

The Greatest Theme in the World

by

F. D. Marsh

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CHAPTER FIVE

CHRIST AND HIS ATONEMENT

There were two large pillars at the entrance of the temple of Solomon, which were named **Jachin** and **Boaz**. The meanings of these names are suggestive. **Jachin** means "*He will establish,*" and **Boaz**, "*In Him is strength.*"

There are two great pillars of truth at the entrance of the temple of CHRIST's teaching about His death, the understanding of which will establish us in salvation and sanctification, and give us strength in service, and these two truths are, *the necessity and the nature of His atoning death.*

CHRIST's Death: Its Necessity.

Without going into the many-sidedness of the necessity of CHRIST's death, such as *Justice demanded it* (Ezekiel 18:4-9), *Law required it* (Galatians 3:13), *Sin called for it* (Romans 4:25), *Wrath is met by it* (Romans 5:9), *Holiness is upheld by it* (Romans 3:26), *Mercy ministers because of it* (Luke 24:46, 37), *Wisdom is displayed by it*, *Power is communicated through it* (1 Corinthians 1:24), and *God is glorified by it* (Ephesians 5:2), I refer to CHRIST's own teaching about the necessity of His death.

There are three passages of Scripture in which CHRIST distinctly and definitely refers to the necessity of His death, and in these He is seen in the three characters of the Baptized Sufferer, the Dying Corn of wheat, and the Uplifted Saviour.

1. *The Baptised Sufferer*

"I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I [72] straitened till it be accomplished?" (Luke 12:50). Rotherham paraphrases the words, "But an immersion have I to be immersed with, and how am I distressed till it be ended?" CHRIST's baptism on the Cross was symbolized by His baptism in Jordan. There are three things we may ponder as we take the one event as an illustration of the other. When was CHRIST baptised, where He was baptised, and who baptised Him.

When was CHRIST baptised? The skilled artist has no superfluous touches in his painting. He is not only guided by the law of perspective, but by the law of unity; that is, every touch has a relation to the picture as a whole. The same is true of the HOLY SPIRIT as He depicts the Lord JESUS in His baptism. He says of Him, "**Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptised of Him**" (Matthew 3:13).

That adverb of time "**Then**" is like a red life-buoy upon a sea scene, it strikes the eye of meditation at once. What was John doing at the time? Baptizing the people in Jordan upon the confession of their sins (Matthew 3:6). But CHRIST had no sins to confess, therefore, John was perfectly justified in refusing to baptize Him.

While CHRIST had no sin personally to confess, He had sins representatively.

In one of the prophetic Psalms of His sufferings He speaks of "**My sins**," "**My reproach**," and "**My shame**" (Psalm 69:5, 19). Personally this could not be true of Him, but representatively it was. Rotherham's commentary of Hebrews 1:3 gives the same thought; it reads, "When He made purification for Himself." As the Head of the Church He acted for His mystical body, in answering for the sin of the members. As GOD the Son, in the intrinsic worth of His personality, there was no need for Him to make purification, but as the Son of GOD, as the representative of the sons of [73] GOD, He acted for them, and thus in His action they acted.

John's objection was overruled by CHRIST's word, "**Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.**"

CHRIST in figure met the claim of righteousness in dying for the sinner, that the believing sinner might have a claim to the righteousness which is by faith in Himself.

The HOLY SPIRIT has distinctly stated that CHRIST was "**numbered with the transgressors**" (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:37), and may we not say as a transgressor? Dr. Denney says, "It would not have been astonishing if JESUS had come from Galilee to baptize along with John, if He had taken His stand by John's side confronting the people; the astonishing thing is, being what He was, He came to be baptized and took His stand with the people. He identified Himself with them. As far as baptism could express it, He made all that was theirs His. It was a great act of loving communion with our misery."

He was numbered with us in our misery, and we are now numbered with Him in His merit. It is not without significance that the word "**numbered**," which speaks of CHRIST being identified with sinners, is the same as applied to believers by GOD, when He reckons to them the worth of His Son.

The word translated "**reckon**," "**impute**" and "**counted**" in Romans 4, which are one and the same in the Greek, is applied to CHRIST being reckoned with the thieves as a thief in Mark 15:22; Luke 22:37.

Who baptised CHRIST? **John**. John was the representative of the majesty of GOD in law. He was the last of the prophets, who had to do with the Old Dispensation, hence, CHRIST says of

him, in contrast to those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven, "**He that is least in the Kingdom of [74] Heaven is greater than he**" (Matthew 11:11): not greater in character, but greater in privilege.

CHRIST identifies Himself with John by saying of His baptism, "**Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.**"

Here are two parties, each has a role to perform. John's part is the part of GOD's Holy Law. The Law must inflict its penalty, or GOD's attributes are forfeited. JESUS' part is '**to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**' (Hebrews 9:26), to be "**made sin for us**" (II Corinthians 5:21), to be made a curse (Galatians 3:13), to once suffer for sins, the just for the unjust (I Peter 3:18). "So, it be cometh us - thee and Me, each to bear His part."

Where did John baptize JESUS? In Jordan. Gosse says of the river Jordan, "The river, like so many things in Jehovah's land, was a symbol of solemn, mystic significance. Physically, it is a river absolutely unique in the whole world; cleft in the very bowels of the whole earth; being, at its issue from the Lake of Galilee, far below the sea level; and ever plunging lower and lower, by twenty-seven distinct descents, till it empties into the Dead Sea, that horrid, yawning chasm of salt and pitch, and desolation, whose surface is actually 1,300 feet below the Mediterranean; the awful grave of those guilty cities, which are '**set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.**' Throughout the Scripture this wondrous river of death stands as the type of penal death - of death issuing in hell. Its very name is a parable, whether we accept the etymology of the word, the 'downward plunger,' or the other which means 'the river of judgment' - the older and perhaps the better one."

CHRIST went beneath the waters of the downward plunger, this river of judgment. The whelming of waters is a frequent figure of the punitive wrath of GOD.

One Hebrew word, which is frequently used, means to wash thoroughly, [75] to drown, to overflow, and is frequently used to denote a calamity, an overflowing devastation (see Isaiah 8:8; 10:22; 28:2, 15, 17; 30:28; 43:2). It is used by CHRIST in Psalm 69:2, when He says, "**I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow Me.**" The same word as "**overflow**" is rendered "**drown**" in Song of Solomon 8:7, where we read of love - "**many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.**"

CHRIST was drowned beneath the waters of judgment for us, but those waters could not drown His love for us, and now He assures us, because of what He has done for us, the waters "**shall not overflow us**" (Isaiah 43:2).

2. The Dying Corn of Wheat.

"**Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit**" (John 12:24). The association of the word "**except**" in John's Gospel lays down the rule - "A condition must be fulfilled before the end can be attained."

- GOD's presence is a necessity to do His miracles - "**Except God be with Him**" (John 3:2).
- The new birth is a qualification to enter into and see the Kingdom of GOD - "**Except a man be**

born again," etc. (John 3:3).

- The bestowment of a -gift is a pre-requisite to its being received - "**Except it be given**" (John 3:27).

- The sinner must be drawn before he can come - "**Except the Father draw him**" (John 6:44).

- Eating is an essential to life - "**Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man ye have no life in you**" (John 6:53).

- Union is necessary to fruit-bearing - "**Except ye abide in the Vine**" (John 15:4). [76]

- Death is necessary to life - "**Except a corn of wheat,**" etc. (John 12:24).

As long as the seed corn remains unburied it abides alone.

When it is planted in the earth it seems to die, to be lost, but it begins to grow, and by-and-bye it brings forth fruit, fifty, sixty, or a hundredfold; even so with CHRIST. He would have been for ever alone had He not died for us, therefore, it was a necessity that He should go into the blackness of our death, that we might share the blessedness of His life. He went into the lostness of our desert, that we might have the livingness of His grace.

3. *The Uplifted Saviour.*

CHRIST's solemn and emphatic affirmation about His death was - "**The Son of Man must be lifted up**" (John 3:14).

We hear CHRIST ringing the changes on the word "**must.**" From His first recorded utterance till near His ascension He emphasizes the necessity of His mission. We have only to ponder His use of the word "*dei,*" and as we do so, we behold CHRIST under twelve different characters:

1. The Obedient Servant - "**I must be about My Father's business**" (Luke 2:49).
2. The Ardent Servant - "**I must work the works of Him that sent Me**" (John 9:4).
3. The Faithful Teacher - "**The Son of Man must suffer**" (Mark 8:31).
4. The Determined Walker - "**I must walk to-day,**" etc. (Luke 13:33).
5. The Expectant King - "**But first must He suffer**" (Luke 17:25).
6. The Passover Lamb - "**The Passover must be killed**" (Luke 22:7). [77]
7. The Scripture Fulfiller - "**This that is written must be accomplished**" (Luke 22:37).
8. The Crucified CHRIST - "**The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified**" (Luke 24:7).
9. The Explaining Lord - "**Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?**" (Luke 24:26).
10. The Unfolding Teacher - "**All things must needs be fulfilled**" (Luke 24:44).
11. The Gospel Personified - "**Thus it behoved Christ to suffer**" (Luke 24:46).
12. The Uplifted Saviour - "**The Son of Man must be lifted up**" (John 3:14).

Bengel says upon this word "**must**" - "**For this purpose He came down from Heaven.**" We must put it even stronger. He had to come if we were to be saved. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane lends color to this statement. He cried - "**If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me**"; and because it was an impossibility, He drained the cup to the dregs and went on to the bitter end till He could say, with satisfaction to Heaven and earth, and the defeat of hell - "**It is finished.**"

CHRIST'S DE'ATH: ITS NATURE

There is no uncertain note in the teaching of CHRIST as to the nature of His atonement.

He speaks of:

- a momentous hour in His life's history (John 12:27),
- a great gift He would bestow (John 6:5 1),
- a substitutionary act He would perform (Matthew 22:28),
- an exceptional work He would accomplish (Luke 12:50),
- a unique love He would manifest (John 15:9, 13),
- a vital blessing He would secure (John 12:24), and [78]
- an unsurpassed glory He would, and did, render to His Father (John 17:4).

CHRIST's atonement was vocative in its calling.

CHRIST again and again points to a crisis in His life's history by referring to a momentous hour into which He was to come. That hour was known and anticipated by Him, as may be gathered by the repeated sentence - "**His hour was not yet come**" (John 7:30; 8:20). When this hour's ominous shadow was creeping over Him, then we have the further statement, "**The hour is come**" (John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

The importance and intensity of that hour may be apprehended in CHRIST's interrogation to His Father about it when in heart's anguish He exclaimed, "**Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour?**" (margin). "**But for this cause came I unto this hour**" (John 12:27).

CHRIST felt He could not pray, "Father save Me from this hour," for that hour was the goal of His life. He was called to this hour of woe that we might know the hour of welcome, salvation, and life to which He refers in John 5:25. His star of destiny was the death of Calvary. He fulfilled the plan of the Father in going to the place of sacrifice.

CHRIST's atonement was vicarious in its act.

CHRIST leaves us in no uncertainty about His death being vicarious. He says, "**The Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many**" (Matthew 20:28). Without going into the usage of the preposition "*anti*," rendered "**for**," it is sufficient to remark its meaning is "*instead of*."

"In His death everything was made His, that sin had made ours - everything in sin except its sinfulness." He put His death in all its value over against our sin in all its evil and condemnation. [79]

CHRIST's atonement was voluntary in its gift.

There was no compulsion laid upon Him, other than the impulsion of His own heart of love. Love compels by its impelling. There is no power which moves so mightily as love in the force of its intensity. The HOLY SPIRIT loves to ring the bells of His voluntary love.

The following Scripture sentences in which are the words "**gave**" and "**give**" illustrate the ministry of the Spirit in this direction:-

*What did He give Himself for? "**He gave Himself for our sins**" (Galatians 1:4).*

*Why did He give Himself? "**Who loved me and gave Himself for me?**" (Galatians 2:20).*

*What did He give in giving Himself? "**Who gave Himself a ransom for all?**" (I Timothy 2:6).*

*Who was it Who gave Himself? "**Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it**" (Ephesians 5:25).*

*What was the intent He had in .giving Himself? "**He gave Himself that He might redeem us from all iniquity**" (Titus 2:14).*

The answers to the questions are found in the emphasized words in the Scripture sentence.

Besides the above words of the Spirit embodying the voluntary act of CHRIST in His death, CHRIST Himself emphasized the same. He says, "**The Son of Man came to give His life**" (Matthew 20:28). "**The bread that I will give is My flesh**" (John 6:51); "**The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep**" (John 10:11). His willingness to act for us brings out the intrinsic worth of His action.

CHRIST's atonement was valuable in its completion.

The thought of failure never entered into the calculation of CHRIST. The conclusion to which He had come was the inclusion of all the Father had given Him to do, hence, His [80] dying triumphant cry was, "**It is finished.**"

That word "**finished**" means *to complete, to fulfill, to perfect*.

It is rendered "**gone over**" in Matthew 10:23; "**pay**" in Matthew 17:24; "**performed**" in Luke 2:39; "**accomplished**" in Luke 12:50; 18:31; 22:37; John 19:28; "**fulfil**" in James 2:8; "**filled up**" in Revelation 15:1; "**expired**" in Revelation 20:7; and "**finished**" in Revelation 10:7.

If we embody these words in CHRIST's work we begin to apprehend something of its greatness and completeness.

- He has "**gone over**" all the will of GOD on our behalf (Hebrews 10:12);
- He has paid all the tribute asked by GOD in His righteousness (I Peter 1:18, 19; Exodus 30:11-16);
- He has "**performed**" all the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4);
- He has "**accomplished**" all the prophecies predicted about Him (Luke 24:44);
- He has "**fulfilled**" all the law of GOD in its double requirement of obedience and death. His obedience shows His perfection, and in His death He answers for the disobedient (Philippians 2:8; Galatians 3:13);
- He has "**filled up**" all the havoc made by sin in the believer's life (Romans 5:17-21);
- He has "**expired**" in death on account of sin (II Corinthians 5:21); and
- He "**finished**" every detail of the work which GOD set Him to perform (John 19:28-30).

What he undertook He consummated.

In creation we behold the perfection of His skillful hand, but in redemption we see the production of His loving heart. **"I Know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him"** (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

CHRIST's atonement is vital in its application.

CHRIST's last act before He suffered was the institution of the Lord's Supper. As He took the cup, He said, **"This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for [81] you"** (Luke 22:20). The word "*ekchuno*" means "*poured out.*" "*Chuno*" comes from "*cheo,*" which means *to pour*, and "*ek*" means *out of*, hence, the compound word which signifies *to pour out*. "*Ekchuno*" is rendered "**spilled**" in speaking of the new wine bursting the old skins, into which it had been placed (Luke 5:37); "**gushed out**" in calling attention to what happened, to Judas when he committed suicide, and his "**bowels gushed out**" (Acts 1:18); and it is given "**poured out**" in referring to the HOLY SPIRIT being given to the Gentiles (Acts 10:45).

CHRIST's life was *spilled, poured out, shed* on our behalf. There were no half measures, but an absolute dying out.

To "**pour out**" is a term which is frequently used in the Old Testament in connection with the offerings (Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 4:7, 18,25,30; 8:15; 17:13). The blood poured out, and all of it, is typical of CHRIST Who poured out His soul unto death on our behalf. His life-giving is our life-bringing.

The poured out life of His paschal offering has secured for us the Pentecostal blessing of the Spirit's abundant life.

As the dead body of the man, which touched the dead body of Elisha, rose and revived and stood upon its feet (II Kings 13:21); so contact with the CHRIST in His death brings life to us who were dead in sins. His death for sin saves us from the death of sin, and makes us dead to sin (I Peter 2:24).

CHRIST's atonement is voiceful in its manifestation.

As the Pleiades are said to be the hub of the universe, so CHRIST's word as to the love of GOD to the world is the center of revelation.

John 3:16 is the:

- Gospel in solution,
- grace in its essence,
- truth in its concrete,
- mercy in its ministry,
- love in its source,
- power in its attractability, and

- the heart of [82] revelation.

All GOD has to say and give are expressed by the Living Word in the beauty of His peerless life, and the provision of His sacrificial death. Verily, His death speaketh better things than that of Abel's for his blood cried for swift and executed condemnation upon the murderer, but CHRIST's Blood proclaims just clearance from sin for the sinner. CHRIST is aptly called "**The Word**," for He tells out in all He became, was, is, has done, is doing, and will do, what GOD is.

"Sorrow, sin and desolation, These Thy claim to me.
Love that won me full salvation, This my claim to Thee."

CHRIST's atonement is voluminous in its glory.

One of the last statements of CHRIST to His Father was, "**I have glorified Thee on the earth and finished the work Thou gavest Me to do**" (John 17:4).

Man had not only sinned, but he had come short of the glory of GOD. CHRIST answered for both, for He was not only the Sin-offering bearing the judgment due to sin, but He was the Burnt-offering, bringing glory to GOD by the sweet savour of His perfect obedience unto death. The glory of GOD's handiwork is seen in creation, but the splendor of His heart-work is unveiled at the Cross.

The glory of GOD's grace, the glory of His truth, the glory of His love, the glory of His wisdom, the glory of His riches, the glory of His compassion, and the glory of His worth, are all unfolded and enhanced in the glory which CHRIST made known, "**the glory of the Only-Begotten, full of grace and truth.**" [83]

~ end of chapter 5 ~
