

The Wonder of Jesus ***The Meaning of His Death***

Lesson #10 for June 7, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 27:45,46; Luke 2:25-35; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 3:25,26; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Galatians 6:14; Hebrews 2:17.

1. This is a lesson about the meaning of Christ's life and especially the meaning of His death. Did Jesus really have to die? Mark 10:45 (*NIV*) says, "He came to give his life as a ransom for many." And the word "many" really means "all." (It is the word from which we get "poly")
2. What is a ransom? What is a Redeemer? What difference would it make if Jesus had come and lived the life which He lived and then, just before the time to die, He returned to heaven? Are you sure that it was necessary for Jesus to die? If so, why? And even if we say that He had to die, what difference does His death make to us in 2008?
3. Some would say that He died primarily to show us how much He loves us. Others would say He died primarily to pay the "legal penalty" required for our salvation because we have sinned against the law; without His death, we would not be "paid up" and could not be saved. And the basic issue is this: Does the death of Christ change us? Or does it primarily change God? Does God relate to us or view us differently because His Son died?
4. The New Testament Scriptures make it very clear that Jesus had to die. (Matthew 16:21; 26:52-54; Mark 10:45; Luke 18:31-33; John 3:14; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 9:25-28) In the words of our Bible study guide:

His death was not an accident. It *had* to happen. Why did it have to? Well, that is not a matter that can be explained fully by rational processes, not because it is irrational but because it is *suprational*, above human reason.... The Bible does not go into any long attempt to justify it or to explain it, maybe because it is not something subject to human logic. We do not have other instances elsewhere by which to judge or compare it. Biblical atonement represents a solo occurrence in the history of the universe. And our task is to seek to understand what the Bible says about it and to apply what it means to our own lives. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for June 1.

5. Does the fact that Jesus had to die "to atone for our sins" impress upon you the seriousness of sin? That is what the killing of all those animals as sacrifices under the Old Testament system was supposed to do!
6. Down through the centuries, an enormous volume of writing has been done concerning this issue. Many of the statements are made very boldly without any explanation. Look at some examples from the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 115: "Jesus' whole purpose in coming to earth was to die for humankind. No matter how good His life was, the end result would inevitably be death. It had to be that way for the plan of salvation to be implemented." "The Savior's death paved the way for the salvation of humanity." "Through Jesus we have been reconciled with the Father." "Jesus died on the cross to save us." Can you explain these statements meaningfully to a child without using clichés?
7. We must recognize that a large portion of each of the Gospels is directed to the events of the final week of Christ's life. Clearly, it is a central portion of the "Good News."
8. One of the very important points that we need to understand is that Jesus did not die of any

punishment that was inflicted upon Him by human beings. Despite their intentions and despite their actions, neither the Jews nor the Romans actually managed to kill Jesus. Jesus actually died before anyone had physically touched Him in a malevolent way. "Having made the [final] decision, He fell dying to the ground [there in the Garden]." *Desire of Ages* 693. Whatever killed Jesus did so first in the Garden of Gethsemane. That was before a single blow had fallen on His body. If the angel had not come to strengthen Him and revive Him, He would have died right there. So what was it that killed Jesus?

9. Many Christians believe that "our sins" killed Jesus. How would you explain that? He died 2000 years ago and we are still committing sins! The Bible uses several metaphors to explain the death of Christ.

1) The simplest metaphor is found in Romans 8:3. "What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like sinful human nature, to do away with sin." (*Good News Bible*) The final expression in that verse says simply, in the Greek, [God] "sent His Son to deal with sin." What is implied by that?

2) Another metaphor is that of a sacrifice, offering, or substitution. Read Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 9:26; 10:14; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24. All of these verses are taken to mean that Christ died "in our place" as a "substitutionary, vicarious death." In what sense did Christ "die for us" or die "in our place"?

3) Other verses in Scripture support the idea that Jesus died as a ransom. Read Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45. Many theologians connect these verses with Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In the traditional sense, a "ransom" is a payment made by someone to someone else to get back something of value. Often, ransoms were paid to redeem kidnaped children or slaves that were valuable to their masters.

Does that mean that each time you commit a sin, you are "adding to the punishment" of Jesus? How do you feel about the fact that someone innocent died in your place? Jesus had repeatedly tried to tell His disciples about what was going to happen when He made that final trip to the Passover festival in Jerusalem. But their minds were so tied up with the idea that He would eventually become King of the Jews that they could not comprehend it when He said that He was going to die. (Luke 18:31-34)

4) Jesus died as a propitiation or expiation (*hilasterion*) for our sins. (Romans 3:25,26; Hebrews 2:17; 9:5) The word "propitiation" has no relationship whatsoever to the Greek word from which it is translated! *Hilasterion* is a word which comes from a Greek word meaning "to be gracious" or "to forgive" and was used in the *Septuagint* to refer to the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament. "To propitiate" someone means that they are upset, perhaps angry, and you do something to calm them down or to restore peace. Is that a correct understanding of how God relates to us? Numerous modern translators have tried to "soften" the idea by using the word "expiation" and then theologians have told us that it means to "cover" or "erase" our sins.

Any idea of human appeasement of God would be utterly foreign to the New Testament writers. Instead, they wanted to emphasize that the entire human race, threatened by the righteous wrath of God on account of sin [What is that and what does it mean?], was rescued by Jesus' death. Jesus became our *hilasterion*, covering us from the wrath of God (see *Heb. 9:5*). *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, June 4.

5) Jesus died to “reconcile us” to God. Read Romans 3:25,26; 5:10,11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Hebrews 2:16; Colossians 1:20-22) “Because of sin, the whole world stood condemned before a righteous God; because of the Cross, our standing before God changed, and thus all who come to Jesus by faith have the assurance of eternal life.” (*Ibid*) And here we must ask the same question again: Does God’s attitude toward sinners change because of the death of Jesus? Or does the sinner’s attitude toward God change when he understands why Jesus had to die? And what about the onlooking universe? The concept of reconciliation suggests that God is making us friends again because of the life and death of His Son here on this earth. The cross destroyed the wall of enmity between us and God.

10. Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; and Colossians 1:19,20 tell us that the entire universe was reconciled to God through the death of Christ. If they were not sinners, what does the cross do for them? It must do something much more than just pay a “legal penalty” on behalf of sinners.
11. Paul is the only New Testament writer who attempts to try to explain, briefly, the death of Christ in two locations. Neither of those passages is mentioned in our lesson for this week! Is that because they do not fit with the basic understanding of the authors of the lesson? Read Romans 3:25-26 and Hebrews 10:1-18. How does God feel about this whole process? Is He “angry” about sin or does He weep over His sinful children? Read Hosea 11:1-8.
12. Read Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-16. Depending upon which version you read, these verses could be understood to suggest that Jesus learned something by coming here to this earth that His Father did not know! Does that mean that God is not truly omniscient?
13. The death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God. **That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.** Fallen men could not have a home in the paradise of God without the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ? **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God.** {*ST*, December 30, 1889 par. 4; *5BC* 1132.8}
14. Many of us have believed for a long time that the death of Christ was not primarily about how God saves you and me but rather about how God has answered the questions in the great controversy! Every question and every criticism raised by the Devil from the days of his rebellion in heaven through man’s sin in the Garden of Eden has been more than adequately “dealt with” through the life and death of Jesus. When we understand the life and death of Jesus clearly and understand that God is the One who has told us the truth from the beginning and that He can be trusted and that Satan’s accusations are false and unwarranted, then we can reestablish a basis for relating to God that will make it possible for us to live together with Him in peace throughout eternity.

15. Even the angels in heaven had questions. Why do you think one-third of them joined Lucifer in his rebellion? Are we to believe that none of the two-thirds of the angels who have stayed on God's side have had any questions?
16. In the Garden of Eden, Satan claimed that man could sin and that death would not be the result. (Genesis 3:4) God had stated that sin would lead to immediate death. (Genesis 2:17)
17. Jesus is the only one in the history of the universe who has died that death—the death described in Genesis 2:17—which is the result of sin. That death is referred to in the book of Revelation as the “second death” or what we sometimes call the “final death.” It is the death which will finally eliminate all sinners. But God is not angry with His children! He weeps over them as they die. God will weep over Satan as he perishes. The death of Jesus proved that God had told the truth about sin.
18. Satan had also claimed that he should be treated as an equal with Christ. After all, didn't he stand on one side of God's throne while Christ stood on the other? Wasn't his name “Lucifer” or “light-bearer,” one of the names of God? But Lucifer was not God. He does not have the ability to create or to give life, for example. Jesus proved that He was Divine by rising from the dead using His own power.

When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, **the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself.** Now was proved the truth of His words, “I lay down My life, that I might take it again. . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John 10:17,18; 2:19. {DA 785.2}

19. Satan has made many other claims and accusations against God that were answered by the life and death of Jesus. He had claimed that no human being could live here on Planet Earth without sinning. He claimed that every human being, given the free opportunity, would choose to be selfish as he was. Christ disproved those claims.
20. Our lesson study guide concludes with three discussion questions. Number one states:

Some limit the cross to a mere demonstration of God's love, devoid of any legal or atoning advocacy. That is, Christ died merely to show us the Father's love; there was no change in our legal standing before the Father. Hence, the only purpose of the cross was to bring a change in us and in our attitude toward God. Why is such a position a radically weak and ultimately unsatisfactory view of Jesus's death? How does such a view, of necessity, lead to a salvation-by-works theology? *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, June 6.
21. Who do you think this question is talking about? Are there Seventh-day Adventists today who actually take that approach?
22. Why are the very essential, basic ideas of the great controversy and dealing with the issues in the great controversy left out of the lesson study guide? Can we explain those ideas to fellow Adventists and fellow Christians in a satisfactory and meaningful way without using clichés?

© 2008 Kenneth Hart, MD. ***Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.*** Info@theox.org

Last modified: April 26, 2008

C:\My Documents\WP\SSSTG-Hart\Wonders of Jesus\SS-10-Wonder of Jesus-2008-06-07.wpd