

## **The Two Scenes of the Stories of Our Salvation**

Sermon April 11, 2021

Scripture readings: Leviticus 16:1-22 and Matthew 27:50-51

Golden verse: *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”* Isaiah 43:1.

In the life of Jesus Christ, the greatest person in the history of the world, events take place, in two scenes.

There is always a heavenly scene and an earthly scene. In order to understand the two scenes and the stories, we need to see both scenes clearly and look at those events in parallel.

To understand Jesus Christ’s mission, we have to go back to the very beginning of the Old Testament, where we see that the first couple, Adam and Eve, who rebelled against God’s decisions, were cast out from Paradise. Their punishment was to live outside of Paradise, and eventually die. In Romans, we read: *“For the wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23/a)

But the Loving God did not want to push away the sinners from Him. For this, God prepared us a way out from sin, so that our sins would be forgiven and we join God’s company again. God decided that the sin has to have consequences and the sinner has to be punished.

What would happen in our world if the sin would not be condemned and the sinners would not be forced to take their punishment and consequences?

God introduced a ceremony of purification. Every Israelite, once a year, had to go up to the Temple of Jerusalem and had to present a perfectly healthy, immaculate lamb before the high priest, which was sacrificed on God’s altar. As the person was holding the lamb on the table, symbolically the sins of a person were placed on that pure and immaculate lamb. The person presenting the sacrifice placed the lamb on the altar and had to hold it firmly with both hands until that lamb bled to death. The lamb died on behalf of the person who presented the sacrifice and the blood of the lamb symbolically washed away the person’s sin.

Unfortunately, after a while, the sense of responsibility and love cooled from the heart of mankind, and humans were only artificially presenting the sacrifice. Therefore, God could no longer accept it. The indifference of God’s people was so

great that Paul, in Hebrews, wrote: *“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”* Hebrews 10:4

But God demanded that a man, who had broken the law, be punished for his actions and receive a worthy physical and spiritual punishment for it. As the Heidelberg Catechism is teaching us:

*“God is certainly merciful, but also just. God’s justice demands that sin, committed against his supreme majesty, be punished with the supreme penalty - eternal punishment of body and soul.”* Q & A 11

Then, Q & A 12 continues:

Q. *“According to God’s righteous judgment we deserve punishment both now and in eternity: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God’s favour.”* A. *“God requires that his justice be satisfied. Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.”*

This kind of legislation has been practiced and practiced by all societies. Let’s consider again: if there were no punishment for breaking the law, what would be in this world?

God did not want to destroy mankind. He did not want the death of the sinner, but he did want man to LIVE and live with him in constant communion.

God's just laws needed a solution. Someone had to pay the penalty for a man’s crime.

**There was another very important ceremony to show the sacrifice for sin.**

As we heard from the Scripture reading, behind the altar in the Great Temple of Jerusalem, there was a room called the Holy of Holies. This place was considered Holy, where God Himself placed His throne. In that room, there was the Mercy Seat upon the ark of Moses, where they kept the two stone signs of the Ten Commandments. Only once a year, and only the High Priest, was allowed to enter that room at the presentation of the so-called GREAT Atoning Sacrifice, when the high priest sacrificed one lamb in the name of all Israel, took his blood into a vessel, held that vessel in front of him, and sprinkled before him seven times in that room, called the Holy of Holies. That place was covered with a very thick curtain, separating it from the great sanctuary. Please remember this story, because we will come back later, when I will share with you the stories of Good Friday.

Near Jerusalem, just outside of Bethlehem, there was a well-known stable where those lambs were born and raised which were prepared to perform the sacrificial rituals. Specially trained shepherds were watching over these lambs, so they should remain healthy and immaculate, worthy to be sacrificed.

To understand Jesus' mission, it is essential to understand the scene of Christmas, and let me repeat again what we already heard before. When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem to comply with the census law, Bethlehem was so crowded that Mary and Joseph could not find a peaceful place in the city where she could deliver her baby.

They retreated to the stables where these lambs were brought into the world and raised for sacrificial presentation in order to abolish sin. This is the human-earth scene of the Christmas story.

According to his heavenly scene, God timed the birth of Jesus when Bethlehem was so crowded that Mary could only give birth to Jesus in the stable where the lambs raised for sacrifice were born. There, in that stable, was also born the Lamb of God, who came into this world to take away the sins of the world, to be sacrificed for all of us by the High Priest, God the Father Himself, so that, according to his just opinion, someone would pay for you and for me.

Another scene: We all are familiar with the story of TRANSFIGURATION, when Jesus took three of his disciples up a mountain with Him to pray. There, too, events move in two scenes.

Jesus prays to the Father as a man. In the meantime, we get a glimpse of the heavenly scene. Moses and the prophet Elijah appear to Jesus, who strengthen Jesus to keep up His mission and depart for His last journey to Jerusalem.

**On Maundy Thursday evening and Good Friday, events move again in two scenes.**

On Thursday night, Jesus had his Last Supper with his 12 disciples. When Jesus took the bread and gave pieces to His friends, He asked His disciples to break the bread as a sign of His broken body, for soon His body would be broken. When they drank wine after dinner, Jesus gave around a goblet of wine and asked that wine be regarded as His blood, His blood would flow out to give us forgiveness before God. Please notice that the elements of the sacraments, bread and wine are signs and seals of Jesus' broken body and His blood which was shed for us.

**On the evening of Maundy Thursday, after Jesus and his disciples had dined, they went to the mountain of olive trees, where they often spent the night.**

Here, too, something has happened that has a human side and a Divine side. Jesus knew what was before Him. In His terrible human fear, he prayed: “*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*” (Luke 22:42) Because he was so scared, an angel appeared before him to strengthen Jesus.

**I suppose, in heaven, the angels waited in silence for events to take place on earth.**

God used Judas’ weakness to tell the high priests where Jesus was that night. God allowed people to pour out all their anger and their wickedness against Jesus. At the same time, God allowed the people to commit any evil that a human heart could think of, so that we could see for ourselves how evil we could be. Even the most faithful disciple, Peter, denied Jesus three times, even though he had previously said he would give his life for Jesus.

**Human evil did its best to condemn Jesus, though humanly innocent, to death on the cross.**

The high priests wanted to put Jesus out of his way, for He said that they were two-faced, evil, and false. The high priests and the council of the temple did not welcome the truth proclaimed by Jesus.

They, as Jewish people could not sentence another Jewish man to death. The Jews hated the Romans who occupied their country, but they still went to Pilate, the local representative of the Roman Emperor, to force him to issue a death sentence against Jesus. Pilate interrogated Jesus, but he saw no sin worthy of death.

Then the high priests and the leaders of the people resorted to a strange trick. Pilate was told that Jesus was called the King of the Jews by the crowd.

The high priests and the leaders of the people, who hated the Roman Emperor with their hearts, told Pilate that what was said in the crowd about Jesus, that Jesus was KING, was against the reverence of the Roman Emperor. “We have an emperor, not a king,” they said. They threatened Pilate that, if he did not condemn Jesus to death immediately, they would accuse Pilate to the Roman emperor of not condemning a Jewish man who had put himself on the same level with the Roman

emperor. Then Pilate got scared and gave in. One poet put it this way: “With one man more or less, Pilate’s heart will not be heavier.”

So, from an Earthly aspect, hell raged. When Jesus was tortured and spat on, Jesus suffered speechlessly.

In heavenly terms, He took on my dirty clothes, made peace with God, our Father. The agony, the curse, is the price of my sin, but he took it up to Golgotha. His body was broken for me, but He washed away both my sin and your sin.

**When Jesus Christ suffered on the cross, the Father sacrificed.** God the Father, held His Son on the altar in his hands. Jesus died as a pure, flawless, immaculate Lamb, that His blood would wash away my sins, yours and ours.

When He said His last word on the cross, “*IT IS FINISHED*”, He declared that His mission had been accomplished. He did His best not to hold you and me accountable for our mistakes, for Jesus took upon himself the punishment of our sins, like the lamb who had been sacrificed for a person before.

And now I return to the story we heard about the Holy of Holies. “*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” (Matthew 27:51) When Jesus died on the cross, God gave us a sign that the blood of the Lamb of God had opened the way for us to His throne of mercy and from there to heaven. God pointed out that now a sinner has the opportunity and the right to walk with God, who gives mercy to all those who are approaching Him. The blood of Jesus is enough to forgive our sins and to reunite us with our Heavenly Father.

**YOU ARE SAVED. YOU ARE LOVED BECAUSE JESUS DIED FOR YOU ON THE CROSS. HE PAID FOR ALL YOUR SIN. YOU ARE FORGIVEN. GOD WANTS YOU TO WALK WITH HIM AND TO BE WITH HIM IN HEAVEN. GOD LOVES YOU. REJOICE. AMEN**