



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:1-2:1

“Death of the Son in History, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Tonight we are looking at the second and final one of our studies in “The Death of the Son in History” according to Johannine thought. We originally began by discussing the death of Christ in prophecy, and we looked at two or three of the passages in the thought of the Apostle John in which the Lord made reference to his coming death. And then in our last study, we were looking at “The Death of the Son in History” and so we looked at the passage in John chapter 19, verse 28 through verse 37, in which the Apostle John describes the death of our Lord as it is presented in the gospel. We looked at the statement, “It is finished,” discussed its significance, and then concluded with some words concerning the doctrine of the atonement, as set forth in these passages and, particularly, in that passage. We saw that the death of Jesus Christ was expiatory in character in the sense that he poured out his blood as a payment for sin. It was, therefore, a penal substitutionary death; that is, he died suffering the penalty for the sins of sinners and he died as their substitute. And this is probably the outstanding feature of it, we also sought to show that the Apostle John identified the Lord Jesus with the suffering servant of Jehovah, and it’s in that light that we are to look at the death of our Lord.

Now, we just looked at the gospel last time and I'd just like to finish this outline tonight, and we will look at Christ's death in the epistle, and there are two passages that we will refer to. The first of these, we'll spend most of our time on, and then briefly take a look at 1 John 4 in verse 10. In this way, I think we can have a well-rounded view of the death of Christ in prophecy and the death of Christ in history and, particularly, as seen in the gospel and in the epistles.

Now, 1 John chapter 1 in verse 1 is where, I think, we ought to begin in our Scripture reading. And so if you have a New Testament or a Bible turn with me to the first Epistle of John near the end of the New Testament and let me begin reading with the first verse of this epistle, and we'll read through the second verse of the second chapter. Beginning in John chapter 1 in verse 1, 1 John 1, verse 1, the apostle writes.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of Life.” Now, a parenthesis in the thought. “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Notice particularly now, these verses that follow at the end of 1 John 1.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

These two verses, 1 John 1:8 and 1 John 1:10, are very important texts which show us that even though we may have become Christians, we still sin. We still have sin, and any kind of doctrine that suggests perfectionism is really contrary to the thought of the Apostle John. Well now, we turn to verse 1 and 2 of chapter 2, in which we have a very significant text concerning the death of Christ.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Now, the apostle has been, in the preceding chapter, the first chapter of 1 John, near the end of the chapter as we were pointing out a moment ago, refuting the claim of the heretics, that they were incapable of sinning. Isn't it strange that people would actually have a view that it is possible for a person not to sin? That's just almost incredible that an individual thinking about his own life could actually believe that he could reach a state where he does not sin. A statement made by G. Campbell Morgan always comes back to me. He said that he was speaking to a woman once who said that she had not sinned for a number of years. I've forgotten whether it was seven or ten. And he said, “My, you must be very proud of that record.” And she said, “I certainly am.” And then Dr. Morgan said, “There went seven or ten years of sinlessness in the confession of her pride.”

Well, I always thought that was just a story until some years later I went down south of Dallas to preach in a Methodist church in one of the cities there, one of those small towns, really. One of the students at Perkins Seminary had been in an inter-varsity class that I was teaching, and so later on when he was serving as a pastor, a student pastor of this church, he asked me to come down and speak one Sunday morning for them, and so I spoke in the church that Sunday morning. But before that, he asked me also to take the Sunday School class. And I took the Sunday School class, and it so happened our subject was Romans chapter 4, and I did as best I could in presenting the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and pointed out to us, pointed out to all of us in the class, that we were sinners; that we were ungodly. In fact, that's the very expression Paul uses there. And a member of the class came up to me afterwards and said, “Well, I don't really understand that, because I have not committed any sin. I don't consider myself to be ungodly.” Well, I thought I would try G. Campbell Morgan's response, and so I asked, “Well, you must be very proud of that.” And this person too replied, “Yes, I am.” And so I kind of needled him a little bit to point out that there is no such thing as saying, “We have not sinned or we do not have sin.”

So the apostle is refuting the claims of the heretics here, and he points out that the denial of sinlessness must not encourage acts of sin. So in chapter 2, verse 1, he writes, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” So in other words, if we spend our time pointing out that people have sin, that they do sin, we're not thereby to take the opposite tack and say, “Well, since we have sin, and since we do sin, then we should just let down our guard, so to speak, and enjoy sinning.” The apostle said, “No, that's not the reason I'm writing to you. I'm writing these things unto you, that you sin not.” So the denial of sinlessness must not encourage acts of sin. Now, I say “acts of sin” because the expression that the apostle uses here, “I write unto you that you sin not” that expression in the original text is an expression that means something like, “that you sin not at all.” And, I think, that the apostle is speaking here, primarily because of the tense

that he uses, of sin as an act or sin as a kind of event. If, however, he says, sin does occur, “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

So if sin does occur, there is a three-fold divine protection. First of all, he says, “We have an advocate with the Father.” Now, I think, that when he uses the term “advocate,” he’s thinking about a legal defender. He’s thinking very much like a man who would think of a lawyer, who is to plead his case in court. “So if any man sins, we have an advocate.” We have a lawyer. We have a legal defender. Now, that’s the first thing that happens when we sin. We have an advocate. The second thing that the apostle mentions here is that it’s not simply that we have an advocate, but we have a righteous advocate. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” So he is a just advocate. And then thirdly, the apostle goes on to say, that this individual is the “propitiation for our sins.” So if any man sins then these things are true. He has an advocate. He has a righteous advocate and, furthermore, this righteous advocate is the propitiation for his sins.

George Finley has written a book on Johannine theology and Johannine thought, and in this book entitled, “Fellowship in the Life Eternal,” Finley says, “When Saint John declares that we have a righteous advocate before the Father, the case is not that of love pleading with justice, so the gospel has often been distorted. Justice pleads with love for our release.” Now, that’s an important point. I think that sometimes we think because we tend to overemphasize the love of God that when men sin or when men are in sin, our salvation is procured by the love of God which overwhelms the justice of God, almost as if God is holy, and righteous, and absolutely just. But the significant work of the Lord Jesus Christ is such that it causes God to relax his standard sufficiently for us to get into heaven, and so the work of Christ is conceived of as love pleading with justice, and overcoming justice because love and compassion are stronger than justice.

Well, Finley is absolutely right. That’s not what John is talking about. That’s not what we preach in the gospel. We do not preach that the work of Jesus Christ is such a

magnificent expression of love and mercy that God relaxes his standards of absolute holiness; opens the doors a bit so sinners can enter into heaven as sinners. That isn't the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and John would not subscribe to anything like that. He says, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, but he is Jesus Christ the righteous.” And what he means by that is simply this; that all of the righteous requirements of an absolutely Holy God are met in the work that Jesus Christ did on the Cross. What we have is justice pleading with love for the release of sinners. Absolute justice. We do not get to heaven on the basis of a love and mercy of God that overcomes justice, but we have an absolutely righteous salvation for all of the claims of a Holy God have been met in Jesus Christ's sacrifice for his people. Every claim that God had against sinners is met by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of our debts are paid. It's not that some are overlooked.

You've known of people who have been unable to pay their bills, and then they've sought by negotiation to arrange to solve the problem of the debt by the person to whom the money is owed giving a bit. We see this in the dealings that nations have with one another in reparations. We see this in all experiences of life; perhaps even someone in this room. I know you all pay your debts, but sometimes there are debts you cannot pay, and you may go and say, “Well, I can pay so much.” And then it might be that the company will say, “Well, if you pay so much, we will forget the remainder.” But that is not the basis upon which our salvation is obtained. Jesus Christ paid our debt in full, so when we enter into heaven, it's not because we still owe anything, which God has forgotten or overlooked. Every debt has been paid. “So if any man sins,” John says, “we have an advocate with the Father, and he is Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Now, when we talk about advocacy, we're talking about not simply a person who stands as a lawyer for us, but advocacy and instruction ordinarily went together in Jewish thought. And so Jesus Christ the righteous is an advocate in the sense that he stands for

us when we sin, but his advocacy is even broader than that, but we don't have to go into that now.

Now, the next thing that we want to note here is that every priest, of course, has to have something to offer; some satisfaction to render to the outraged character of God who is light. And so John goes on to say that this righteous Jesus Christ is the “propitiation for our sins.” Now, he's acting as a priest. Advocacy was the work of a priest, so he's acting as a priest. But a priest must have an offering. That's characteristic of priests. They must have an offering, so Jesus Christ must have some satisfaction to render to the outraged character of the Holy God and that brings us to the question of propitiation. “He is the propitiation for our sins.” What does propitiation mean? Well, we have often used the expression something like this; that “propitiation” is very close to our English word “satisfaction” and so when we read, “He's the propitiation for our sins,” we're to understand something like, “He's the satisfaction for our sins.” That means, that he is the one who has by virtue of the penalty that he has paid, he has satisfied the righteous requirements of God.

Jim Packer, in one of his books called, “Knowing God” which many of you have read makes reference to an ancient legend concerning the individuals who took part in the Trojan War. There probably was some Trojan War, probably around the years of twelve hundred BC. When I was going through high school and college, particularly in college, we studied a great deal about the Trojan War. You'll find treatment of the last details of that war in Homer's “Iliad” and in the study of ancient Greek literature we had to study the Trojan War. We also had to study accounts of it. Well, the story was something like this, in case you've forgotten it. Prince Paris had carried off Princess Helen to Troy, and a Greek expeditionary force had taken ship to recover her, but they had been held up half way because of the winds that were against them on the Aegean Sea. And so Agamemnon, the Greek general, seeking to placate the gods, sent home for his daughter from Sparta, and Ephigenia was the daughter, and Ephigenia was brought to

Agamemnon, and he slaughtered her as a sacrifice; the sacrifice of his own daughter. And it was done in a ceremony in order to mollify the god responsible for the winds that were contrary to them, so the concept of God was of a hostile God one who was against them, and he demanded a sacrifice in order that his anger and wrath against them might be assuaged. Now in the story, the move paid off, the west winds began to blow again and the fleet reached Troy without further difficulty.

This bit of Trojan War legend mirrors an idea of propitiation, which is in the minds of most pagan people when they think about propitiation. The pagan religion appears as a callous commercialism; that is, it's a matter of simply managing and manipulating your gods by bribery. So what you do is to pay a certain amount in order that the gods may change their opinion with reference to you. But this appeasing of celestial bad tempers is not what we have in the Bible. What we have in the Bible, is a holy and righteous God, who is also a loving God, but in order for him to express his love, and apply his love in the deliverance of his people, it's necessary for his righteous law to be upheld, and so Jesus Christ comes as a gift of a loving God. It's not we who offer the Son up as a bribe to the Father, it's the Father who gave the Son in grace, in order that he might righteously die for our sins. The grace by which we are saved is not the grace which wouldn't really be truly biblical grace, the grace of overlooking his requirements. The grace by which we are saved is the provision of the substitute who pays the last bit of the debt that sinners owe. So when we talk about propitiation, we're talking about the satisfaction of a holy God, but he is himself, the one who has provided his satisfaction.

Many years ago, when you bought a fountain pen, they had a little machine, I don't think I've seen this in recent years, but there was a little machine. If you bought a fountain pen, you could have your name written on it. And it was a kind of machine which you would take some instrument, I've forgotten whether it was a pen itself. But the pen would be put under it and you would take hold of this instrument and you could write your name on the side of the pen. And it would be actually in your handwriting so

that that pen would be a kind of pen that would could be only yours because the handwriting was your handwriting and no one else could duplicate it. Dr. Barnhouse used to use the illustration based on that; that suppose, for example, God should say to you, “Now, if you will present to me a fountain pen with this name on it and he had written it out, “then I will deliver you from punishment.” We would have to say, “Well, we cannot do that. That’s impossible. Only the person who wrote it can do that.” But if at the same time he said, “You must put something like that in my hand, he with his other hand, gave you this to put in your hand,” all you would need to do would be to take this and put it in his hand, and you would meet the conditions.

And so in the case of our salvation, what is required for our salvation, is a payment made for our sins, but God has given us the redemptive price in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is the propitiation for our sins. So it’s not a case of bribing a god who is bad-tempered or even simply a god who’s just righteous and just holy, but a God who is absolutely just and absolutely holy and absolutely righteous, but who is also a God of loving kindness who provides that which meets his own requirements. So he’s not an arbitrary or vengeful deity, and the means by which his wrath is averted is not a bribe, either from us, or from a third party. On the contrary, the initiative in the propitiation is entirely God’s.

Now, what is the propitiation? Well he says, “He’s the propitiation,” but he describes this also as being “Jesus Christ the righteous.” He’s the propitiation. Over in the fourth chapter, in the tenth verse we read, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” So the propitiation is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not the propitiator, but he is the propitiation; that is, he’s the propitiatory offering. That’s what’s meant by, “He’s the propitiation for our sins.” He’s the propitiatory offering. And by the way, do you notice it says, “He is.” And I would gather that what that means is that there is a continual efficacy that flows from the

sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. “He is the propitiation for our sins.” And what he has done has a continual efficacy.

Now, he says, “He’s the propitiation with reference to our sins” or as the original text has it, “concerning our sins.” The idea is that of making provision for sins, of taking them away. Now, the last clause of these verses here, I guess, we would say the last two clauses, these clause have significance for the question of the extent and design of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Now, it’s possible that these words simply refer to the sufficiency of the atonement. “He’s the propitiation for our sins, and he’s the propitiation not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.” That is, if anyone is going to be the recipient of a salvation due to the propitiatory work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ alone; that is, he is absolutely sufficient for the sins of the world. His sacrifice has sufficient value for the sins of all individuals in this world, not only alive, but those who have lived in the past, and will live in the future. Now, of course, that is a truth. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient in value for the sins of every single individual.

It’s possible then that that’s all that John has in mind. He’s the propitiation for our sins, and he’s not the propitiation for our sins only, but he’s the propitiation for the sins of the whole world of individuals who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, so his death is sufficient for sins; that’s the interpretation that many place upon this.

Now I’m not sure, however, that that is really what is in mind here. It seems to me that there is something different in mind. He says, “He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Now, if you’ve been reading the Gospel of John, and if you’ve been reading Johannine literature, you will know that in John’s thought, he thinks of salvation as being originally of the Jews. Like our Lord said, “Salvation is of the Jews.” He considers our Lord to have been first sent, not to the Gentiles, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He also, in the

presentation of his Gospel, makes that quite plain when John the Baptist comes and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” In other words, the Lord Jesus is not simply the Lamb of God for Jewish people, but also for the world, for Gentiles. In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John he is called, “the Savior of the world.” Now, taking those words in their strict bare sense that would mean that he saved everybody in the world. We know, of course, that that is not true. It does not say he may be the Savior of the world or he could be the Savior of the whole world, but he is the Savior of the whole world.

So if we are to avoid the pitfall of universalism that everybody is going to be saved, which is so contrary to Scripture, we must give this a different sense, and in the Johannine literature, the sense of the whole world is a reference to the Gentiles. “He is the propitiation for our sins,” John writes as a Jewish apostle. He writes out of the context of salvation being of the Jews, directed initially toward the Jews, then spreading out to the whole of the world. The apostles were given the commission to begin in Jerusalem, and go to the uttermost parts of the earth. The salvation is to be spread out over the whole world. It’s likely to my mind that what he has in mind is, “He’s the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” That is for Jews as well as Gentiles or to put it in other ways, he’s talking about all men in the world without distinction, not all men in the world without exception. In other words, the same fountain for sin that we have is the fountain for sin for Gentiles as well. That seems to be the thought that the apostle has in mind.

Now, some people have difficulty with this because they tend to think of the word “world” as inclusive of every single individual. Now, it isn’t possible for us in the time that we have to give you a word study on the word “world.” Let me just suggest that you do this sometime; that you take your concordance down and take a look at it. Look up the word “world.” You’ll find it under “w’s” and look up all of the instances of the use of the term “world.” Look them up first in the Gospel of John and in the Epistles of John

and in the Book of Revelation because after all the usage of terms is first of all to be seen in the light of its context, and the context is the Johannine literature. See how John uses the term “world.” But then look at other places, and then try to construct just a little, take a piece of paper out, and write down the different meanings that you find for “world” by just looking up the term “world.” Now, I invite you to do that and before you do it, you should never say anything about what the word “world” ought to mean.

But first of all, do this. For example, you’ll find, I’ll just give you two or three little things. Really, the term “world” has six or eight or ten different meanings in the New Testament, but it also, just to show you that it does have a different sense from every single individual in the world, let me first say that you will find the term “world” in the sense of evil men; godless men. 1 John chapter 5 and verse 19, would you turn over just a few pages there? 1 John chapter 5 in verse 19. Now, look carefully at what John is saying. In fact, this is rather interesting because we have here even the expression, “the whole world.” What does John say? He says, “We.” Now, to whom does he refer when he says “we”? Well, we Christians. “We know that we, we Christians, are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” Now, who is included in the whole world? Everybody? Every single individual? No. The apostle in this very verse says, “We are of God.” So if we just had this verse, we would say the term “world” may be limited by its context. In this case, the believers are excluded. The term “world” here does not refer to every single individual, but it refers to the godless or evil individuals in this instance. That’s one use of the term “world.”

It also is used of the accursed world under Satan. Turn to the Gospel of John chapter 14 in verse 30. John chapter 14 in verse 30. I rather hesitate to do this because somebody might think when I do this that, “Well, these are all of the texts. These are the only texts that refer to world in a sense different from every single individual.” You’ll find that in the minority of the instances, it refers to every single individual. John 14, verse 30. The Lord Jesus says, “Hereafter, I will not talk much with you, for the prince of this world

cometh and hath nothing in me.” Now, here he refers to the “world” as being under Satan, but again the believers are excluded. John chapter 16, verse 11, contains the same expression. Satan is called “the prince of this world.” In fact, it’s possible that the term “world” here has the sense of world system and not so much a reference to the individuals only secondarily if at all.

Turn back to chapter 7 of the Gospel of John. Chapter 7 of the Gospel of John. “A brethren of our Lord said to him, ‘Depart from here and go into Judea that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.’” Well now, is that to every single individual? No, he just said to go up to Jerusalem. Furthermore, they are excluded. They’ve already seen those things. So what he means here is something like the general public. “Go up and show yourself to the world.”

So you can tell just from these simple instances that when we talk about the term “world,” we’re not necessarily talking about every single individual. Johannine thought, I think, makes it very plain that when John says, “He’s the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world,” that he’s talking about the fact that the Lord Jesus came to do not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles. The people of God are made up of Jews from the nation and of Gentiles from the nations.

Well, let me summarize one or two things here then from what we’ve learned from this passage and then I want to say something of a more general character for a few minutes. In summary, you can see that the penal idea of the death of our Lord is found again. “He’s the propitiation for our sins.” The idea of satisfaction is there too, but it’s a satisfaction that is rendered to God because Jesus Christ pays the penalty for sinners. Furthermore, you notice that the propitiation here is equivalent to the taking away of sins by satisfaction. The innocent, the righteous one, takes the place of the guilty, and renders that owed to God. This representative substitution which is referred to here is thereby set

out as the Johannine teaching. In paganism man propitiated his gods and religion became a form of commercialism and indeed of bribery. But in Christianity, it's God who propitiates his wrath by his own action.

Now, what about the intent of our Lord's death? Did our Lord come intending to save everybody, or did he come intending to save his people? We're not asking the question, "Was his death sufficient for the salvation of all? Was it sufficient in value to satisfy the death that all men owed?" No question about that, for Jesus Christ is an infinite person, and his death has infinite value being a divine person. Therefore, his death is sufficient payment for the sins of every individual. The question is, "Did he intend to save everybody or did he intend to save his people?" This text certainly supports the idea of the sufficiency of Christ's atonement for all, and some believe that's all the sense that it has. John Calvin wrote some words on this text that make the point, that as far as he was concerned, he accepted the fact that this text did teach the sufficiency of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of all. But let me read you what Calvin said. He says this. He's commenting on, "and not for ours only." He put this in for amplification, "that believers might be convinced that the expiation made by Christ extends to all who by faith, embrace the gospel.

Well, here the question may be asked as to how the sins of the whole world have been expiated. I pass over the dreams of the fanatics who make this a reason to extend salvation to all the reprobate and even to Satan himself. Such a monstrous idea is not worth refuting. Those who want to avoid this absurdity have said that Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world, but effectively only for the elect. This solution is commonly prevailed in the schools." In other words, that's what people have ordinarily taught before Calvin. "Although I allow the truth of this, I deny that it fits this passage, for John's purpose was only to make this blessing common to the whole church. Therefore, under the word "all" he does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe, and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth. For as is

meat, the grace of Christ is really made clear when it is declared to be the only salvation of the world.” So Calvin is saying then, that the word “all” does not include the reprobate, it refers to those who would believe, and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth. They were comprehended by the death of Christ.

Now, that reminds me of a passage back in John chapter 11, and I think it'd be good for us to turn there for just a moment. It's John chapter 11 in verse 51 and 52, and you'll remember it being in the context of the passage that has to do with Caiaphas the high priest. Verse 49, says, “And one of them named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year said unto them, “Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spoke he not of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only.” Doesn't that sound exactly like, “He's the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only?” “And not for that nation only, but that he also should gather together in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

In other words, John is saying, “Caiaphas spoke some words which he didn't really understand. He prophesied even though he was an unbeliever because by the providence of God, he said words that were true. He said, “One man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” John says, “He didn't really know what he was saying, but those words of his are true, and what was meant by them was that he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that he should gather together in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad.” In other words, that his death would be not simply for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. That's what John thinks of when he thinks of the “whole world.” “He's the propitiation for our sins, but not for ours only; the sins of the whole world; the sins of Jews and Gentiles.”

People get awfully excited when you talk about the fact that Christ came to die for his people. Why, I don't know. Because in the final analysis, if we accept the doctrine of

the election of the saints of God, which is taught on hundreds of pages of the Bible; in the final analysis, whether you think that Christ died for all people, or whether you think that he died with the intent of saving his people, his people are going to be saved. Not a single person is not going to be in heaven because they misunderstood the design of the atonement. The same number of people are going to be there, because he's going to save all of his people.

So in my opinion, this text affirms that all without distinction are the objects of his propitiation but not all without exception. Does the text teach universalism? No, it doesn't teach universalism. That's shown to be contrary to the teaching of the Bible in many, many places. If we were to take these words as meaning the “whole world” then, of course, every individual, then we'd have to be either a universalist or we would have to change “He's the propitiation” to “He may be the propitiation. He could be the propitiation,” but not “He is the propitiation.” In other words, we'd have to add a condition; make it a conditional propitiation; conditional upon certain other things taking place.

When we are taught in the Bible that Christ died as a substitute, the nature of divine substitution demands that the ones for whom he died go free, for their penalty is paid. If their penalty is paid, how can heaven bring further charge against them? If he's paid all of their debt, what do they owe? So it is clear that when we read that he is a substitute, he saves those for whom he is the substitute. Substitution ensures the salvation of those for whom Christ died. Well, there's no need, I think, for us to labor the point. I think, you can see, that if you believe that Jesus Christ intended to die for the whole world, then he was frustrated in his saving ministry, because the whole world is not going to be saved. So he tried to do something which he was unable to accomplish. Or looking at it another way, if he really intended to save the whole world, and if we believe that the Holy Spirit intends to save the people of God, and does save them by bringing conviction and conversion to them, and if the Father has elected a certain people, then

we have the Father working to save his people. The Spirit bringing salvation to his people, but the second person of the Trinity, I don't want to speak caustically, sarcastically, unaware of the plans and purposes of the other two members of the Trinity, and trying to do something that they are not trying to do. But if we have a unity and harmony in the godhead, and the Father has elected a people of God, and the Spirit applies the salvation to this elect people of God, it's clear that when Jesus Christ came to offer the sacrifice, that he would offer the sacrifice for the people of God. He intended to save them, and he did save them, and he purchased for them, their salvation when he died, and he purchased also the faith by which they believe.

Do you remember John Owen's famous little statement on, “For whom did Christ die?” John Owen said, “The Father imposed his wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for either: one, the sin, all the sins of all men; two, all the sins of some men; or three, some of the sins of all men. In which case,” Mr. Owen went on to say, he was probably the greatest of the English theologians, “in which case, it may be said, A) that if the last be true, that is, the Father imposed his wrath on the Son for some of the sins of all men, “that if the last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so none are saved. That if the second be true then Christ in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world”; that's if he died for all the sins of some men. And Owen adds, “And this is the truth.”

And then with reference to the first of the possibilities, that he died for all the sins of all men. “But if the first be true, why are not all men free from punishment due unto their sins, if he died for all the sins of all men? Why are not they free? You answer,” Mr. Owen said, “Because of unbelief.” I ask, “Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it or he did not. If he did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died? If he did not die for unbelief, then he didn't die for all their sins.” I never have found any effective answer to the things that Mr. Owen says, so it appears to me, that when we read, “He's the propitiation for our sins,

and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world,” he’s talking about an effective substitution. It is effective for the sins of the saints, and for the sins of the whole world, and the reference is not only for saints who are believers, but also for the saints who are Gentiles.

Now, there are some who’ve had another interpretation of this. They’ve said that, “He’s the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of all the people down through the years who will in the future, being part of the people of God, come to faith in Christ.” Well, that’s a possible interpretation, but, I think, the other holds water, makes sense, is true to the context here, is true to the context of the Johannine literature, is true to theology. And why do we want any other sense, than that which is true to Johannine theology, true to the context, true to the context of the Johannine teaching, effectively meets the objections that are lodged against universal atonement, and satisfies the saint who realizes that the door is not shut on the salvation of any sinner, all sinners are invited to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if they don’t want to come, then they get exactly what they want. So why we should find difficulty with this, I don’t know.

There is one final passage we’ll take just a quick look at because it says much the same thing as the other. In the outline, it’s “Christ’s Death in the Epistle: 1 John chapter 4, verse 10”. And here we read, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Now, this text affirms the same points that we’ve already gone over. “There is a need for satisfaction, because we have sins,” he says. Look again. He said, “He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” And second, the provision is made by “his Son.” “He sent his Son.” Now, back in chapter 2, verse 2, we read, “And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world, and he’s called Jesus Christ the righteous.” Here it is “his Son.” The source of the propitiatory work of our Lord is seen more clearly here because we’re definitely told here that the source of the propitiatory work is the love of

God. Look at verse 10 again. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

So again, biblical propitiation is distinguished from pagan propitiation. Pagan propitiation is the bribing of an angry god or a god who is demanding certain things of his people, which may be satisfied by some kind of bribe. Here we have the God who is satisfied by the death of Christ loving the saints and himself providing the remedy for their sins. So it is the appeasement of the wrath of God, by the love of God, through the gift of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. That really is the heart of the gospel, isn't it? That we are sinners. That God has loved us. And that he has given the propitiation for our sins. We could not save ourselves. We have an infinite debt that we owe. There was no possible way in which we could get up a sufficient bribe, in order to bribe this deity. He's not that kind of deity at all, but he has loved us and given the Son to die for us. That, it seems to me, is the heart of the Johannine teaching concerning the death of Christ.

Well, let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these wonderful passages that so beautifully expound the nature of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee that the text reads that, “He is the propitiation for our sins” not “may be, can be, could be, potentially is, conditionally is” but “he is.” And we thank Thee that he's the propitiation, not only for the sins of the Jewish believers, but also for the sins of Gentiles as well. And we thank Thee for this present age, in which God is accomplishing his wonderful purpose of bringing into the body of Christ both Jews and Gentiles, and making them one in Christ, so that we have one new man.

We thank Thee that the Gentiles have been made fellow heirs, fellow partakers of the promise, fellow members of the same body with the ancient saints of the nation Israel. How wonderful it is to know, that we have actually entered into the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant and may be called the children of Abraham. We are grateful to

Thee, Lord. Thou hast been so wonderful to us in marvelous grace. Enable us to serve Thee and to please Thee in our daily life, to give true testimony to Thy grace. Give us boldness. Give us earnestness. Give us zeal. Guided by the teaching of the word of God, and the reaching of others, enable us to do Thy will, we pray. If there are some here, who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, this great propitiation for sins, draw them to him through the Holy Spirit, and may they enjoy the forgiveness of their sins.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.