

The Cross: How Jesus Saves Us

Lesson # 12 of 27

Scripture/Memory Verse

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Lesson Goal & Objectives

Goal

- The students will understand the central Gospel message of salvation: that Jesus Christ bore our sins on the Cross so that we would be reconciled to God. Students instinctively think that they have to make things right with God by themselves, but when they grasp what Christ has done for them, they will experience the freedom and gratitude that comes with the Good News.

Objective

- The students will review the problem of sin and learn how Christ alone is able to resolve that problem. They will see how the atoning work of Christ is based on the Old Testament and accomplished in the Gospel. They will learn about the concepts of “vicarious suffering” and “substitutionary atonement.” (Note: they do not need to know these technical theological terms, just the meanings, which you should try to make as concrete and accessible as possible.)

Introduction and Background for the Teacher

This lesson concerns the Doctrine of Atonement. Note that the term “atonement” can be broken down like this: “At – one – ment.” Through atonement, sinful human beings are reconciled with a just God and restored to fellowship with Him. Three basic points need to be communicated:

First: for atonement to make sense, students must recognize the problem of sin and alienation from God discussed in the previous lesson. They must come to terms with the Bad News of Sin before they can grasp the Good News of Salvation.

Second: we cannot atone for sin ourselves: it is entirely the work of Christ on the Cross. It is a matter of Grace. Atonement is accomplished by means of “vicarious suffering” – which means that Christ suffers for us, on our behalf or in place of us. Because he bears our suffering, offering himself as a sacrifice in our place, Christ is our “substitute.”

Third: Atonement is *not* the vengeance of a cruel and angry God, inflicted on a helpless and innocent victim. (*It is important to stress this and make this clear because the idea of an angry, vengeful God is very popular.*) As we learned in the lesson on the Trinity, Father and Son are “of one substance.” By means of the cross, the Trinitarian God absorbs divine wrath against sin

within the Godhead itself. That is, God Himself absorbs and eliminates the just consequences of sin into His own Divine Justice and Mercy. Jesus says, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” (John 10:17-18) The Father did not force Jesus; He chose to do it.

This is called the “objective” doctrine of Atonement, which means that it does not depend on us or our subjective thoughts or experiences (although we must receive its benefits subjectively by faith) but rather on the objective fact of God’s action to accomplish this. The objective doctrine of the Atonement does not derive, as some say, from the medieval theologian, Anselm of Canterbury, but rather from the New Testament, from the Apostle Paul and from Jesus’ own teaching about himself (Mark 10:45).

The key message to be communicated is that Christianity is not just about being “a good person” – it is about our being rescued from the power of sin by Christ’s offering of himself on the cross.

Materials Needed for Lesson

- Large fireproof bowl
- Slips of paper
- Pens
- Matches (**Caution Do NOT let the students light the matches)
- BCP

Opening Prayer (5 min.)

(Collect for Proper 15, BCP, 232)

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of this redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. *Amen.*

(The students may also offer some of their own prayers)

Review of the Previous Lesson (5min.)

- What is sin?
- How is your relationship with God broken or damaged because of sin?

Introductory Activity (5-10 min.)

*(These ideas are intended to ensure a lively and exciting atmosphere for the beginning of this lesson. It is fine for each parish to approach this differently if you wish to make use of your own games or other materials. It is best **not** to eliminate doing any activity at all.)*

ALL HEARTS ARE OPEN:

Remind students of the beginning of “Collect for Purity” from the Holy

Eucharist (BCP, 355): “Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid....”

Ask, “What if everyone knew your deepest, darkest secrets? Are there things that you have done that you would prefer nobody ever found out about you?”

Give each student a slip of paper. Ask them to write down something that they have done that they don’t ever want anyone else to know – and assure them that they will **not** be asked to share this information. Remind them that God knows what they are writing down already, and that while God loves us, he is also a just God who allows us to experience the consequences for our sins.

Put a large bowl on a table that everyone can see. Have each student crumple up their slip of paper in a ball, and put it in the bowl. Light the slips of paper on fire, and let them burn out.

Have other slips of paper ready with the following passages: *Isaiah 53:6*, *Romans 6:23*, *Colossians 3:13-14*. Have three volunteers read them as the paper in the bowl burns.

Lesson (20-25 min.)

1. Why do we need to be saved?

The Greek word for sin means “missing the mark,” as when an arrow misses its target. To “miss the mark” is to fall short of what God expects of us. Sin is not just an isolated act. Individual sins are like symptoms of an underlying disease – like a virus that gets into your computer. It is a condition which we all share as human beings and descendants of Adam. Remember the Fall? The exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden is about a separation from God common to all human beings. Discuss briefly:

Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

2. **The Scapegoat:** Read *Leviticus 16:20-22*. This was the ritual for the Day of Atonement

(Yom Kippur) in the Old Testament.

Ask the students if they know what the common term, “scapegoat,” means? (If they don’t, explain: “one that bears the blame for others” – *Miriam Webster’s Dictionary*). Explain that the term comes from this passage in Leviticus.

Discussion Questions: What is the role of the goat that is sent into the desert? How are the Israelites different after the goat goes into the desert, from how they were before? What would it have felt like to participate in this ritual? In what way is Jesus like the goat in the desert?

3. **The Suffering Servant:** Have a student read *Isaiah 53:4-9*. Explain that this passage is from the Old Testament and points to a future figure known as the “suffering servant.” We read this passage on Good Friday because Christians regard this as a

prophecy of Christ. (See Matthew 8:17, 1 Peter 2:24-25, Acts 8:32-33).

4. **St. Paul's summation of the atoning work of Christ:** *Romans Chapter 3:22-25.*

Break up the passage into sections and focus on the key words in boldface type:

- A. *"there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."*

Paul starts with the **bad news of sin** – of why we need a savior.

- B. *...and are justified by his grace as a gift...*

Justified means we are accepted by God, not because we have earned it, or deserve it, but as a free gift.

- C. *"...through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."*

Redemption means to buy back. Jesus paid the price for us.

- D. *"...whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood,"*

Jesus offers himself as a **sacrifice** for us – dying in our place, just as the Passover Lamb died in the place of the first born in the Exodus. (Explain)

- E. *"...to be received by faith."*

This is the one thing we do: we place our **faith** in him.

5. **A True Story.** Read or tell the following story:

"This is a true story a famous Jewish philosopher named Moses Mendelssohn who was a German thinker who lived in the eighteenth century.

In 1762, at the age of 33, Moses Mendelssohn was engaged to marry a beautiful young woman named Fromet Gugenheim, the daughter of a prominent merchant. Her father was eager for the match and negotiated the arrangement in traditional fashion. Moses Mendelssohn had a humped back and was not a handsome man. When the young woman saw his stunted, misshapen figure, she burst into tears and refused to marry him. Mendelssohn asked to speak to her alone. "Is it my hump?" he asked. She nodded.

"Let me tell you a story, then." Mendelssohn said. "When a Jewish child is born, proclamation is made in heaven of the name of the person that he or she is to marry. When I was born, my future wife was also named, but at the same time it was said that she herself would be humpbacked. 'O God,' I said, 'a deformed girl will become embittered and unhappy. Dear Lord, let me have the hump, and make her fair and beautiful.'" Fromet was touched by the story, and in June, 1762, they were married. They had six children and a happy home life. Their grandson was the great composer, Felix Mendelssohn.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Fromet change her mind?

2. In what way does Moses Mendelssohn's story remind you of the story of Jesus?

Take-Home Activity (5 min.)

*(It is recommended that you make use of this take-home activity to re-enforce the learning experience. You **may** eliminate this exercise if **necessary**. You may also substitute another activity if you find that to be more helpful. You should briefly review this lesson and review the take-home activity at the beginning of the next learning session).*

Recall: occasions in your life in which you have missed the mark. Write down as many examples as you can think of. Confess them to God. Destroy the paper. Consider going to Confession with your priest.

Reflect: on ways in which you have tried to make up for your mistakes: how you have tried to prove to God, to other people and to yourself that you are a good person who is worthy of respect and affirmation.

Consider: we are not forgiven and accepted by God for what we have done or not done – but because of what Jesus has done.

Pray: thank Jesus for what he did for you, and put your trust in his death as the guarantee of your forgiveness.

Closing Prayer (5 min.)

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

(Give the students some time to offer their own concerns or thanksgivings)

Scripture References

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Isaiah 53:1-12
Romans 3:23-26
Romans 5:6-11
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Hebrews 9:11-10:18

Resources

- *English Standard Version*
 - Intersivarsity Press – can be purchased at christianbook.com for \$21.99
- The Bible (Recommended translation:
John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*,

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