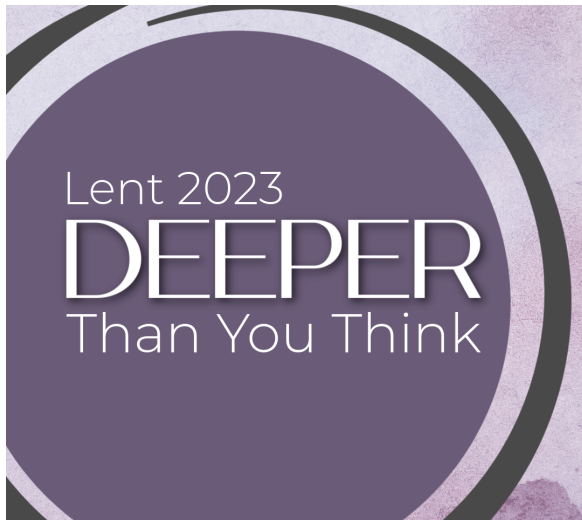


DEEPER THAN YOU THINK: Atonement

March 19, 2023

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Mark 10:43-45

But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase or image stands out to you?
2. **What does it mean to lead?** Jesus teaches his disciples that leadership is about serving, not "lording". What does excellent, faithful leadership mean to you?
3. **Jesus interprets his own life, ministry, and (possibly) death.** What do you think it means that Jesus refers to himself as "giving his

life" and "a ransom for many"?

4. Jesus offers his disciples a unique phrase that has become the source of much speculation by later generations, including how it is that God saves through the life and death of Christ.

See the "Atonement Theories" listed on the back of this guide. Notice how "ransom" becomes a theory.

5. **Atonement means becoming at one with God (at-one-ment).** The bible does not offer any definitive "theory" or "model" that spells out *how* humanity and God are brought together as one through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. What we do have are a collection of metaphors, reflections, and convictions scattered throughout the gospels, Paul's letters, and other New Testament writings. Later theologians used these to come up with their ideas of how it is that God saves. Some denominations have made one of these models into "the only way" to understand salvation and the meaning of Christ's death.

Do any of the atonement theories resonate with your religious past or current spiritual convictions? Why or why not?

6. What does it mean to you that God saves through Christ?

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CLASSIC ATONEMENT THEORIES OR MODELS

1. **Ransom Theory** - humanity is held hostage or “captive” to the devil (or evil) because of sin. Christ makes payment to release the captives, thereby releasing humanity back to oneness with God.

Theologian: Origen, 3rd Century

Historical Context: Debt/Payment metaphors abound in scripture

Key Idea: Freedom from captivity

2. **Christus Victor** - There is a battle between God and Satan/Evil, which is won by Christ. God defeats death by entering into it through Christ.

Theologian: Found throughout the first 1,000 years of Christian history

Historical Context: Battle/War imagery

Key Idea: God is victorious

3. **Satisfaction Theory** - God’s divine honor is injured by human sin, making humanity a “debtor” to God for this injury. No finite gift, offering, or payment can make this right. Only a divine (infinite) one can. Christ makes this payment by his death.

Theologian: Anselm, 11th Century

Historical Context: Feudal shame/honor system. Concerns that Ransom Theory makes Satan/Evil in charge

Key Idea: Satisfying God’s honor

4. **Moral Exemplar** - Christ’s life and death inspires human beings to be more loving.

Theologian: Abelard, 12th Century

Historical Context: reacting to Anselm, trying to account for teachings about love

Key Idea: motivation to love

5. **Penal Substitution** - God’s divine justice has been wronged by sin and requires a punishment/penalty. Human beings are too limited to fully satisfy God’s infinite anger over this injustice. Christ substitutes himself for human beings to satisfy God’s anger and takes the punishment instead of humanity.

Theologian: Luther/Calvin and Protestant reformers

Historical Context: Law, courtroom and punitive ideas of justice

Key Idea: God’s justice

6. **Scapegoat** - Jesus is the scapegoat that ends scapegoating. His death reveals and breaks the violent ways humans make scapegoats of other people and groups.

Theologian: Rene Girard

Historical Context: 20th century anthropology and sociology

Key Idea: breaking cycles of violence