

Jesus Atoned for Sin

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Date: 03 February 2019

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[0 : 00] Well, they did it again. Who? The Israelites. What? They grumbled and murmured again, yet again. Why? Numbers chapter 16 tells us it all started because some Levites and community leaders didn't like Moses and Aaron telling them what to do.

They wanted equal authority themselves. Who do you think you are to set yourselves above the rest of us? You're no holier than we are, they said. We too are holy and the Lord is with us too. So this is Korah and Dathan and Abiram and 250 community leaders. These are the best in Israel. And Korah and his fellow Levites were chosen by God as helpers to the priest. But being helpers to the priest was not dignified enough, was not enough glory for these men.

They wanted to be priests themselves. And so they grumbled against Aaron, the high priest, which the Lord says is really grumbling against him. Because after all, he was the one who established Aaron as their high priest and set Moses and Aaron above the Israelites. They weren't self-appointed.

[1 : 22] As that record at the burning bush shows, God was the one who called them and appointed them. Well, Moses says, this is how we'll know then who the Lord has chosen to be near to him and to lead.

The Lord will show it in the morning who he would have come near him. So Aaron took his censer. Kids, a censer is just a little cup, a container to burn incense in.

And so Aaron, the high priest, whose job it was to burn the incense, took his censer. And Korah and his 250 cronies took their censers, ready to offer fire and incense before the Lord.

And then the glory of the Lord appeared over the tent of meeting to the entire assembly. Sometimes there's a cloud of fire at night, a cloud by day.

And here this glory of the Lord appeared to the entire assembly. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.

[2 : 37] But Moses and Aaron fell face down and cried out, O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?

And so the Lord said to Moses, say to the assembly, move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. So Moses gets up and he goes to Dathan and Abiram and the elders of Israel followed him.

And he warned the assembly, move back from the tents of these wicked men. Do not touch anything belonging to them or you will be swept away. So they moved away from the tents of Dathan and Abiram.

Dathan and Abiram who were standing with their wives and children in front of their tents. And Moses says to the assembly, this is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea.

If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me. So if they just die of old age and die the way people usually die, you'll know that the Lord has not sent me.

[3 : 52] But if the Lord brings about something totally new and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that belongs to them and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt.

When they complained about our leadership, it wasn't us they complained about. They treated God, the Lord, Jehovah as a nobody. And as soon as Moses said that, the ground under them split open, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions.

They went down alive into the grave with everything they owned. And then the earth closed over them and they perished. And at their cries, all the Israelites around them fled shouting, the earth is going to swallow us too.

And then fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense. So with awesome deeds, God was showing who he had chosen to be near him and to lead Israel. That was a day like no other day in the wilderness, in all the 40 years in the wilderness. But in some ways, what happened the next morning is even more staggering than what happened that day.

[5 : 20] The next day, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron saying, you have killed the Lord's people.

Are you kidding? Are you kidding? As if Moses and Aaron had the power to make the earth open up and swallow people alive and to have fire come from heaven and incinerate 250 on the spot?

You have killed the Lord's people, they grumbled. We read in verses 42 to 45, But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the tent of meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared.

Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the tent of meeting and the Lord said to Moses, get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once. And they fell face down.

The third time, they're on their faces, interceding with an offended God to have mercy upon these rebels. Verse 46, Then Moses said to Aaron, Take your censer and put incense in it along with fire from the altar and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them.

[6 : 47] Wrath has come out from the Lord. The plague has started. And so Aaron, God's chosen high priest, is sent in a hurry to make atonement for the rebels.

What's the hurry? God's wrath in the form of a plague had already started spreading among them. Verses 47 to 50, So Aaron did as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly.

The plague had already started among the people. But Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped.

But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the tent of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

So reads the word of God in Numbers chapter 16. And I really wonder if this was one of those passages that our Lord opened up on the road to Emmaus to those two disciples that gave them holy heartburn as the Lord took the things written in the Old Testament and revealed to them the things that were written about himself.

[8 : 06] Because surely in this account, we meet our Lord Jesus, don't we? Let me draw several observations, three observations from the passage.

The point is so clearly to our Lord Jesus Christ. First, we see the incurable cancer of our sin. Moses tried to reason with Korah and these rebellious Levites.

But sin is unreasonable. Have you seen that? Sin doesn't follow the track of reason. It's insanity. And is not cured by divine logic.

So in verses 8 to 11, Moses said to Korah, Now listen, you Levites. Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near to himself to do the work at the Lord's tabernacle and to stand before the community and to minister to them?

He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself. But now you're trying to get the priesthood to? It is against the Lord that you and all your followers have banded together.

[9 : 14] Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him? What divine logic? How can you argue with that? God has already shown kindness and esteem for you Levites and separating you out from the normal Israelite and calling you to work in the temple and to be helpers of the priests.

And yet that's not enough for you. You want the priesthood too. You're not grumbling against Aaron, but God who has made him high priest and who's made you servants to the priests.

This perfectly clear exposure of their sin should have brought them to repentance, but no, it went off like water off a duck's back. Sin is not cured by words and reasoning.

And Dathan and Abiram were no better. Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. It's really a legal term. When a court sends a summons, you must appear. But they said, we will not come.

They disobeyed the summons, showing contempt of Moses' authority. Instead, they sent a cheeky letter that maligned Moses. Verses 13 and 14.

[10 : 26] Isn't it enough that you brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards.

Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come. The first charge Moses is having been blameworthy for having brought them up out of a land of milk and honey.

That's what they call Egypt. Short memories. They were miserable slaves in Egypt. And they refer to it as a land of milk and honey. Well, sure, they had leeks and onions and things that they didn't have in the wilderness, but it was no milk and honey land.

And so they blame them for having brought them out of Egypt. Ungrateful wretches is what Matthew Henry calls them.

for claiming that Moses wronged them in bringing them out of Egypt. And then they accuse him of wanting to kill them in the desert. You brought us out of that nice land of milk and honey to kill us here in the desert.

[11 : 38] How many times Moses had already interceded for these rebels, pleading with God for their lives when God is ready in his anger to wipe them out.

Remember, they made the golden calf. God's angry enough to wipe them out and start all over. And Moses is on his face. He's pleading for mercy for these rebels.

Not trying to kill them. Trying to save them. Trying to keep them alive. Hardly out to kill them. And then they accuse Moses of lording it over them. Will you now lord it over us?

Even God-given authority is viewed as being lording it over us. So unruly that they will not even recognize God's authority over them as it flows through his spokesmen, Moses and Aaron.

That authority was clearly vindicated by the many miracles that God did through Moses. Showing that he was God's man. He's not self-appointed.

[12 : 40] The ten plagues. The dividing of the Red Sea as he holds up the staff above it. The closing of the Red Sea. The water from the rock. The manna from heaven.

The quail. Over and over. No amount of miracles could cure their problem of sin. And their rebellious refusal to be ruled. And then they blame Moses for the consequences of their own sin. You haven't brought us into our inheritance in the promised land. And whose fault was that? When the Lord and Moses had said, now go in and take it. The Lord will be with you.

Now go take it. They refused to go in. It wasn't Moses' fault. It was their unbelief and their disobedience. They could have been in the promised land by now.

Sitting each man under his own fig tree. But no, it's your fault. You haven't brought us in yet. No amount of reasoning, no amount of miracles or kindness could cure their sinning hearts.

[13 : 46] Even the glory of the Lord appearing did not frighten Korah and his followers into confession of their sins and repentance. Stubbornly, they went ahead and offered their incense.

And even the judgments of God didn't cure Israel of their sins. The very reason God's judgments took a new form, a form that had never been seen on the earth before. With the ground just opening up and just swallowing the rebels.

Not a general earthquake or something that just swallowed a whole mass of them. No, it was the rebels. And it opened up, swallowed them alive. And fire just comes down.

It was unique. It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing. And the reason it took that form was to convince them that Moses wasn't acting on his own. This was God who set him up as ruler.

But not even that. Was enough was it to cure them of their rebellion and their not wanting to be ruled by God or his spokesman.

[14 : 47] Because the very next day finds the whole Israelite community united in grumbling against Moses and Aaron as if they had murdered the Lord's people. Amazing hardness of heart.

Clear evidence of the total depravity. The spiritual deadness that we heard of this morning. The blindness. The deafness. The need for a new birth.

That's the incurable cancer of our sin. Because we're only reading here our human nature. Our fallen nature. We too would not be ruled by the Lord, would we?

We would not have God tell us what to do. We each turn to our own way. The incurable cancer of sin. And then secondly, we see in this passage God's wrath is what our sins deserve.

Even our sins of grumbling and complaining. Moses tells Aaron that the great emergency of the situation that should hurry him on his errand is that the wrath has come out from the Lord and the plague has started.

[15 : 55] And we heard it again this morning. We have a world that doesn't believe that there is wrath in God. And yet the Bible shows us that sin is so offensive to his holy nature that the reflex action of who he is, of his character to sin is wrath and indignation.

Could you know what a reflex is? We have these points in our elbows and our knees that if you hit it with a little rubber mallet just right, it causes our arm to jump without even trying. And that's what God's wrath is to sin.

It's the reflex response that whenever you bring sin and offensive it's so offensive to this holy God that his reflex response he cannot help but be indignant against sin.

For all of us lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature following its desires and thoughts like the rest. We were by nature children of wrath.

So we're following our evil desires little thinking about what's the response in heaven? Well, you are a child of wrath. You are an object of wrath by your very nature and its expressions.

[17 : 08] It's obnoxious to God's settled wrath and indignation. He's far more holy than we realize. Romans 2 because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you're storing up wrath against yourselves for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed God will give to each person according to what he's done for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger tribulation and anguish.

So our great need is to be saved from the wrath to come. And that was the great emergency that hurried Aaron on his way. The plague of God's wrath has started.

So our incurable sin problem that provokes God's wrath And lastly, God's only remedy is atonement. Atonement for sin.

And here's where we can't help but see our Lord Jesus. He's pictured everywhere in this account.

We see him in Moses the mediator standing between God and man.

When God's wrath threatened to put an end to them at once it's Moses who's down on his face pleading with God to have mercy upon them.

[18 : 29] And it's not the first time and it won't be the last time that we read of that happening in the book of Numbers. What patient love and pity for undeserving rebels.

And what a sweet picture of our mediating Jesus. Because there really is only one mediator between God and men. The man, Christ Jesus.

Not saints, not Mary. Not our parents. No one can mediate for us before God but the man, Christ Jesus.

Bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh. Who became like us in every way except sin. To identify with us, to represent us before God.

Precious mediator to come between this holy God and sinful humanity. To reconcile us to God.

What do we owe to this mediator, mediator Jesus and his merciful work of mediation.

[19 : 34] Then we see our Lord Jesus in Aaron. And who's Aaron? He's the high priest who makes an atonement for sin. And Moses said to Aaron, take your censer, put incense in it along with fire from the altar and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them.

Wrath has come out from the Lord, the plague has started. So Aaron did as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. What a scene. The distinguished high priest of Israel in his distinctive garb running, running.

It reminds us of that father in Jesus' story in Luke 15, doesn't it? Running to meet his prodigal son who is now returning. And we're told that fathers in Israel don't run.

Kids run. Not fathers. But this father's running. And it's his love for his son that won't let him walk.

It's his joy to receive back his returning son that causes him to run. And that's our Jesus running with love and joy to welcome repentant sinners like you and me.

[20 : 56] And now here in number 16 is not a running father but a running high priest. That's even more rare. If it's, if running was something that a father in Israel wouldn't do, it's certainly something that a high priest who is a father but more than a father is the high priest.

Certainly you wouldn't find them running. But he is. He's pulling up his high priestly robe with his left hand and carrying the censer in his right hand.

And he's running. What's the hurry? Whatever can account for this rare sprint? Well, it's the plague of God's wrath that has already started. And surely in this running high priest we're meant to pause and to adore the heart of our great high priest Jesus Christ.

He saw me plunged in deep distress. He flew to my relief. For me, he bore the painful cross and carried all my grief.

He set his face as a flint to go to the cross at Jerusalem. He let nothing deter him. It was a straight line. It was to get there and to, he went willingly. He went eagerly. He flew to my relief to save me from the coming wrath.

[22 : 12] And let's never forget that Moses and Aaron are interceding and are hurrying to save the very ones who hated them. The very ones who grumbled against their authority, who despised their authority, falsely accused them as murderers.

Matthew Henry says they are the best friends their enemies have. They're hurrying to save their enemies. And our mediating high priest hurried to save us who had despised and rejected him and said, we will not have this man to rule over us.

And we snubbed him. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And it was our sins that gave him grief.

And yet it was for us that he's hurrying to make atonement. to save us from the wrath of God.

So Aaron comes running into the midst of this assembly and what a scene meets his eyes. The plague has already been mowing people down by the thousands, we're told.

[23 : 22] And then there's this strange statement. He stood between the living and the dead. The only way I can account for that statement is to think that it must have been like a huge sickle of God's wrath.

It was just coming through the assembly. Mowing people down by the thousands. And as Aaron runs into the midst of them, he makes his way into the midst of them.

And here's the sickle of God's wrath. And on the one side were 14,700 corpses, the dead. And on the other side of Aaron are the terrified living as they're seeing death coming their direction.

A dramatic scene that surely tells a story and sets an undeniable truth before the eyes of these who had no ears to hear that the only thing that separates us, the living, from them, the dead, is that high priest, Aaron, that we have despised and rejected.

It's the only thing that can account between the difference of the living and the dead is this one who's standing in the midst between them. Surely, we see the Lord Jesus in this high priest that we despised and rejected.

[24 : 48] So we see him in Moses, the mediator. We see him in the high priest, Aaron. We see the Lord Jesus lastly and the atonement itself, the sacrifice that's offered to turn away God's wrath, the sacrifice that secured life and saved them from death.

And so this dramatic scene continues. There's this huffing and puffing high priest now standing between the living and the dead and he offers the incense and he makes atonement for the people and only then does it happen that the plague stopped.

It stopped. It was sweeping through the camp but upon meeting the atonement it stopped. Death was stopped dead in its tracks.

Not one more life was taken and here we can't help but see the work of our Lord Jesus our great high priest. But there is a huge difference, isn't there, between the type, Aaron, and the antitype, the Lord Jesus.

Aaron simply makes an atonement with his censer and then he goes back to Moses. All it cost him was a run. But when the great and the real high priest, Jesus Christ, stood between the living and the dead at Calvary, the plague of God's wrath would not be turned aside by a mere censer with incense in his hand.

[26 : 15] No, this would require that the high priest himself becomes the sacrifice. And that's what Hebrews tells us in 7.27 that this high priest sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

He is the offerer and the offering. Never before, never after. as a high priest become the offering, the atonement.

Dying the death, sinners deserve to die under God's wrath. So Jesus is himself the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice that turns the wrath of God away from us by having it fall upon himself.

This, then, is the death of deaths in the death of Christ. The death of death at Calvary, the sickle of death, finds its satisfaction in the flesh of our high priest, Jesus Christ, who dies under God's wrath in the place of favored sinners.

There was no other way for God's wrath to be satisfied. No other way for God's indignation to be pacified. Our substitute absorbed the full blow himself, leaving none for us.

[27 : 32] And that's why the Bible says there is no condemnation left for those who are in Christ Jesus. because in Christ there's there's nothing left of condemnation and wrath.

No second death where death has already fallen. No lake of fire where sin has already been punished. It was condemnation at Calvary and he took it willingly becoming the atoning sacrifice himself.

And so he who had no sin became sin for us, bore the wrath, took the blame, bore the wrath, we stand forgiven at the cross. The plague of God's wrath against us is stopped once and for all.

Never again wrath for those in Jesus Christ. What is the value of this atonement that we're remembering tonight? I wonder, friend, do you have a share in it?

Have you been to Calvary, the one place in all the universe where the plague has stopped? Have you been to Christ where infinite wrath has already fallen, judgment has fallen?

[28 : 44] Have you obeyed the gospel command to repent and believe on Jesus? Because though the sacrifice has been made, it is applied to none but those who trust in this Savior. As we heard this morning, you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ if you would not perish.

The last verse of John 3 says, he who disobeys the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him. The work of Christ on the cross is applied only and always to those who repent and believe and his invitation is come to me, take me, trust in me.

He stood between the living and the dead and the plague was stopped. Precious words for us tonight as we take the Lord's Supper and all of us who have life know that the only reason we're not like those who are yet dead in their sins and under God's wrath is because of the atonement of this high priest, this great mediator, Jesus Christ.

It reminds us of another dramatic scene yet future revealed in Matthew 25 when our Lord Jesus Christ returns, not the second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him and there on one side of him will be the living and on the other will be the dead and the living will hear from his lips, come, welcome you who are blessed by my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world and those on the other side of our Lord will hear those words, depart from me, you who are cursed, I never knew you.

Another dramatic separation with the Lord Jesus standing between the living and the dead and all of us who are hearing those words of blessing will know that the only reason we are not following that group into eternal torments is the one who is seated now upon his throne who once was hanging on a cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and how we will sing in that day worthy is the lamb that was slain.

[31 : 09] This is what has made us to differ from all eternity and that's why it will tune our song for all eternity. Blessed cross, blessed Jesus, blessed mediator, blessed high priest, blessed atoning sacrifice that has forever saved us from the wrath of God.

And blessed Father who loved us so much that he sent his one and only son to be that propitiating sacrifice to save us from God's wrath. And blessed Holy Spirit who sustained our Lord Jesus under that whole journey to the cross and the whole enduring of the cross until he could cry it is finished that blessed Holy Spirit who came to our hearts and gave us new birth and opened our eyes so that we could see our need of this great Savior and trust in him.

The logic should be clear to us who are in Christ that if God did not spare his own son to save us from wrath but delivered him up for us all how can we withhold anything from the Lord?

Love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all Amen. Amen.