

The Work of Christ
Lon Solomon
McLean Bible Church
October 12, 2008

One of the greatest hymns ever written, and one of my very favorites, is the hymn by Charles Wesley, *And Can It Be*. I want to tell you a little bit about the background, so you'll appreciate this hymn a little more. Charles Wesley was the brother of John Wesley, and Charles himself was one of the great leaders of the Methodist revival that swept England in the 1700s. Charles composed this hymn in May of 1738, two days after he had given his life to Jesus Christ. He composed it as a celebration hymn to his conversion.

It wasn't long after that, that his brother John gave his life to Christ. Right after he did at Aldersgate Chapel, he rushed over to see Charles and tell him about it. The two brothers embraced, and then arm in arm, they began singing a hymn of triumph together. The hymn that they sang was *And Can It Be*, the chorus of which says, *Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me.*

Friends, in this chorus, John Wesley said everything that needs to be said about, number one, who Jesus Christ is—that is, the person of Christ—and number two, what Jesus Christ did—that is, the work of Christ. Look now. Wesley says first of all, *Thou my God*. Who is Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ is God Himself, wrapped in human flesh, fully God and fully man, the God-man. We talked about this last week, and if you missed that, I urge you to get the tape or CD in our BOOKstore or download the message off our website. Second of all, Wesley then went on to say, *that Thou my God shouldst die for me*. What did Jesus Christ do? Well, friends, He died for you and for me.

I believe just about everybody knows that Jesus Christ died on the cross. I was raised Jewish, folks. I never read the New Testament in my life. I'd never been in a church before I was 21 years old, and yet I knew Jesus had died on the cross. Now, I didn't have the slightest idea why Jesus had died on the cross.

I believe there are millions of people just like me in our world today who are in the exact same boat that I was in, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jewish people, Bill Maher, all of them (laughter, laughs), people who know that Jesus Christ died on the cross but who don't have the foggiest idea what His death really means for their lives.

This is what we want to talk about today in part 5 of our series *How Firm a Foundation*. We want to talk about soteriology, which simply means the study of God's plan of salvation for the human race, which was secured for us by the Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

Let's begin today by talking about the problem. You see, the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to fix a problem. Until we fully understand what the problem is, we'll never fully appreciate the remedy that He provided. So the problem begins way back with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If you remember, God only laid one restriction on Adam and Eve. In Genesis 2:17, He said, "From the tree of good and evil in the middle of the garden, you may not eat, for in the day you eat of it, you will surely die." Of course, as all of us know, Adam and Eve did eat from that tree.

You say, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, Lon. You don't really believe that story, do you? You don't really believe there was some literal garden, an Adam and an Eve, do you?" Well, friends, I most certainly do believe it. Let me tell you why I believe it. I believe it because the Lord Jesus Christ believed it. Check it out in Matthew 19:4. I believe it because the apostle Paul believed it. Check it out in both Romans 5:12 and II Corinthians 11:3. I figure that the Lord Jesus Christ knew a lot more about spiritual truth and the apostle Paul knew a lot more about spiritual truth than I know. If they believe the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden, then friends, I believe the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. If you're a follower of Christ, I hope you believe the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden, amen? All right.

Now, with that behind us, let's go on here. You say, "But Lon, there's a contradiction here. Adam and Eve didn't die right away when they ate of that

tree. In fact, Lon, Adam lived to be 930 years old. I should die like that! Listen, you're right. The Bible teaches that mankind incurred a twofold death when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden, both physical death and spiritual death. Physical death came eventually; spiritual death came immediately. See, Adam and Eve had been spiritually alive before they ate from that tree. Genesis 3:8 says, Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden, and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. When God finally flushed them out in verse 10, Adam said, I heard You coming in the garden, and I was afraid, so I hid myself. Now listen, folks. Adam and Eve had never run away from God before they ate from that tree. They had never hidden from God before. They had never been afraid of God before. Something radical had happened inside of them; what had happened is that the spiritual part of their being had died, the part of them where we as human beings connect with the living God in relationship had died. Now Adam and Eve were separated from God. They were alienated from God. They were estranged from God, and they were afraid of God.

You say, Wow, Lon, that's terrible! I feel so sorry for Adam and Eve. Well, it's not that simple, friends, because the Bible goes on to say that every single descendant of Adam and Eve—that's you and that's me—every one of us is born spiritually dead, just like they were. Every one of us comes into this life separated from God and spiritually dead in the same way that they found themselves. Ephesians 2:1 says every human being is born spiritually dead in our sins and our trespasses. We are born with lifeless spirits, dormant spirits. We are born spiritual cadavers, if you will.

You say, All right, so is that a real big problem? Well yeah, it is. It's a big problem for two reasons. Number one is because a person who is spiritually dead cannot have a deep and intimate relationship with almighty God. A spiritually dead person can accept the reality of God in their mind, but they cannot experience the reality of God in their heart, because the part of us that allows us to experience God is not functioning.

Number two, the reason being spiritually dead is a big problem is because a person who leaves this world spiritually dead misses heaven. Listen to what the Lord Jesus said. For God so loved the world that He sent His one-of-a-kind Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life. The key word for our consideration here is the word perish. Jesus said every person who leaves this life spiritually dead is headed for an eternity in which they perish. The Bible says they're going to go to a place that's called hell. Jesus talked about hell more than He talked about any other topic; do you realize that? He told us that hell was a literal place. He told us that it was a place where people are conscious and awake for all of eternity, in agonizing torment. He told us that it's a place where the graces of mercy, love, beauty and kindness do not exist. Worst of all, He told us that it is a place from which there is no escape ever! This is not a myth. Jesus would not have come to earth and died on the cross to save us from a myth. This is a literal situation.

So let's summarize. What's the twofold problem we all face? Number one, we all face alienation from God in this life. Number two, we all face permanent separation from God in hell in the afterlife.

Now that brings us to the work of Christ. Are you guys with me? Are you still with me? Okay. What did Jesus Christ do? What was His work? Well, what Jesus Christ did is that He shed His blood on the cross to deliver us from both ends of this problem, to deliver us from the curse of hell in eternity and to resuscitate our lifeless spirits to God in this life.

You say, Lon, wait a minute. I hear you talking a lot about Jesus shedding His blood and about the blood of Christ. I mean, is that really so central to all of this? Why is that so important? What's so important about the blood of Christ? Well, that's a great question. Let me explain that to you. You see, my friends, God's plan of salvation for sinners has always been based on the principle of a blood covering. God told Adam way back in the Garden that the penalty for his sin would be death. God repeated that throughout the Bible.

Romans 6:23 says, For the wages of sin is death. The Bible says that in His justice, God demands death blood as payment for a person's sin. That's the bad news. The good news is that in His mercy, God allows for substitution. An innocent substitute can shed its blood in my place as a sinner, and God will accept it.

Now in the Old Testament times, God prescribed that this innocent substitute was to be an animal. Talking about those animal sacrifices in Leviticus 17:11, God says, For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it the blood to you to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. In other words, the death blood of that innocent animal offered to God by faith there in the temple in Jerusalem would cover the offender's sin in the sight of God, would protect the offeror from God's justice and, friends, in this protected status covered by the blood, God was now free in His mercy to forgive our sins, to revive our dead spirit and to grant that person eternal life. Are you all with me?

Okay, now this is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. You say, What does that mean? What that means is that God will accept the blood of an innocent substitute to atone for my sins, substitutionary atonement. This concept of substitutionary atonement, this doctrine of the blood covering for sinners is the foundation, the lynchpin of God's plan of salvation for the human race. It runs from cover to cover in the Bible.

Let's go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned, what did God do? Well, Genesis 3:21 says, For Adam and his wife, God made coats of skin and clothed them. Do you see what God did here? He took two innocent animals, shed their blood as a spiritual covering for Adam and Eve, and then He covered Adam and Eve physically with the skins of these animals to help them understand this doctrine, this concept of the blood covering, of substitutionary atonement.

Adam and Eve passed this principle on to their children, to Cain and Abel. Genesis 4 says that Cain brought an offering to God from the fruit of the ground,

while Abel brought a firstling an animal from his flock. Abel came with a blood covering as God had told him to, and God accepted it. But you know, Cain brought his best crop of vegetables and fruit, his best crop of human energy, and God rejected it, as God always will. God's plan of salvation is not based on a fruits and vegetable covering. It's not based on a human works covering; God's plan is based on a blood covering.

Noah brought blood to God. Check it out. So did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job. The whole Old Testament system of sacrifice that formed the foundation of the tabernacle in the temple that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai was all based on the substitutionary atonement by the animal sacrifices that people brought.

The ultimate expression of this truth is found in the Passover events. You'll remember that at Passover, an innocent animal's blood protected the Israelites against the tenth plague as it moved through the land of Egypt. The Israelites were told to take that animal's blood, to put it on the doorposts of their house, and as the destroying angel was moving through and killing the firstborn son of every family in Egypt, God said in Exodus 12:13 here's His promise--
When I see the blood not when I see that you're synagogue members, not when I see that you're Israelites, not when I see that you've been bar mitzvahed, not when I see that you're trying hard to be good people, but when I see the blood and you hiding behind it I will pass over you. The issue that night was who was covered by the blood, who was hiding behind the blood.

So let's summarize and say that all of this is meant to teach us the absolute necessity of the blood covering. Don't miss this. The point is that God is willing to accept the blood of an innocent substitute to satisfy His justice against my sin and let me go free, but God is unwilling to accept anything else.

You say, But Lon, how in the world can the blood of some animal pay for my sin in the sight of God? Well, the answer is it can't. Hebrews 10:4 says,
For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. In the Old Testament days, God accepted animal blood as a temporary covering, a

temporary whitewash for sin, but animal blood could never achieve the final solution, the final satisfaction of God's outrage against sin. To purge the sin of human beings, friends, ultimately God's justice demanded the substitutionary death and lifeblood of a human being. All of this brings us to the work of Jesus Christ.

Look at this. I Corinthians 5:7 says, For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. The reason for calling Jesus our Passover Lamb is clear when we understand the correlation between Christ and that lamb. They were both males. They were both perfect and blemishless. Hebrews 4:15 says that Christ was without sin. They were both killed on the very same day, the 14th day of Nisan in the Jewish calendar. Most importantly, the Lord Jesus Christ's blood, shed on the cross, is the permanent, supreme and final blood covering for us as sinners to hide behind. The Bible says that when we as sinners hide behind the blood of Jesus Christ, just the way those Hebrews hid behind the blood of the Passover Lamb that night in Egypt, then we are protected against God's judgment against sin in the same way those Hebrews were protected that night in Egypt, for the promise of God still stands. When I see the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and you hiding behind it, I will pass over you in judgment, except as I said, the blood we're hiding behind is not the blood of some literal, tangible Passover lamb, but it's the blood of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Now that's a lot to dump on you, so I'm just curious. Is everybody okay? All right.

Now you say, Lon, are you sure you're not reading way too much into this blood thing, huh? Oh, I'm positive, friends. Listen to these Scriptures, and these are just a few. I John 1:7 says, The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Hebrews 9:12 says, By His own blood, He Jesus obtained eternal redemption for us. I Peter 1:18 says, For you were not redeemed from your empty way of life with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. In Matthew 26, Jesus Himself said, This is My blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of

sins. Colossians 1:14 says, In Jesus Christ, we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Revelation 5:9 calls Jesus the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood. Romans 5:9 says, We have all been justified, declared not guilty, acquitted in God's sight by Jesus blood. How about Romans 3:25? We get atonement for our sins through faith in His blood. Is there any wonder then that John the Baptist looked at Jesus in John chapter 1 and said, Behold, the lamb of God, the Passover Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world ?

Friends, the Bible is airtight. There is only one basis upon which God justifies sinners, and it's not good works. It's not church membership. It's not baptism. It's not being a nice person. It's not trying to keep the Ten Commandments. It's not saying the rosary, being bar mitzvahed, being confirmed, or driving the speed limit on the Beltway. It's none of those things. If you hide behind any of that, I'm telling you that you will perish. Our only hope for escape is the blood covering that the Lord Jesus Christ provided for us by His death on the cross.

So to sum up, what is salvation really? What are the working pieces that make the plan of salvation work? Friends, salvation simply means, number one, you and I simply realizing that we are sinners under the judgment of God. It means, number two, repenting and turning away from that sin. Number three is abandoning every other remedy to pay for our sin in the sight of a holy God and taking refuge instead, hiding behind instead the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, just like those Hebrews hid behind the blood in Egypt at the very first Passover.

You say, Well, Lon, wait a minute. I mean, what you're saying makes sense, but it's too easy. It can't be this simple! Why not? Why can't it be? Listen, friends, don't be educated beyond your intelligence. Listen to me. God loves you. God wants everybody to go to heaven. God wants it so simple that a little child can do it. Why would God make it hard? Don't kid yourself. It is this simple, really.

That's as far as we want to go in our theological treatment of the plan of

salvation that the Lord Jesus purchased for us. We want to ask now our most important question of the morning. You know what that is, so are you ready? Nice and loud now, let's wake up and do this. One, two, three SO WHAT?

You say, Lon, so what? All right, I appreciate everything you've said here, but how does this really make a difference in my life? You know, Paul Newman was one of my favorite actors. As you know, he passed away back on September 26. I used to love his movies, *The Sting*, *Butch Cassidy*, *Cool Hand Luke*. (imitates Paul Newman's voice) What we have here is failure to communicate. (laughter)

Not only was Newman a remarkable actor, but he also was a great philanthropist. He raised over \$250 million in his lifetime for charities, most of which came from the sale of Newman's Own, the salad dressings and the whole thing. In an interview with *The Chicago Tribune* reflecting back on all the good deeds he had done over his lifetime, here's what Newman said. He said, If I had to total it all up, I guess I do have more credits than debits in my life. This was his hope for eternity. This was his hope for facing God, that there would be a balance there, that somehow God would put all his philanthropic endeavors and all his good deeds on one side and all of his bad deeds on the other side and the good side would outweigh the bad side. This was his hope as he went into eternity. That's a sad thing, because friends, this is a false hope. I believe there are a lot of people in our world today who are basing their hope on this very same equation, that the good side of the balance is going to outweigh the bad side of the balance.

Folks, God is going to reject this approach just the way He rejected Cain's offering. He will not accept this, because God's plan of salvation is not based on a human works covering that we generate for ourselves; it is based on the blood covering the Lord Jesus made for us. It's just that simple.

If you and I go into eternity with the wrong covering, hiding behind the wrong thing, it is going to be a disaster for us. Robert Murray McShane, the famous Scottish preacher, wrote a letter to a friend, and here's what he said. He

said, In yourself, you can never stand righteous before God. In your nature, in your past life, in your breaking of His holy law, in your indwelling sin, God can see nothing but what He must condemn. Now that's the bad news. Here's what McShane said. He said, You must be covered with a spotless righteousness. Well, that's wonderful, McShane. Where do I go and get one of those things to cover me? He went on to say, And Jesus offers you this perfect righteousness through His blood.

Let me close today by asking the question for every one of us here today. What are you trusting to cover your sin in the sight of a holy God when you face Him? What are you trusting, my friend, to shield you from God's awesome holiness? If it's anything but the blood of Jesus plus nothing, then you're going to God just the way Cain went to God. Folks, the result is going to be the same. You may be sincere. You may be trying as hard as you know how, but God only has one way. Remember what He said, When I see the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and you hiding behind it, I will pass over you.

Let me tell you the best part of all. The best part of all is that this blood covering that Jesus offers us is free. It's there for the taking. The last invitation in the Bible to the human race is this in Revelation 22:17, Let him who is thirsty come. Whoever wants look at this! let that person drink of the water of life that I offer him freely. Wow! Whoever wants!

Friend, if you want to be covered by the blood of Christ today, you can have it. We can do it right here. You can exchange everything else you've ever trusted to cover you, and you can avail yourself of the blood of the Lord Jesus and the covering He created on the cross right here this morning. We're going to give you the chance to right now. Let's bow our heads together, shall we?

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, with no looking around please, if you would like to come to Christ today and repent of your sins, if you would like to exchange all that you've been trying to do to create a covering for yourself in your own effort and take the blood of Christ as your covering instead, then here's what we're going to do. We're going to have a little prayer. I'm

going to pray out loud, and I m going to ask you, one phrase at a time, to pray silently with me, and let s make that transaction right now. Here we go. I ll pray out loud; you pray silently.

Lord Jesus, I come to You today because I want to go to heaven. I understand that I m a sinner. I understand that I am facing Your judgment against my sin. So today, I m willing to turn from my sin and turn to Christ. Today I give up everything else I ve ever trusted to cover me from the judgment of God, and I embrace the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross as my one and only covering for sin. I give my life to You today, both as my Savior and my Lord. Please forgive my sins and grant me eternal life and resuscitate my dead spirit that I may walk with You in intimate reality here on earth, and I pray these things in Jesus name.

And Father, we want to thank You for the folks who prayed that prayer. We pray in their hearts right now that You would confirm in their hearts that a great transaction has taken place in the heavenly places, that they have passed, as John 5:24 says, from death into eternal life, never to go back. Father, for all of us here, we stand in amazement that You would love us enough that the Lord Jesus Christ would come to fix a problem for us that we could not fix for ourselves, that He would come to redeem our lives on earth and to deliver us from perishing in eternity. Lord, we stand in awe and say, And can it be, that we should gain an interest in the Savior s blood? Amazing love, how can it be that You my God would die for me? Lord Jesus, lift our hearts and encourage our spirits today to know that if You were willing to die for us when we didn t belong to You, certainly there is no way now You re going to let anything happen to us now that we do belong to You. Lord, give us hope and encouragement today because of the Scriptures and the teaching of the Word of God, and we pray these things in Jesus name, and what did God s people say? Amen.