



Sermon Discussions - The Cross in the OT

This short series leading up to Easter is a follow-up on the Wonderful Work of God. We will look at three key OT passages about the cross.

After some feedback, I will provide specific questions, though if you prefer the general ones, feel free to use them. See below in that case.

There are old study notes on these passages if you want to know more, just like for the Wonderful Work of God. They are in the same [Drive](#) for convenience.

Sermon Discussion Questions

- *(Understanding)* What was the sermon about this week? What was the Big Idea and what were the main points?
- *(Understanding)* Do you have any questions about the passage or things you didn't understand? Spend a short time trying to find an answer together.
- *(Application)* What part of the sermon was most impactful to you personally, and why?
- *(Application)* Where in the sermon/passage were you convicted of sin, or feel the need to repent?
- *(Application)* What from the sermon/passage do you want to rejoice in? How does it motivate you to respond?
- *What does this passage tell you about the world and God's love for the lost? How would it speak to those outside the church?*
- *(Application)* What is God calling you to do in the light of this message?



Week 1 - Exodus 32-34

Sermon Outline

The start of this series is the famous golden calf episode, which highlights the problem of God's mercy and justice that leads ultimately to the cross.

In chapter 32 the people make a golden calf and worship it. They would have been destroyed were it not for Moses' intercession. Then in 33:1-11 God seems to waver, as a holy God cannot dwell with a sinful people. However, if he doesn't go with them, his plan is not fulfilled, Israel wouldn't be his special people. It is a difficult conundrum. Finally in 33:12-23 God decides he will go with his people, implying he will solve the problem of their sin and his holiness. Moses struggles to believe it so asks God to reveal who he really is (33:18), so in 34:1-9 he reveals the problem is located in his character of both mercy & justice. God then renews the covenant, but we are left wondering what the solution will be. Part of the solution will involve a mediator. It is Moses who intercedes for the people and helps 'manage' the situation.

The solution is of course Jesus - who died on the cross to satisfy both God's mercy and his justice - and intercedes for us as our mediator.

Questions

1. The Golden Calf is such a well-known sin. But why is this sin so famous and serious in the Bible? How do you feel about what Israel does here?

Idolatry is of course generally a serious sin. But the golden calf is particularly serious mainly because of context.

- *It is the first sin after Israel entered into a covenant with the Lord*
- *It is pretty much straight after this - within 40 days, while Moses was still meeting God in a cloud on top of the mountain*
- *Idolatry is the very first commandment that Israel just agreed to.*
- *It is a national sin - not just some individuals but the whole nation together turning away from God*

We should be horrified at such a flagrant forgetting of God so soon after Israel walked through the Red Sea.

2. What was the reason Israel wanted this statue? How can we be similarly tempted?



Israel had to wait for Moses to come down, but they couldn't wait. The statue was concrete and visible, unlike God and Moses who had been gone for 40 days. Having something concrete must have been more reassuring for the people.

We often prefer concrete gods. We know God will take care of us, but we prefer it if we can check our bank balance. We know God approves of us in Christ, yet we prefer people's approval. And so on. It's like it's more real to us. Basically we don't trust God.

3. What are the two options for God and Israel in 33:1-6? What are the pros and cons of each? Is any option acceptable?

A holy God cannot dwell with a sinful people, as ch.32 makes clear. So either God won't go with them, or God goes with them but consumes them.

- *God doesn't go. Pro: the people don't die. They get to live in the promised land and be blessed. Con: God is not with them. God's promises are not fulfilled.*
- *God goes with them. Pro: they have God's presence. Con: they will die pretty soon. God's promise is not fulfilled.*

You will notice that for both options God's promise to dwell with his people is not fulfilled. So our sin is a huge problem.

4. God seems to waver for a while. Where is the problem located, according to God's revelation of himself? Why is this such a difficult problem to solve?

God reveals that he is a God of both mercy and justice (34:6-7). It is his character that makes the two options of the previous question impossible. Either he doesn't go with them or he destroys them - in both cases his mercy is not satisfied. Or if he doesn't punish them, his justice is not satisfied. This is where the problem lies. God's justice leads to punishment for people's sins. God's mercy leads to him rescuing his people and dwelling with them. And because God is unchanging and absolute, there doesn't seem any way around it.

5. God ultimately goes ahead and dwells with his people. What is God implicitly saying, and how do you feel about this? What questions does it raise?

By proceeding with his plan, God is implicitly saying he will make it work. He will find a solution. For us who want to be with God that is amazing news, that should



make us marvel at his grace. Though given it is so difficult, we are left wondering how God is going to do this. How can God's mercy and justice both be satisfied? Because if not, they are basically having a timebomb in the camp.

6. Why is Moses such a great mediator? How is Jesus even better? How would that affect your life next time you sin?

The passage highlights the role of a mediator, in this case Moses. He intercedes and prevents Israel from being destroyed. What makes Moses so suitable is that he does not share in the people's sin, and in fact he acts like God - he loves what God loves and hates what God hates (e.g. burns with anger at sin). His prayer is God-centred, about God's concerns. So here is someone who is like God but also like the people, yet without sin. Ultimately Jesus fulfils that perfectly as both God and man, and in fact perfectly sinless, unlike Moses in the end.

And the result is that we can have confidence in God's grace when we sin. Our sin is not the end, as Jesus will mediate on our behalf, and so we can confidently go to God and confess our sin and keep walking with him. Wonderful news.

(By the way, if anyone brings up that God seems to change his mind in ch.32, or that without Moses he would have destroyed Israel: if you read carefully it is clear that God sets it up. If God was really angry he would have destroyed Israel in an instant. The fact that he talks to Moses and reveals to him what he will do suggests he wants Moses to intercede. The whole event reveals his character more, which of course is a big theme in Exodus.)



Week 2 - Leviticus 16

Sermon Outline

The second sermon in our cross series. This chapter explains the Day of Atonement, the annual ritual for Israel where atonement was made for their sins.

The ceremony is complicated, but basically it involves the high priest offering sacrifice first for himself and then for the people, first sin offerings in payment for their sin, then burnt offerings as substitutionary righteousness. The application is in the last verses: the Israelites are to stop and think about it. They are to do no work and fast, and reflect on this huge and serious event. And that is what God wants for us: that we don't take the cross, our Day of Atonement, for granted, but take it in so that we will be both humble and thankful for God's costly mercy to us.

Again, there are old study notes in the [Drive](#), which also has some visuals you can use for the recap.

Questions

1. The words 'atone' or 'atonement' appear 20x in this chapter. What is the big question this passage tries to answer? How relevant is this to us?

To atone is to make at-one, to reconcile. The question is, how can a holy God dwell with a sinful people? How can they be reconciled to him? This is the problem in the Bible's story, especially last week with the Golden Calf. And of course, this is the big question for all human beings - how can we guilty sinners have a relationship with a holy God?

2. Recap - Go through the ritual for a refresher on what is happening.

This ritual is important but can be quite confusing. It would be good for people to get a refresher. It was meant to be concrete and visual and so it would be great to try and make it like that, especially for the visual and tactile learners among us. Two ways of doing it:

- Watch a video: <https://youtu.be/fssPmwOhRf0?si=v2hBjfrfjZZmyOFC>. Very simple but helpful.



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- Better: try to enact it with craft. In the folder with study notes is a Word document with a tabernacle layout and some animals and priests. You can print this out, cut it, and try to go through the ritual together. Depending on the age of your group and their sense of fun this might work well.
- (Pro tip: the sheet has both small figures and large ones. With the large ones you can glue the bull and one goat to McDonald's ketchup packets. Then you put in a knife and red liquid will come out.. And put a dish on the altar space and bring some matches and burn the rams... You may want to print the tabernacle A3 for these things. Make it as fun as you want.)

You can in a way just follow the chapter, but note that v.6-10 is just a summary of the sin offerings, so skip those. So follow v.3-5 and then v.11-28.

3. How would you have felt if you were there watching this? What are some different emotions the Israelites might have felt?

This is a hugely important event and people might have felt all kinds of emotions.

- Tense, nervous - what if the High Priest does one thing wrong and dies?
- Sad, contrite - animals are being killed, very aware of my sin
- Hopeful, relieved - God is graciously atoning for my sin, I can come back to him
- Frustrated - all this work and yet access to God remained very limited
- Etc

4. What does the Day of Atonement achieve? What does it not achieve?

The Day of Atonement is great in many ways

- The Israelites are clean from their sin. In a way it is the gospel that they are seeing, and if they trust it God will forgive them
- As a result, God can continue to dwell with them without destroying them

However, our access to God is still limited - only the high priest can go in, and he but once a year (Hebrews 9:7-8). We ordinary people don't have access yet. In fact the ongoing nature of the ritual, repeated every year, reminds us we are still in our sins (10:1-3). So it doesn't achieve those. In fact, what it achieves is telling us of its and our shortcomings.



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5. If you compare this to the cross, what is similar? How is it better? (Hebrews 9:25-10:18 is a great passage to read)

It is a great picture of the cross - God's mediator offers both a sacrifice for our sins and righteousness in God's presence, so we can be back with God. It is very complicated and burdensome, but it does work.

Yet the cross has a better mediator - the perfect Son of God - the real presence of God - heaven itself - and a better sacrifice - the perfect life of the Messiah. So it is effective, seen in Jesus sitting down at God's right hand. So our sin is now fully, forever dealt with.

6. How might we take the cross for granted? What would be the consequences of doing that?

Jesus has won incredible access to God for us. The access is so good, that we often forget how much it cost to win that for us. When we sin, we quickly say sorry and move on. We pray for the smallest matters without thinking. All of these are incredible privileges, and we never consider that this cost the life of the Son of God.

Consequences will involve a lack of thankfulness, but also perhaps entitlement when things are not what we want, a lack of relationship because we think it's all automatic, pride when we think it has something to do with us, etc. All kinds of inappropriate attitudes for sinful humans to relate to a holy God.

7. How has this passage helped you appreciate the cross more? How do you want this to change your heart and attitudes when you go to work next week?

Share how this passage has impacted you, and pray about how you want it to affect you, e.g. make you more humble, thankful, trusting etc...



Week 3 - John 13:1-17, 34-35

This week's CG, if you have it, will be on "Maundy Thursday" when Jesus and his disciples at the last supper and Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Maundy comes from the Latin 'mandatum' which means commandment (from which we get 'mandate'), the new commandment to love one another. Hence as it is a special day, we have a bible study on John 13 with optional footwashing.

Passage Outline

The solution is of course Jesus - who died on the cross to satisfy both God's mercy and his justice - and intercedes for us as our mediator.

Questions

Read John 13:1-17

1. Footwashing doesn't mean much to us now. What was footwashing for back then? How was it seen by people?

Back then the streets were dirty, and people wore open sandals. Their feet would have been very dirty, So when people come home or come for dinner, washing their feet is a welcoming gesture - just like these days people always wash their hands when they come in from outside.

The thing is that it is a very menial task. Only slaves could do footwashing (and for Jews, not even Jewish slaves, only foreigners). It was such a humiliating act to have to wash someone's feet.

2. Why were the disciples so reluctant for Jesus to wash their feet? What would be a modern example that might provoke the same feeling?

It is a servant's job, too humiliating or degrading for their Lord and Teacher. So inappropriate for him to strip down and wash feet.

Think of any relationship with a power dynamic. E.g. an employer washing the feet of their helper. The helper probably wouldn't want their employer to do that, it seems so inappropriate.



3. What things do you see that connect the footwashing to atonement and the cross? How does it make you feel about the cross?

The footwashing is not just an act of service by Jesus. He tells Peter he won't truly understand it now but will do so later. Mainly it serves as a parable for the cross.

- *It is a servant's job, so Jesus is becoming a servant. He is willing to do this degrading service for his friends.*
- *Notice how Jesus takes off his garments beforehand and puts them on again afterwards - like the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Philippians 2:5-11 is a great commentary*
- *Footwashing makes you clean, and clean in the Bible often has overtones from sin. E.g. the Day of Atonement was to cleanse the people from their sin.*
- *The Passover is mentioned prominently, so reminding you of the sacrificial lamb*
- *Jesus showed "the full extent of his love" which clearly points to the cross, with dying for someone the ultimate display of love.*

There are more, but this gives you an idea. The main thing is that it makes the cross into humble, sacrificial service, which we don't often think about.

4. How can we be reluctant like Peter about the cross? What does Jesus' insistence on washing mean for us in that regard?

Peter finds it hard to accept that Jesus should serve him. He feels unworthy, this is beneath Jesus. I don't think it's pride (I'm so good I don't need you to die for me), but clearly he doesn't yet see how essential the cross is. . Many people likewise think that the Son of God dying for them is too much, not really needed. Surely there is an easier way. But Jesus insists he has to wash Peter's feet, or Peter has no share in him. We have to come to the cross and accept what Jesus has done. It is not abstract but a personal thing where we let Jesus serve us. Without a personal acceptance of the cross there is no salvation.

If you want to do footwashing, suggest you do it here, then question 5 reflects on the experience. Practical details after the study. If you don't do footwashing, go straight to question 6.



5. How did you find having your feet washed? How did you find washing feet? How does it help you appreciate the cross?

People sharing - hopefully they found it strange or awkward, and it makes them realize what a massive thing the cross is.

6. When Jesus says he wants the disciples to wash each other's feet (v14), what did he mean? What are ways we could do this?

Jesus didn't literally mean we should have a footwashing service. He means sacrificial love and service. If no one brings it up, point to v.34-35. Love one another as I have loved you is the application of "wash one another's feet as I have washed yours".

Think about your CG and what are ways you can serve one another, particularly costly, sacrificial ways

7. How has tonight helped you see this in a new light, through the cross and footwashing?

We know we should love one another and serve one another, but hopefully tonight has been eye-opening. Seeing it as doing what Jesus did for us, and seeing the humble, degrading service, the awkwardness of being served, our reluctance to accept someone's service etc... Hopefully it makes our community life more meaningful and cross-centred.

Footwashing details

If you want to do actual footwashing as part of your time together, this gives the info you need. Any questions please ask.

What you need:

- Basin/pan/bowl to wash feet in (low and wide - e.g. dishwashing bowl).
- Cloth/sponge for the washing
- Two or more towels (one underneath the bowl, others to dry)
- Water (warm is nice)
- Device to play music (optional but nice)



Practical Tips

- Make sure everything is ready and works beforehand so you can have a smooth time without interruptions. (Though it will still feel awkward and things may go wrong - this is part of the atmosphere)
- One bowl, cloth & set of towels would be for about 4-6 people, so if you have a large group get two or three sets, otherwise people will get bored from waiting.
- For women, they should wear appropriate clothing. You should be able to easily bare your feet, so no stockings. And someone should be able to kneel in front of you while you are sitting, so short skirts might feel awkward.
- It would be good to separate men & women for the actual footwashing. For some people it can feel intimate with someone of the opposite sex and this could become an inappropriate distraction if they are not married to each other.

Service order

- It would be good to set a mood of reverence. Maybe sing a song about the cross beforehand
- Good for someone to explain what you will do, and encourage people to reflect on how they feel. If it feels strange or awkward, why is that? What light does it shed on the cross?
- Pray and commit this time to the Lord, praying we would see the cross in a new way through this experience.
- Take turns washing each other's feet, such that everyone has a chance to wash and get washed, e.g. in pairs. The bowl is on the floor with a towel underneath, the person being washed is seated, the washer kneels or sits on a low stool. As with Jesus and the disciples, it helps if you wash the feet of someone you would normally never do this for, e.g. someone with a lower social status. But that may not be possible, given the make-up of your group.
- You might want to play some appropriate worship music in the background, silence may be awkward.
- End with a minute of silent reflection when everyone is done, then continue with question 5.