's going on here? No one would doubt that the book of Romans provides an in-depth explanation of the gospel, but he doesn't refer to forgiveness. What Paul does in Romans is give a robust answer to our question on what basis does God forgive? That's what Paul does in Roman, and that distinguishes true gospels from false gospels. So when anyone tells you they believe that God forgives, ask them that question and then listen. On what basis and how does he do that? And you'll find out whether they're Christians or not by how they answer that question or whether they understand the gospel or not.

That's what Paul does, he gives us this robust answer to our question on what basis does God forgive? Paul describes three more things which Christ's sacrifice accomplishes which answers our question and those three more things are propitiation, redemption and justification. That's the basis. Beginning with propitiation, propitiation is the removal of God's righteous anger from us by sacrifice. It is almost universally accepted that in classical Greek the meaning of "to propitiate" when applied to a deity is to appease and avert the anger of the deity. Sacrifices were offered as a means of propitiating, appeasing the offended deity. There are no persuasive reasons to believe that this was not the common understanding within Old Testament Israel. I quote from Leon Morris, "To the

men of the Old Testament, the anger of God is both very real and very serious. God is not thought of as capriciously angry like the deities of the heathen, but because he is a moral being his anger is directed towards wrongdoing in any shape or form. Once aroused, this anger is not easily assuaged. The dire consequences may follow but it is only fair to add that the Old Testament consistently regards God as a God of mercy. Though men sin and thus draw down upon themselves the consequences of his anger, yet God does not delight in the death of sinners. He provides ways in which the consequences of sin may be averted."

God is angry. God is in a moral outrage against humanity. A moral outrage, and when you hear some heinous crime committed, do you feel it? Do you feel that moral outrage? Well, if you do, and I trust you all do, it's because you're made in the image of God, and if you and I feel that moral outrage against sin and we are unholy and all the things, can you imagine the moral outrage that God feels against mankind's sin and rebellion? It is real. It is holy. And it is just. And there's only one way to deal with that moral outrage is to offer a propitiatory wrath-appeasing sacrifice that removes the moral outrage. Yes, God must be appeased and his anger must be assuaged. That's our word propitiation. That's what that word means and it's tied into the Old Testament concept of atonement.

Yes, it must be assuaged. You see, those that fatally got the answer wrong only talked about God's mercy and they fatally got the answer wrong. They don't know the true God and they reject the word of God that shows us that God is righteously, morally outraged not simply against sin but sinners. God's anger is against sinners. It wasn't sin on the cross that suffered, correct? God's anger is against sinners and Jesus Christ ended up on that cross because he became legally as a sinner and God's moral outrage is against sinners who commit sin, and that's how we must explain it in our day. And this business of, you know, love the sinner, hate the sin, is fallen theology. Jesus was on the cross and God's anger righteously was poured out on the substitute sinner. And if you're not in Christ, John says that, the anger of God abides upon you and that is not inconsistent with him having a heart of mercy, offering you mercy.

So propitiation is how that anger is assuaged. Hebrews 2:17, "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." To give an anger-appeasing sacrifice. Romans 3:25, "whom God," referring to Jesus, "whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith." God does not forgive us while he feels moral outrage toward us. Have you got it? God does not forgive us while he's feeling moral outrage toward us. He forgives us when he smells the sweet aroma of the wrath-appeasing sacrifice, and I say it reverently, and he calms down and then he forgives us. Paul is giving us the basis in Romans. Christ offering himself as an anger-appeasing sacrifice on our behalf opens the door for forgiveness. It opens the door.

Next consider redemption, being set free from slavery to sin. Our needs are greater than debt cancellation and appeasement of God's anger. We have other needs. Christ paid a ransom price to deliver us from being enslaved to sin and to set us free. The price was an awesome one, his own life. He redeemed us and thus became our Redeemer, and for a

Jewish believer familiar with the God El of the Old Testament, familiar with the redeemer/kinsman of the Old Testament, a Jewish believer could not but see the selfless love of the near relative who pays the price to set him free. A Jewish person who was in slavery could not but see the concept of the near relative that pays the price to gain his release from slavery, thus redemption. The fundamental idea in the Old and the New Testament word groups is deliverance by the payment of a price. The deliverance in the New Testament is a deliverance from the enslavement and the dominion of sin. The great example and foundation of what it means to be redeemed is in the Old Testament, and it was the Lord's redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt. That's the ground of this redemption terminology as it's used in your Bible. It's the exodus and the people of God are enslaved, and God comes and, what? Redeems them from that slavery. Exodus 6:6, "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.'"

The deliverance from an external slavery by God's outstretched arm was wonderful but the deliverance from slavery to sin that we receive by the outstretched Son of God on the cross is far more glorious. That outstretched arm that contains the power to emancipate those Hebrew slaves is fulfilled by the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross redeeming us, dying for us and us dying with him, and therefore being delivered from the power and dominion of sin. That's redemption. Our union with Christ in his death is the outstretched arm that emancipates us from sin. Romans 6:6 through 7, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin." Romans 6 is not talking about the cancellation of debt, it's talking about deliverance from the bondage to sinning, redemption. Romans 6:20 through 22, "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life." Redemption accomplished for us by Jesus going up on that cross, taking you and your body of sin up there with him. Do you realize that's the basis of New Testament sanctification is the cross? Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit but the foundation of sanctification is the cross and you going up on that cross with Jesus Christ and being put death to sin and delivered from bondage and slavery to sin. That's Paul's argument, you theologians against the antinomians. It's the cross that saves us from the power of sin.

That's the third word, redemption. The fourth word, next consider justification, that Christ by living and dying under the law of God, we have to bring the law into the picture here, Christ by living and dying under the law of God, secured our justification, to be declared righteous before the law of God. Keep in mind that justification is the opposite of condemnation. God's law is inextricably joined to his character. What does that mean? What does that mean God's law is inextricably joined to his character? That means you cannot separate one from the other. For God to ignore his law when dealing with mankind would be for God to un-God himself. Can't be separated. Which he will never do. Thus we read Galatians 4:4 through 5, "when the fullness of the time had come, God

sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." God doesn't just forgive, those under the law have to be redeemed from under the law. This has to be taken care of. It has to be taken care of. To be justified in God's sight means you have fulfilled all the requirements of the law. All of them. That's what it means to be justified. If you have not fulfilled all of the requirements of God's law, you are condemned now and you will be condemned in the future. All of those requirements must be fulfilled. To be justified means you have fulfilled all the requirements of God's law, and I hope you will say, "I've never done that. I've never done that." That is true but Jesus has done that for you as a legal substitute. He cosigns for you and stands before the judge in your place.

He was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law. When you believe in Jesus, his righteous standing before the law is credited to you and you have gone to trial and the judge ruling according to the law, has declared you justified. You are not condemned but, of course, Jesus who became responsible for you, is condemned. That's right. Jesus, brothers and sisters, became responsible for us to fully satisfy the demands of God's law in our place. I thought God said, "In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." Did God not say that? What's this business that he forgives just because he's merciful? What's this business, what's this apostate theology that talks like that? They're not worshiping the God of this book. No, they're not. These things need to be taken care of in order for you to be forgiven.

Romans 3:24, "being justified freely by His grace," those two words go together, "freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation," Paul's got all three in one verse here, "whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." He's just and he is the justifier.

Back to our on what basis question, and I realize it's almost impossible to explain justification in five minutes, the debt is canceled on the basis of the law being fulfilled. Understand? The debt is cancelled on the basis of the law being fulfilled in your behalf, in your legal standing, in your legal standing before God the law has been fulfilled. Therefore there is no condemnation. Why? Because you kept the law and fulfilled it? No. Because God decided to ignore the law and lower the standard so that we could keep it? No. But because God fulfilled it in Jesus Christ on your behalf. You can be assured of this: your sins are not forgiven until God's law is fulfilled perfectly. So what Paul is doing in the book of Romans is giving the basis.

Now, I'm not saying that a new believer, or even an old believer or a new convert needs to understand all this, and I would never expect a new convert to understand all this, but if we are going to refute false gospels, if we are going to praise God and glory in our salvation for the fullness of what it is, we need to understand these five terms. So don't misunderstand what I'm saying. We're celebrating today our Lord offering himself on our behalf to God and part of that celebration is to gain an appreciation of all those five stunning things which he has done.

Fifth, these are all sweet, this is the sweetest one, reconciliation. Reconciliation removes the hostility between God and man. The hostility exists in both directions. God is angry with those who commit sin and those who commit sin are hostile toward God for condemning them and insisting they repent. The hostility is in both directions, and those who preach the gospel as if the hostility is only in one direction, man hostile to God, false. God is unreconciled to humanity. He is and he's morally outraged at us. We are not reconciled. No. Yet God has initiated the reconciliation, hasn't he? God has come after us in his Son to restore that relationship between us and mankind and himself. That's what he's done.

So the hostility is in both directions. God is angry with those who commit sin and those who commit sin are hostile toward God for condemning them and insisting that they repent. You see how angry sinners get when you try to evangelize them, right? Call sinners to repent and you see the hostility. Colossians 1 says this, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He," God, "has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." He has reconciled you in the body of his flesh through death. Friendship has been restored. "Abba, Father. Abba, Father." People that are unreconciled to God don't talk to him like that. They don't cry out to him like that. When you're reconciled to God, you cry out to him as a child in trust cries out to his father. That's reconciliation. "Abba, Father." And he throws his arms around you as your friend. That's reconciliation. It's sweet.

You see, reconciliation goes further than propitiation. It sure does. This is so applicable in our own personal relationships. Reconciliation goes further than propitiation. Yeah, propitiation, God's wrath, oh, it's turned off. Will he invite me over for dinner? Does he want to be my friend? That's a different question, isn't it? And the gospel says, yes, yes indeed he wants to become our friend. And he does. Reconciliation goes further than propitiation. God's anger has been replaced with friendship toward us. That's right. Every one of these words is vitally important. They all are. It's a wonderful matter. The Father wants us to understand that not only has God's wrath been appeased but his friendship toward us has been restored and our hostility toward him has been replaced with love toward him. We now love him because he first loved us. Reconciliation restores our personal relationship with God the Father.

So those are the five stunning accomplishments: forgiveness, propitiation, redemption, justification and reconciliation accomplished for us when he, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God on our behalf. Amen.