

**Romans 3:21-25, 27-28**  
**Pentecost 2; June 18, 2017**

Humans love to play the blame game. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the Devil. Democrats blame Republicans. Republicans blame Democrats. Everyone blames the media. When everything else fails, it's always Mom's fault. When something bad happens, it's always someone else's fault. Such is the life of a "scapegoat."

*SCAPEGOAT.* We've all heard the term. We have all made someone a scapegoat in order to direct the blame away from ourselves. I would imagine, that we have all been the scapegoat for someone else's sinful actions. We understand what a scapegoat is. But do you know where the idea of a scapegoat comes from? It comes from the book of Leviticus.

In the worship life of the Israelites, there was one day that was bigger than all the rest. It was called the Great Day of Atonement. It was the one day that the High Priest, and only the High Priest, would be allowed to go into the most sacred place of the Tabernacle. It was the Most Holy Place. It was the place where God dwelled as symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant. On that Day, two goats would be chosen. The High Priest would cast lots between the two goats. One goat would be offered as a sin offering for the High Priest. Its blood would be sprinkled on the most the top of the Ark of the Covenant. The other goat was chosen to be the scapegoat (Leviticus 16). The high priest placed his hands on the scapegoat and confessed Israel's sins over it before sending it into the wilderness to die. There was no shepherd to guide and protect the goat. There was no one to rescue it. As the goat was released into the wilderness, its fate was sealed. It was going to die a cruel death all alone. The innocent would die for the guilty.

Would it not have made more sense if God had devised a system of atonement where sinners suffered for their own commandment-breaking? Shouldn't they earn forgiveness by paying with their own pain for the wrong they've done? You would confess your wrongdoing to the priest, turn around, put your hands on the altar, and take the whipping you deserve for whatever sin you committed. You would spill your guts and receive a spanking. Doesn't that seem to make more sense?

But that's not what happened. A guilty Israelite did not even get his finger pricked to put a drop of his own blood on the altar. Instead the sins of the people were placed onto a scapegoat, and then it was sent into the wilderness to die. And the sinner would go home with his sin atoned for.

That scapegoat was a yearly reminder, a picture, that there was someone coming who would be THE SCAPEGOAT. That someone, of course, was Jesus. The sins of this world, your sins and my sins, would be placed on Jesus, the Scapegoat. This Old Testament sacrifice of atonement pointed ahead to the New Testament sacrifice of atonement of Jesus, the Christ.

What does that word *atonement* mean? Our sins separated us from God. We didn't want to walk with him in the garden. We wanted to hide like Adam and Eve. We have those skeletons hidden deep in our closet, hoping that God wouldn't see it. We were enemies of God by nature, not wanting anything to do with Him – no praise, prayer, worship or will. Yet, God provided a way that we could once again be *at one* with God. God made us "at one" with Him through the sacrifice of atonement.

That's the picture behind the words of the Apostle Paul: **"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood."** When Paul is speaking about the **"sacrifice of atonement,"** he is not speaking about the death of an animal. He is speaking about the death of the Son of God.

Our sins against God's will should draw God's wrath down upon us. We should be punished for our sins. We should be spanked, and slapped, and whipped, and made to feel miserable every moment of every day. We should be grounded for an eternity in hell.

But that's not what happens. Our sin and guilt and rebellion was laid on Jesus. He became the sacrifice of at-onement. He reconciled us to God by giving His perfection for our sins. He gave His righteousness to cover our rebellion. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. By His wounds, we are healed. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The Lord made His life an offering for our sin.

As we look at the world of today, it is easy for us to draw the conclusion that the guilty should be punished. It's easy to point our finger at all the people who doing such wrong and evil things. It's easy for us to think of ourselves as people who are pretty good, at least, in comparison to others. Dear friends, we are NOT good people. At least, not 100% of the time. By ourselves, we can NEVER win the approval of God.

Remember the Rubik's cube? A puzzle invented in 1974. Six sides and six colors. I could never get that thing figured out, at least not very quickly. Even with the cheat sheets, it would take quite some time. Have you noticed how the puzzle has made a comeback lately? I've watched some of our students in school do it. But even as fast as they can do it, I don't think they can beat the world record of 5.5 seconds. Yet, if someone could do it faster, no one can do it in no time at all. As good as we might be in this world, we always **"fall short of the glory of God."**

That's the beauty of Jesus, isn't it? We should have our mouth washed out with soap for every time we may take God's name in vain. We should have our hands slapped every time we reach for something that is harmful to our body. We should have the skeletons in our closets emptied and opened for all to see. Christ lived the life we could not live. He took the punishment we could not take. He now freely offers this salvation to us as a gift.

**"Boast in it."** Repent that your sins caused the innocent Lamb of God to die in your place. It was your sins that sent the Scapegoat of Christ to die in the wilderness. Believe the forgiveness that is yours in Christ. That's real atonement. Amen.