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THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT
IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of New Testament Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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Approved by:

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THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

(Outline)

Central Thought: The purpose of this paper is to prove that the synoptic Gospels teach the vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The Scriptural doctrine of the atonement.

II. The problem--many deny such an atonement is taught in the synoptic Gospels.

A. Some deny it outright and give new meanings to the atonement texts.

B. Others admit it is taught but delete the texts as later interpolations.

III. The Gospels do teach such an atonement.

A. It is important that we remember the purpose of the Gospels.

1. Written after some of the epistles of Paul, providing material on the life of the Savior whom Paul preached.

2. Consider the great amount of space given to the history of the Passion of Christ.

B. The study of the individual passages.

C. Christ knew Himself to be the Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

IV. The witness of New Testament scholars to the atonement teaching of the synoptic Gospels.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT
IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

The doctrine of the vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is the center of our theology. The entire Bible is built around this historical fact, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Especially the New Testament throws light on the atonement of the Lord Jesus. The letters of Paul, the letter to the Hebrews, the letters of Peter, all teach the vicarious satisfaction. But many theologians are not satisfied with the so-called "later theology" of the apostles. They want to go back to the original teaching of Jesus. Did He teach such a doctrine? The source for such information according to modern theologians can only be found in the three Gospels which give a factual history of the life of the Savior on earth, the Gospels of Matthew, of Mark and of Luke. These are the synoptic Gospels. John's Gospel these critics do not acknowledge as authentic. They claim it contains later traditions and interpolations. Do Matthew, Mark and Luke teach the vicarious atonement? That is the question with which

this paper will deal.

We might briefly define the doctrine of the atonement. It begins with the premise, based on Scripture, that man is by nature separated from God, alienated from His holy presence by sin (Matt. 8, 12; 12, 36; Gal. 3, 10). Nothing that man can do is able to bridge that gap with God (Rom. 2, 20; Gal. 3, 10; Eph. 2, 12). Man needs to be reconciled but is unable to effect this by his own efforts.

Through Christ's suffering and dying in our place (vicarious sacrifice), this atonement, or at-one-ment, has been made (Rom. 5, 10. 18; 2 Cor. 5, 19-21; Gal. 4, 4. 5). God reconciled the entire world to Himself by punishing His beloved Son for the sins of the entire world. Through faith in this divine message of the atonement made by Christ man becomes a partaker of this reconciliation (Mark 16, 15. 16; Rom. 3, 28; 4, 5; 1 Cor. 2, 2-5).¹

The doctrine of the vicarious atonement might also be put in this way: Christ offered His life as a sacrifice to God for the sins of the world (Isa. 53, 4-6. 8. 10-12; John 1, 29; Gal. 1, 3; 1 Pet. 2, 24). The Father accepted

1. Cf. F. Pieper, "The Reconciliation of Man with God," What is Christianity? And Other Essays, pp. 48-99 (presented in English by Dr. John Theodore Mueller, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1933).

this sacrifice as possessing inherent value, fully ample for the expiation of the guilt of all men. And so by virtue of that atonement He declared the whole world to be righteous in His sight (objective justification: 2 Cor. 5, 19; Eph. 2, 4-10; Col. 1, 20-22). Man by faith gathers to himself the benefits of this justification of God and so is personally able to stand before God the Father clothed in the righteousness of Christ (subjective justification: Isa. 53, 11; Acts 10, 43; Gal. 2, 16-20; Heb. 10, 10-22).²

That is the Christian doctrine of the atonement. That is the doctrine we hope to find in the first three Gospels. The purpose of the paper, we might add, is not to study the various theories of the atonement which have arisen throughout the years since Christ's death. We shall simply prove this statement, "The Son of Man came... to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20, 28; Mark 10, 45). Many scholars have defended this statement giving the true intention and purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ in coming to earth though they may have held differing opinions as to the method or way in which Jesus "ransomed" us. Thus it may be that at times we quote the opinions of scholars considered heterodox or even liberal in their theology. Yet insofar as they accept and teach this statement of Jesus their testimony to the atonement is valuable.

2. Cf. Paul E. Kretzmann, For Us! p. 7.

The answer given to the question, "Is the atonement taught in the synoptic Gospels?" does not depend on a scholar's bias. The doctrine is either taught or it is not taught. Yet a prejudiced mind can find what it wants to find in the Gospels, can overlook or explain away the unfavorable facts, can read into the books whatever it wishes to find. Thus the need for complete objectivity arises. The purpose of this paper is to make as unbiased a study as is possible of the synoptics, to discover if they teach the atonement of Jesus Christ. It is our opinion however that the atonement teaching is not confined to Paul, John, Peter, or the author of the letter to the Hebrews but is actually taught by the evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke. By a study of the Gospels we hope to bring out that fact.

Finally we might add the opinion of a Bible scholar who claims that the Christ of John and of Paul differs in no way from the Christ of the synoptic writers:

"The Jesus of John does not differ from the Jesus of the synoptics. It is admitted that the Jesus of Matthew and Luke is to all intents and purposes the very same Jesus as that St. John depicts. Wrede argues that St. Mark's presentation of Jesus is the same as St. John's; in fact, as he puts it, that it is a life of Christ written from the standpoint of the later Church....What we note is the admission of the harmony of St. John with the synoptics, notwithstanding the striking differences between them.

"...the very same Christ appears in them [I. e. in the synoptic Gospels as in the rest of the New Testament]. They do not vary from the Pauline presentation which preceded them, nor

from the Johannine which followed them."³

So far by way of introduction. The question is before us. Is the atonement of Jesus Christ taught in the earliest records of His life here on earth? The following problem immediately presents itself: Many students of the New Testament deny that it is taught. This denial takes at least three forms.

By far the largest group of scholars who deny the atonement simply give new meanings to most of the synoptic passages dealing with the atonement of Jesus Christ. Without attempting at this place to refute any of the statements and charges made we shall merely quote a few such scholars. Objections to what they have to say will come later in this paper, particularly under the section dealing with the study of individual passages.

Thus, F. W. Farrar speaks of

"methods of presenting the doctrine of the Atonement which put a terrible stumbling-block in the path of thousands of those who think and feel for themselves, and are not content to take at second-hand what may be presented to them as 'the scheme of salvation.' Many able and intellectual men, entirely discontent with the placid and autocratic shibboleths of very imperfectly-equipped teachers, have--as a distinguished public man once expressed it to me--'thought out the fundamental truths of religion for themselves, and are content to let the clergy talk.' Others, and not unfrequently

3. J. P. Sheraton, "Our Lord's Teaching Concerning Himself," The Princeton Theological Review, I (October, 1903), pp. 516-517. For further witnesses to this fact see pp. 91-94 of this paper.

women of sincere and tender souls, feel a shock to their moral sense from many statements which profess to explain the necessity for the death of Christ. They are shocked at the notion of a justice by which 'a criminal can suffer penalty by deputy and sentence executed on him by substitute.'⁴

P. T. Forsyth has much the same to say in an excerpt taken from the same work as the above:

"He did not indeed bear our guilt in the sense of a vicarious repentance. That for His holiness was impossible. He who was made sin for us could never be made sinful, nor being made a curse for us, was He accursed."⁵

Evidently many of these men have "axes to grind."

While trying to replace one doctrine they substitute another, often a theory which appeals to them as being more logical or acceptable than the former. William Forbes Cooley for example believes that the aim of Jesus was to establish "an institutional Kingdom, a Kingdom of social welfare."⁶ He "grinds" his own "axe" this way:

"Evil had, indeed, triumphed on Calvary; but it was only a temporary reverse, and was due entirely to Israel's slowness to understand the heavenly appeal and respond to it....But the years went by, and Israel was not won to the Nazarene; rather did the majority become more hostile to him. When at length the Holy City was actually destroyed, and Jesus did not return nor the Kingdom come...then the new generation of Christians, by that time largely Gentiles, ceased to be satisfied with the Messianic explanation; and some other reasons for his death appeared to be called for. Those were days when the Graeco-Roman intellectual world was

4. F. W. Farrar, The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought, pp. 33-34.

5. P. T. Forsyth, ibid., p. 65.

6. William Forbes Cooley, The Aim of Jesus Christ, p. 86.

dominated by various religious philosophies-- Platonic, Stoic, Philonic, etc.--which by free speculation obliterated the usual commonsense lines of distinction between the natural and the supernatural, earth and heaven, man and God. Not unnaturally Gentile believers, especially as recruits came in who were familiar with Greek philosophy, came ere long to find metaphysical rather than historical solutions to the problem of why Jesus chose to die.... One of the first theories was derived from the old ethnic doctrine of sacrificial propitiation. Jesus was declared to be 'the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' This theory takes no account of Jesus as the Messiah nor of the Kingdom of God. It has left the domain of mundane affairs and interests, especially social interests, and is concerned only with the individual's sense of sin--or status as sinner--which it conceives to be removable or assuageable only through a change in the attitude of the Deity, a change which the death of Jesus effected for all believers.

"There is nothing to warrant the belief that Jesus himself had the least acquaintance with them [theological explanations of His death]. It is true that certain sayings of his have been construed so as to accord with the atonement idea which is present in them all; but none of these sayings requires, or itself suggests, any one of these interpretations. On the contrary, the idea is imposed upon the sayings, not derived from them."⁷

Cooley denies the vicarious atonement because it does not fit into his theory of a social Kingdom which Jesus intended to establish.

In the notes at the back of his book, F. W. Dillistone quotes Dr. Rashdall as saying in the Bampton Lectures of 1915:

"There is nothing in any of the narratives to suggest that the approaching death was in any way whatever to bring about the forgiveness of sins, or that Jesus was dying "for" His followers

7. Ibid., pp. 87-89. 91.

in any other sense than that in which He had lived for them--in any sense but that in which other martyrs have died for their cause and for their followers. That the death of the Messiah had more significance than the death of other martyrs is true; that the service which in life and death the Messiah was rendering to the world was a greater service than others could render is equally true...but the fact remains that there is nothing in the sayings attributed to the Master at the Last Supper which implies any fundamental difference in kind between the service which He was conscious of performing and the service to which He was inviting His disciples.

"There is an imperative necessity...that we should discuss the question of Christ's own attitude on the matter without presuppositions, and without assuming that we are bound to discover in it, even in a rudimentary form, the later doctrine of the Church, or rather any one of the numerous doctrines of the atonement which have at various times been taught as the doctrine of the Church."⁸

Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann gives other illustrations of this same attitude on the part of many scholars who deny the atonement by giving different meanings to the plain atonement statements of Jesus. We list a few from his work, For Us!

"...Washington Gladden: 'He who has learned to love God, who is the perfect Goodness and Truth, with the highest love of his heart and to love his neighbor as himself is a saved man, no matter what creed he may profess or what language he may speak....No compensation offered to God's justice was ever needed to make Him merciful to the sinner....When a man ceases from his evil ways and turns to God, the divine grace immediately begins a work of restoration in his soul.'
(Present-day Theology, 83. 180. 183) Rauschenbusch remarks: 'A salvation confined to the souls and its personal interests is an imperfect and only partly effective salvation....The form which the

8. F. W. Dillistone, The Significance of the Cross, pp. 237-238.

process of redemption takes in a given personality will be determined by the historical and social spiritual environment of the man. At any rate, any religious experience in which our fellow-men have no part or thought does not seem to be a distinctively Christian experience." (A Theology for the Social Gospel, 95. 97). Another man in the field writes: 'The redemption of the world means the prevalence of a healthy, happy, holy, human life.' (Hyde, Outlines of Social Theology, 228).

"...in a similar manner Fosdick (The Modern Use of the Bible, 230f.) finds in the cross of Jesus only 'so perfect and convincing an illustration of the power of a boundless love expressing itself through utter sacrifice that He has become the unique representative on earth of that universal principle and law....Jesus has supplied an object of loyalty for the noblest devotions of the generations since He came.'"⁹

These then are a few samples, taken almost at random, illustrating the way in which many scholars and theologians deny the vicarious satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have quoted somewhat at length to show their manner of approaching the doctrine. It is necessary to understand the problem which the Christian meets in present-day theology. For our Scriptural presentation of the atonement would seem to be practically outmoded in this day and age. Such arguments as have been presented will be dealt with in the major portion of this paper, the study of the individual synoptic passages which actually do teach a vicarious atonement.

A second group of men who deny the atonement admit that it is taught in the synoptics as we have them today.

9. Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 75.

But they deny that Jesus spoke such words. The passages dealing with the atonement are misconceptions of the Savior's death added by the evangelists in later years. And when Jesus is represented as saying that His death would be a ransom for many such a passage is an interpolation added by the later Church which completely misunderstood the true teaching of the Lord.

Thus Carl S. Patton of Chicago Theological Seminary tries to take such passages as Mark 2, 10; Matthew 9, 6; Luke 5, 24 (where Christ is spoken of as forgiving sins) and Mark 10, 45 ("a ransom for many") out of the mouth of Jesus and put them into the mouths of the synoptic writers. He claims they were interpolated into the texts of the Gospels or else added many years after the death of Jesus as the interpretation of the early Church. Professor Patton is only one of many who would do the identical thing. But the obvious fact of all their findings is that these findings are without exception only subjective

10. Cf. Patton's article, "Some Late Elements in the Teachings of Jesus," Journal of Religion, IX (July, 1929), pp. 389-397.

11. Incidentally their attempts to remove such passages from the synoptic Gospels are a powerful evidence of the fact that the Gospels actually do teach such an atonement. Such men are at least honest in saying that the Gospels teach a vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ. That they try to remove the atonement passages as later interpolations proves that those who deny the atonement are only deceiving themselves. In this case, at least, the findings of one group of scholars effectively crosses out the teachings of another group.

opinions. They again simply prove to be attempts to back up some pre-conceived theological notions and so deny the clear teachings of the Lord and the apostles. Manuscript evidence is sufficient to prove that the atonement passages must be left in the Gospels as genuine expressions of the doctrine of Christ.

"We acknowledge the validity of the Gospel record here, because obviously the Church could not have invented it. It was the Church that wrote the Gospels. And of the historicity of two events which it wrote into those Gospels, certainly no external proof is needed; the one at the beginning, the other at the close of our Lord's career--the baptism-temptation experience and the cross.

These are "the great timber events that form the scaffolding upon which the Gospel records erect their building. That this scaffolding represents solid historic fact is as nearly certain as anything can be in the field of historical research. For the necessity which the Church felt to be laid upon it to explain or to explain away these hard facts is the surest possible guarantee of their validity."¹²

Leonard Hodgson has these pertinent remarks to make in regard to textual interpolations:

"It may be said at once that if the Gospels are approached purely along the lines of objective literary criticism it is impossible to eliminate these elements in the teaching of Jesus Christ as later interpolations which do not express His own mind. Nevertheless, attempts to deal with them in this way have been made, notably by Dean Rashdall in his Bampton Lectures on 'The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology' and by Miss Dougall and Dr. Emmet in 'The Lord of Thought.' But in both cases one cannot avoid the conclusion that the attempt would never have been made had it not been for the views of God, sin, and atonement held by those authors, views which were incompatible with the

12. John Wick Bowman, The Intention of Jesus, pp. 18-19.

prima facie meaning of the Gospel teaching." ¹³

W. E. Orchard claims, and rightly so,

"that there is no agreement whatever as to what passages of the synoptics are to be excised as unhistorical or tendencious; while the endeavour to eliminate everything from the four Gospels which ascribes to Christ supernatural power or to His Person supernatural significance would lead to complete disintegration of the Gospels, and would reduce their central figure to such dimensions that it would be difficult to see why such accretions should ever have gathered about His name. It is impossible not to think that a great deal of this criticism is dominated by philosophical prejudices against the supernatural and also by the modern theory of evolution, which is here applied in an uncritical fashion."¹⁴

These statements all bear out our original conclusion that the propounders of interpolation theories have their own pet theories to bring forward. Whatever does not agree with them is thrown away. Many Gospel passages, as we shall see, teach a vicarious atonement. Hence such passages are later interpolations, or else they do not mean what they say! Such unscholarly and unhistorical approaches to the Scriptures made by Biblical scholars does great injustice to the true science of Biblical theology. Personal prejudices have no place in either science or theology. We repeat what we said at the beginning, A biased mind can find in the Scriptures whatever it wishes to find. An objective approach finds only what

13. Leonard Hodgson, And Was Made Man, p. 77.

14. W. E. Orchard, "Christological," Foundations of Faith, II, pp. 35-36.

the Scriptures actually teach. The facts stand. Deny them if you wish. But they are there for all to see and learn. Insofar as it accepts these facts Christian theology is truly scientific.

One more class of those who deny the atonement of Jesus Christ might be mentioned. This class is made up of those who are willing to admit that the Gospels do teach a vicarious atonement. But they simply refuse to accept it. It means nothing to them. They live their lives without the knowledge that Christ is their Savior from sin. However, consideration of such a class hardly comes under the scope of this paper. For if a person is unwilling to receive the Gospel teaching there is little we can do. The Holy Spirit is the Agent who alone can enlighten his heart. No amount of reasoning will open it. Only God can do that. We can only preach what we know to be the truth of God as it is found in the Holy Scriptures.

Those who deny the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world strike at the root of the Gospel. For there can be no salvation without a Savior. And the life and purpose of that Savior is given us in the Gospels. If they are unreliable witnesses to the life and death of Christ then we literally have nothing else to which to turn. If they teach that Christ died for our sins then He did die for them.

It is essential in the first place that we remember the purpose of these Gospels. They are not isolated documents standing by themselves in no relation to the rest of the New Testament books. They were written after a number of the books which now make up our New Testament canon were already in existence. That is an important fact; because the Gospels often seem to take things for granted. It is true, the Gospels do not teach a complete doctrine of the atonement in all its ramifications as does the apostle Paul in his letters. On the contrary the Gospels presuppose that these letters of Paul, many of them, were already in existence, that the people of the day were well acquainted with their teaching and theology. There was no need to present the full doctrine. The people knew it well. It was at the heart of all apostolic teaching. The Gospels were written to provide further historical material on the life of this Savior whom Paul and Peter and the other disciples preached.

Furthermore, the New Testament canon as we have it is a unit, inspired in its entirety by the Holy Spirit. There would be no need to say the same thing in the same way on every page of that New Testament. No author nowadays would think of writing a book which had only the same thing to say, no matter how important it might be, on every page. Just so the Gospels laid new emphasis on the life of Christ, stressed things which some of the early Christians might have easily forgotten. These Christians were taught by Paul that they could be saved by faith alone. Many undoubtedly used this in addition to their newly discovered Christian liberty as an excuse for license and iniquity.¹⁵ The Gospels emphasized to such people this truth, that the loving Savior who died for their sins was also a stern Teacher of the Law of God. They were taught that their faith in this Savior had to show itself in good works and Christian living or else it was no faith at all. It was according to James nothing but a "dead" faith (James 2, 26). To foster such a living faith was one purpose of the Gospels.

The Gospels then are not the earliest teaching about Christ and the atonement that we have. A number of the epistles of Paul must have also been in circulation at this time.

15. Cf. Gal. 5, 13; 1 Pet. 2, 16.

"The Gospels are not the earliest documents about Christ; their literary publication was certainly preceded by some of the Epistles of St. Paul. This important fact has two bearings; firstly, those Epistles presuppose that the main outlines of the Gospel story are already known, and assume that the significance given to Christ by the Apostle's teaching is supported by the character, the teaching and the career of Christ; secondly, the Gospels were written by men, and probably for men, who held the Apostle's opinion about Christ. This means that the Gospels cannot be isolated from the theological atmosphere in which they were composed without distorting their full meaning."¹⁶

"In his Apostolic Preaching, Professor C. H. Dodd has shown that the certainly authentic epistles of Paul can be understood only on the assumption that behind Paul's preaching there lay a solid foundation of traditional material which he could assume as known and accepted by the Church as a whole."¹⁷

This was the teaching which the Gospels recorded, particularly the story of the Cross.

According to Dr. W. Arndt's New Testament Notes:

"By this time [56 A. D.] there were certainly six letters of Paul in existence: Galatians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans. According to the view taken in these notes, the captivity letters were in existence also: Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philip-
pians."¹⁸

James Moffat, in his Introduction, gives a table listing various opinions held by scholars, recent and ancient, as to the date of the Gospels. By far the greater number of scholars are of the opinion that the

16. Orchard, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

17. Bowman, op. cit., p. 14.

18. Wm. Arndt, New Testament Introduction Notes, p. 30.

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synoptics were written between 60 and 100 A. D. Samuel A. Cartledge suggests "very tentatively: Mark, about 50; Matthew and Luke, about 60."²⁰ He also lists the following letters of St. Paul as having been in existence by the time the Gospels were written: Galatians, 1 and 2 Thesalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. Canon Streeter goes so far, influenced of course by his liberal attitude toward the New Testament, as to give the following dates for the writing of the synoptics: Mark--about 65, before 70, A. D. Matthew--about 85 A. D. Luke--about 80, not later than 85, A. D.²¹ Surely by the time the Gospels were written many of the letters of Paul were being circulated and studied by the Christians.

"Recent criticism has done nothing to impair our confidence in the genuineness and historicity of the Synoptical Gospels. On the contrary the weight of sober New Testament criticism tends strongly to support the traditional belief of the Church, notwithstanding the strange recrudescence of radical scepticism, which was nothing more than what was to have been expected, when the methods and theories of the dominant school of Old Testament criticism came to be applied logically and consistently to the problems of the New Testament. In the face of this reaction, New Testament scholarship in its best forms has made very decided advances toward an agreement as to the authorship and date of the Synoptical Gospels...the acceptance of a date between A. D. 78 and 93."²²

19. James Moffat, Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p. 213.

20. Samuel A. Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament, p. 88.

21. B. H. Streeter, The Four Gospels, pp. 485-487. 540.

22. Sheraton, op. cit., p. 515.

Dr. Sheraton's dates may not be acceptable to conservative scholars, but they too point to the fact that the Gospels came after a number of the letters of Paul.

But even if this were not true, if we had only the three primary Gospels on which to base our theology, we would still have the doctrine of the atonement. We could know positively that Christ died for our sins, that He gave His life a ransom for many, that He came into the world to seek and to save the lost, that His body was broken and His blood was shed for the remission of sins.

And perhaps the most startling and conclusive of all proofs for this teaching is the great amount of space given in the Gospels to the suffering and death of Christ. It is out of all proportion to the rest of the narratives if it is so unimportant as some would have us believe, or was simply a tragic death for what the martyr Jesus Christ believed in. Matthew gives eight of his twenty eight chapters to the narration of events of Christ's last week before His death, almost a third of his Gospel. Mark gives six of his sixteen chapters to the same last week, more than a third of his Gospel. Luke gives six of his twenty four chapters to the telling of the events of the last week, or a fourth of his entire Gospel. Surely these last events must have meant something more to the evangelists than they would have if these men only knew that Christ was a victim of the evil forces of the day. It

seems likely that they would have spent as little time as possible describing the disgraceful death of Christ if He were just another young man cut off in the prime of His life. But in all three Gospels the passion of the Savior is the high spot. It is the theme of each work. It might be called the goal of Jesus' whole life on earth. And the writers must have known this.

Newmann Hall, Atonement: The Fundamental Fact of Christianity, claims that the passion of Christ is the heart and center of the Gospel narratives. ²³ It is the prominent feature of all the Gospels. It is contrary to the general rule of proportion that a life crowded with such important historical incidents should be narrated with such briefness while the circumstances of death are described with such elaborate detail. If the mission of Christ was to teach a social gospel, to proclaim only a new and different kind of morality and love toward men, why should such a great amount of time be spent on His death? The death of Christ if only a tragedy incident to the death of a martyr would need little space. But here is the death with intrinsic value for every human being who believes in Christ. It is described as the high spot of the Savior's career. It is indeed strange that God should allow any loyal servant of His to die as the wicked die. In the case of Christ God allowed

23. Hall, pp. 39-40.

His only Son to die, the object of His perfect approval and delight, who had no sin of His own to demand penalty. His life was a perfect reflection of the perfect holiness of God. And yet He died! And He died in a terrible way. He was not Himself bound by the physical laws of death for He died to save others from dying. The atonement alone meets the difficulty. He died to take away the sins of the entire world.

"He was born not simply with the liability, but the very purpose of death. Life is the great purpose of heroes and philanthropists. They live for the cause of humanity, and death cuts short their labours. Christ came to die for humanity, and His death perfected and perpetuated His work. This was prominently in His mind during His active ministry. Again and again He spoke to His disciples of the death He was to die. 'From that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must suffer many things... and be killed, and the third day be raised up' (Matt. xvi. 21; xxvi. 12; Mark viii. 31; ix. 12; xiv. 8; Luke ix. 22; xvii. 25; xxiv. 6-8). It was unlike other heroes thus to dwell on His death. Was it not because His death had objects beyond their's? In their case life was to benefit, life which death ended: in His case life was not so much for philanthropy as for salvation by the surrender of it."²⁴

So W. E. Orchard writes in the same vein:

"It is believed, therefore, that the space given to the crucifixion has been due to a later interpretation of Christ's death, which can find no sanction in His own outlook and estimate. But an examination of the Gospels shows that, on the contrary, it was Christ's own attitude towards His death which provided the basis for the Pauline interpretation, that such an event must have struck any person with a historical sense as having profound significance, while the simple details of the passion narrative constitute a

24. Ibid.

revelation and produce a redemptive effect. In the space they give to the death of Jesus, the Evangelists show their sense of proportion, and in their attitude towards it they only reproduce the place which it held in the consciousness of Christ Himself. It is not merely that the utter tragedy that Jesus should have come to such an end has dominated the mind and feeling of the Evangelists, because the apparent defeat of Christ's death would then have been obliterated by the triumph of the resurrection; but the crucifixion dominates the resurrection, which is memorable just because it is the resurrection of the Crucified who still bears the wounds of the cross. This emphasis on the death of Christ is therefore not due to a religious interpretation distorting the perspective of a historical life; it is a clear view of historic events giving rise to an inevitable religious interpretation."²⁵

The evangelists knew what they were doing when they allotted so much space to the sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They knew not only because Jesus told them His death was to be so important, but because His entire teaching and life breathed the purpose of His coming. There is a great deal of truth in the old statement, when properly understood, that the Lord Jesus came not so much to teach a vicarious atonement but that there might be an atonement to teach. Not only did He teach the atonement. He came to make the atonement a reality. But this fact will be brought out in further detail in the last section of this paper where we consider the teachings of New Testament scholars who defend the atonement in the synoptics.

Jesus Christ lived and died to redeem sinful mankind

25. Orchard, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

from its sins. He came not to preach a mere social gospel. There is no text in the Bible which states that God so loved the world that He inspired a certain Jew to say that there was a good deal to be said for loving one's neighbor. But there are many texts which say that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The synoptic Gospels contain their share of such passages. We shall now consider in some detail the passages which directly pertain to the atonement of Jesus Christ.

A word might be said as to the way in which we shall consider such individual passages. Using a harmony of the Gospels ²⁶ we shall take up each passage in its proper perspective in the life of the Savior. When any two, or all three, evangelists give the same passage relating to the atonement we will follow the Gospel of Mark, insofar as this is possible. This is by way of concession to the historical criticism of the day which likes to claim that Mark is the earliest Gospel. The order to be generally followed is Mark, Matthew, Luke.

After a literal translation of the pertinent passage or passages we shall give the statement of the surroundings, conditions and times under which the passage is given--when such information is relevant. Then will follow the exegesis of the passage, including study of important words and grammatical constructions.

26. Archibald Thomas Robertson, A Harmony of the Gospels.

The first passage, logically enough, is the first verse of the first chapter of Matthew.

Matthew was well qualified to write a history of the life of the Lord Jesus. He had been one of the first disciples to be called by the Savior (Matt. 9, 9-13). His testimony is always valid, because he was an eye-witness of all that he was later to write.

Matthew 1, 1. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David."

This passage forms the superscription of the genealogy which is to follow. In a way it gives the purpose of the entire book, indicating the intention of Matthew to prove that this Jesus Christ is the Messiah born of the royal household of the king David. Matthew furthermore as much as says that this same Jesus Christ is the direct fulfillment of the many promises about the Messiah made to the patriarch Abraham.

The name Ἰησοῦς was a fairly common one among the Jewish nation. Its literal meaning is "whose help is Jehovah," the German Gotthilf. This meaning of the name of the Savior will be further considered under the next passage, Matthew 1, 21, in which the Angel told Joseph why he was to call Mary's son "Jesus." The name

27. Dr. Arndt, op. cit., p. 36 believes Matthew was the first evangelist to write and places the date of composition between 50 and 60 A. D.

Χριστός, which came to be a part of the proper name of Jesus, not only a title, is the LXX rendering of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ. This word means simply "the anointed one." As such it must have been weighted with meaning for every Jew who knew his Old Testament. For the Messiah was often designated as "the anointed one of God." It was synonymous with the name of the Messiah. It referred chiefly to the custom of anointing kings with oil, the ancient manner of coronation. It indicates not only that this Jesus was to be the Messiah but also that in Him were to be fulfilled all the promises made concerning the royal son of David.

The further designation is added, "the son of David, the son of Abraham." Here too is indicated the specific Messianic character of the person of this Jesus Christ.

"Of David first, because with his name was associated the more specific promise of a Messianic king; of Abraham also, because he was the patriarch of the race and the first recipient of the promise. The genealogy goes no further back, because the Gospel is written for the Jews....The word υἱοῦ in both cases applies to Christ. It can refer grammatically to David, as many take it, but the other reference is demanded by the fact that ver. 1 forms the superscription of the following genealogy."²⁸

"Matthew writes for Jewish Christians in order to establish them in their faith that Jesus is the Christ promised in the Old Testament....The designation...marks Jesus as the one in whom the Messianic promises...were fulfilled."²⁹

28. Alexander Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," The Expositor's Greek Testament, I, p. 62.

29. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 25. 27.

So we see that the very first verse of our New Testament is already indicative of the fact that this wonderful Child was no ordinary human being. His name and His genealogy at once bring the thought that here was a very special person who would perform a very special work. This special work is more clearly indicated in the next passage.

Matthew 1, 21. "And she will give birth to a son, and you will call his name Jesus; for He will save His people from their sins."

The circumstances of this angelic pronouncement are well known. Joseph was betrothed to a young virgin, Mary by name. According to Matthew, she was found to be with child "by the Holy Spirit" (1, 18). Joseph of course could not know this. Consequently he was resolved to divorce her quietly, fearing scandal both for Mary and for himself. But the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told Joseph not to be afraid of a scandal but to go ahead and marry his betrothed. For Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit. Then follows our passage. To prove to the pious Joseph that this was in direct fulfillment of the Old Testament promise the angel quoted a passage from Isaiah. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7, 14). Joseph believed the word of the angel of the Lord. He married his betrothed.

But as to the passage itself we note the following points. The angel gives the reason as to why Joseph should call this child Jesus. "He will save His people from their sins." Here if ever is stated the purpose of the coming of the Savior, stated in unequivocal terms. This will be no ordinary child. Not only is He begotten by the Holy Spirit. But in some way this child will deliver His people from the spiritual bondage in which they lay. No intimation is given that the Lord Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom, any kind of social institution, any material reign. The purpose of this child's life is spiritual.

Joseph was a "just" man (Matt. 1, 19). He must have realized the appalling condition in which his nation lay, enslaved to the Romans, enslaved to a rigid interpretation of the Law of God, enslaved to sin. But to remove from his mind any materialistic notions about this young son of his wife the angel says that the purpose of this child will be to save his people from their sins. It will be throughout a spiritual salvation. Such a deliverance may have disappointed the Jews who would have liked to have seen a great kingdom of the Messiah established, something like the great kingdoms of David and Solomon. But it would disappoint no true believer in this Savior. For such a true believer would realize the immensity of his sin. He would see that the greatest need of his

nation was not a release from the Roman government. The greatest need was a release from sin, a sin which held the entire world in its grip ever since the first human beings fell into sin. Just as great was the need to be released from the external, often hypocritical, observance of the Ceremonial Law.

Such thoughts as these must have flashed through the mind of Joseph as he later pondered the sayings of this messenger of the Lord. "Save His people from their sins." Perhaps he did not realize its full implication at the time. But the meaning was clear enough. Here was a child who was to release his people from bondage, not to the Romans, but to sin. Here was a child whose mission on earth unlike anybody else's was to be completely spiritual.

"Thus early and clearly is the spiritual nature of Christ's salvation declared, in opposition to the current expectation of a temporal Deliverer."³⁰

"This wonderful word touches the very heart of the mission and message of the Messiah....From their sins....The substantive (hamartia) is from the verb (hamartanein) and means missing the mark as with an arrow. How often the best of us fall short and fail to score. Jesus will save us away from (apo) as well as out of (ex) our sins. They will be cast out into oblivion and he will cover them up out of sight."³¹

30. F. C. Cook, The Holy Bible...With an Explanatory and Critical Commentary, I, pp. 6-7.

31. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, I, pp. 10-11.

Great emphasis is properly laid upon the verb in our passage σωβειν, "to save." It is one of the great words of the Scriptures. It may imply an earthly, physical salvation. But when used soteriologically it signifies rescue from the worst of mortal dangers, that of sin, death and the devil. And coupled with the act of rescue is the idea of keeping those rescued safe and secure, preserving them so that the danger shall not again involve them.

λαὸς αὐτοῦ, "His people," denotes the Jews but in the sense in which Jesus once said that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. "His people" is not restrictive, referring alone to the nation of Israel. It refers to the spiritual Israel.

"Jesus shall save his people 'from their sins.' With one stroke all political ideas are swept away for Joseph, such as deliverance from the Roman yoke....The real evils under which the Jews suffered were 'their sins.' Sometimes the collective ἁμαρτία, 'sin,' is used, heaping all together into one vast unit mass; again, as here, this collective is spread out in the great plural 'sins,' all varieties and kinds, yea, each and every individual thought, word, and deed by which men miss the mark set by God's law....These sins destroy us, body and soul, in time and in eternity. To save from these sins is salvation indeed. Who is mighty enough to effect such a salvation? Only he who was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, God's Son. For to save from sins is to separate the sinner from his sins, so that these sins can no longer reach him or inflict their deadly, damning power upon him. But what man ever separated himself or another from even a single sin?...God's own Son frees, rescues, saves us."³²

32. Lenski, I, op. cit., pp. 49-51.

Here in this passage of Matthew is taught the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. No details are given. But the fact is there, 'He will save His people from their sins.' Details follow later, in other passages, but chiefly in the story of the passion and death. Remember again that many of Paul's letters had been written. The people who read this Gospel of Matthew knew well what the angel of the Lord was telling Joseph and what those words meant.

"He shall save His people from their sins." That is atonement. For once our sins are removed we are at peace with God, at-one with Him. If we had only this Gospel passage we would still know that we had a Savior from sin. We might not know the exact way in which Christ would save us from our sins. But He would do it. There can be no doubt about it. The angel of the Lord made that clear to Joseph. And in making it clear to Joseph he has made it clear to all men. We are the "people" of the Lord Jesus. He came to save us from our sins.

But even more is contained in this verse than appears at first glance. All forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament was connected with the shedding of blood, generally of a lamb or some other animal. The author of the letter to the Hebrews could write that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9, 22 RSV). What were Joseph's thoughts? Would

this Son of Mary's have to shed His blood to forgive the sins of His people. Surely not! And yet there could be no forgiveness of sins without shedding of blood. God had made that plain to His people during the days of the Old Covenant, preparing them for the great sacrifice that was to come and bring the New Covenant. Perhaps these thoughts were not in the mind of Joseph who was probably more concerned at the time over his wife and himself and their future. But the thoughts occur to us. They are in our minds. And we think they must have been in the minds of the people who read this Gospel of St. Matthew.

The next passage which comes under consideration is from the first chapter of Luke's Gospel.

We think that the book of Luke was written primarily for Greek Christians because Luke stresses the universality of salvation. According to Luke Christ is the great humanitarian of the ages, but He is more. Jesus has drawn for us the picture of the Good Samaritan with his disregard for caste and race and religious prejudice and his sheer pity for a man in trouble. Jesus was the friend of the poor, of the sick, of the suffering. He was the true philanthropist. Nowhere is He pictured with such attractive power as He went about doing good as in the Gospel of Luke. The very heart of Luke went out to Jesus in His works of mercy and kindness. But, adds A. T. Robertson in his work, Luke the Historian in the Light

of Research.

"...there is a deeper note than all this blessed work of social amelioration. Jesus is the saviour from sin in Luke's Gospel. He is the friend of publicans and sinners, not to condone their sins or to join in them, but to win them from their sins...

Jesus not merely has sympathy with the suffering and the sinful. He has love for the souls of the lost. He has power to help men. Jesus sees the cross ahead of him as the way to win the lost. He makes the plain prediction (9:43f.) to Peter (Luke 9:20-27) and repeats it. He knows the cost of redemption from sin and he means to pay the price with his life. It is no mythical 'dying god' of the autumn who rises, according to the myth, in the spring, as the mystery religions teach. Jesus sees his baptism of death (12:49-53) before it comes. Jesus is conscious that he is dying for men (12:19ff)...Luke's account of the death on the cross (23:32-54) and of the resurrection from the dead is all in harmony with the Pauline gospel of the death of Christ for the salvation of the sinner. In Luke we have the Son of God and the Son of Man giving himself as the victim of sin to save the sinner. The Gospel of Luke has often been called the Gospel of Sacrifice. 'The Son of Man must suffer many things' (Luke 9:22). And Jesus himself will explain to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: 'Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?' (24:26)."³³

Luke 1, 68-79 (Translation of pertinent passages).

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, (69) and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His Son David, (70) as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, (71) salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us....(76) And you, Child, shall be

33. Robertson, pp. 163-164.

called the prophet of the Highest; for you shall go before the Lord to prepare His ways, (77) to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the forgiveness of their sins."

The circumstances of this prophecy of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, are well known. The angel Gabriel had appeared to Zacharias as he was offering incense in the sanctuary of the temple. The angel of the Lord had told Zacharias of the coming birth of his son. Zacharias had doubted it, and the messenger of the Lord had stricken him dumb as a proof of his words of prophecy. Now the child had been born. The neighbors and relatives of Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth had come together to the house of the new parents to help name the child. They of course wished to name the boy "Zacharias" after his father. But Elizabeth told them that he was to be called John. The friends turned to the mute father. He called for a wax tablet, and on this slate he wrote the words, "His name is John." (Luke 1, 63). Immediately his affliction was removed and he spoke plainly.

Then, perhaps at the same time, but probably some time later, Zacharias sang this wonderful hymn of praise and prophecy, telling of the glorious future this son of his was to have. For our purpose we are concerned chiefly with the parts of his prophecy which pertain to

the "horn of salvation" which the Lord was to raise up for Israel.

Zacharias sang, "He has visited and redeemed His people." Does this mean that this "horn of salvation," the Messiah, would lead the people in their fight to break the yoke of Roman bondage? Many commentators have believed this to be the meaning of the words of Zacharias. However this is unlikely. For in verse 77 the salvation is described as the "forgiveness of sins." The terms ὁσλοῦτητι and δικαλοῦτη (v. 75) further³⁴ indicate the spiritual nature of this redemption. This salvation which God had prepared for His people is their redemption from sin, death and the devil. Adam Clark says:

"Sinners are fallen into the hands of their enemies, and are captives to sin and death. Jesus ransoms them by his own blood, and restores them to life, liberty, and happiness. This truth the whole Bible teaches.... (Man was now visited, not by the ministry of angels or prophets...but visited by God himself--God incarnate, and for the purpose of redeeming--paying the redemption Price--to divine justice, and ACTUALLY REDEEMING, or delivering, man from guilt and sin, and the power of Satan, and the reign of death.--Watson.)"³⁵

The enemies here spoken about are not the Roman tyranny, or Herod's usurpation, the galling bondage of the Jewish state, plus something more or less spiritual.

34. John Peter Lange, The Gospel According to Luke, 18, p. 27.

35. Adam Clark, The New Testament...With a Commentary and Critical Notes, V, p. 224.

These enemies and haters are the very foes which Christ overcame, Satan and the powers of darkness. When we know what enemies Christ conquered why insist on a different interpretation? When God looked upon Israel its political situation was a minor matter entirely as compared with its spiritual need of a ransoming act to free it from sin and guilt.

"Almost every concept in this Psalm cried out against politics by emphasizing the spiritual. Most decisive is v. 77, where the σωτηρία which this λύτρωσις produces is described as occurring ἐν ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν. This certainly settles the question that here we have the ransoming act of the Messiah referred to."³⁶

The reference to the "horn of salvation" is particularly interesting and important. The expression is fairly common in Old Testament writings. Psalm 132, 17 states that the Lord will cause the horn of David to bud. Zechariah 1, 21 speaks of the Gentiles as lifting up their horn over the land of Israel to scatter the people. It is also used in Deuteronomy 33, 17; 1 Sam. 2, 10; Ps. 18, 3; and in other places. The term almost invariably refers to the strength of an animal as indicated by its horns. In many cases the horns are the one means of defence from enemies or ^{of} offensive action. The reference in this case means that the power of the Messiah will be so great that it can easily overcome the strongest enemies. The qualitative genitive σωτηρίας speaks of the nature of

36. Lenski, II, pp. 545-551.

this "horn." It will be a mighty power which will be able to save the people from their enemies, sin, death and the devil. Christ the Messiah of course is meant as the person whom the Lord will thus raise up for His people. He will be mighty in the strength of the Lord Himself. And every bit of His power would be needed to overcome the enemies whom He would have to fight. For, according to St. Paul, we fight "against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6, 12 RSV). We have to fight to keep these powerful forces from again taking their deathly grip on our lives and souls. Christ broke their strangle hold on us by dying on the cross.

According to Alfred Plummer,

"The metaphor of the horn is very freq. in O. T. (1 Sam. ii. 10; 2 Sam. xxii. 3; Ps. lxxv. 5. 6. 11, etc.), and is taken neither from the horns of the altar, nor from the peaks of helmets or head-dresses, but from the horns of animals, especially bulls. It represents, therefore, primarily, neither safety nor dignity, but strength. The wild-ox, wrongly called 'unicorn' in AV., was proverbial for strength (Num. xxiv. 22; Job. xxxix. 9-11; Deut. xxxiii. 17). In Horace we have addis cornua pauperi, and in Ovid tum pauper cornua sumit. In Ps. xviii. 3 God is called a κέρας σωτηρίας."³⁷

And in the great lexicon of Kittel we have the following in regard to this "horn of salvation":

"Dagegen wird in Alten Testament das Horn nicht

37. Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke," 28, International Critical Commentary, p. 40.

mur als Ausdruck physischer Macht in prophetischer Symbolhandlung gebraucht (3 Bas 22, 11) und im visionären Gesicht als Bild für die Macht, die Israel zerstreut hat, Sach 2, 1-4, sondern das Horn (J P) ist im AT direkter Ausdruck für Macht. In dieser Bedeutung ist es von LXX (wie auch in seiner weiteren Bedeutung als Horn des Altars) stets mit κέρας übersetzt (bis auf Hi 16, 15, su) = Dt 33, 17 κέρατα

ΜΟΝΟΚΕΡΩΤΟΣ ΤΑ ΚΕΡΑΤΑ ΑΥΤΟΥ : seine Kraft ist wie die eines Einhorns. 2 Bas 22, 3 = ψ 17, 3 werden von Gott die parallelen Ausdrücke ὑπερασπιστῆς μου, κέρας σωτηρίας μου und ἄντιλήμπτωρ μου gebraucht....

"1. In diesem Sinne nun begegnet Lk 1, 69 die Wendung: ἤξειπεν κέρας σωτηρίας ἡμῶν ἐν οἴκῳ Δαβὶδ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ. Das Besondere an dem Verbum ἤξειπεν ist, dass es in LXX nie mit κέρας verbunden erscheint (auch nicht Ex 29, 21: ψ 131, 17). ἤξειπεν wird von Gott als dem Lenker der Geschichte gebraucht, der etwas 'auftreten' lässt, der geschichtliche Tatbestand schafft. κέρας σωτηρίας ist aus 2 Bas 22, 3 = ψ 17, 3 genommen und bedeutet: enim Macht des Heils, eine hilfreiche, heilschaffende Macht. Wenn auch die Rabbinen von dem 'Horn des Messias' sprechen, so ist doch die Wendung 'Horn der Hilfe' kein unmittelbarer Ausdruck für den Messias, aber der Zusatz bei Lk 'im Hause Davids, deines Knechtes' zeigt, dass Zacharias mit der 'Macht des Heils' den Messias meint. Inhaltlich ist an dieser Stelle die at.liche Form der Hoffnung nicht überschritten."³⁸

So the meaning of the passage presents itself. The Lord God of Israel was about to send His promised help. He was now ready to raise up this powerful Savior who was to save His people from their enemies, sin and death. The thought is about the same as that spoken of in Isaiah 61, 1 which speaks of the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Through this work of redemption to be made

38. Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, p. 669.

by Jesus Christ full justification has been prepared for all men. This redemption is for all the people of God. It is made for the entire world. But only the people of God, that is, only Christians, believe it, appropriate it to themselves and so receive the full benefits of this ransoming. The son of Zacharias, John the Baptist, was to be the prophet telling people of this Savior and this salvation. He was to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, preaching a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1, 4 RSV).

In this great passage we have again the doctrine of the atonement of Jesus Christ. By His might He would save all people from their sins. No details are supplied as to the exact way in which this was to be done. The last chapters of the Gospel of Luke indicate that it would be by suffering and dying.

Our next passage is also from the Gospel of Luke. Like the previous passage from the great hymn of Zacharias, this too is a song of thanksgiving and praise to God for His great mercy in sending the Redeemer and Savior of the world. It is the so-called Nunc Dimittis of Simeon.

Luke 2, 29-32. 38. "Now release your slave in peace, Lord, according to your word; because my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel'....(38) And coming up at

that very hour she (Anna) gave thanks to God and kept speaking concerning Him to all those awaiting redemption in Jerusalem."

After the Lord Jesus had been circumcised, "when the time came for their purification...they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (Luke 2, 22 RSV). In Jerusalem there lived an old man, Simeon by name, who was awaiting the "consolation of Israel" (2, 25). To this man it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Christ, the Messiah of his people. And now, led by the Spirit of God, he came into the temple. He saw the parents of the Savior, recognized their son as the Messiah, took Him up in his arms and inspired by the Holy Spirit sang the wonderful hymn before us.

He had finally seen the "salvation" of the Lord which God had prepared through His only-begotten Son. The word "salvation," σωτηριον, is from the verb σωβω, "to save." According to Thayer's Lexicon,

"...to save in the technical biblical sense;-- negatively, to deliver from the penalties of the Messianic judgement, Joel 11. 32 (111. 5); to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the Messianic deliverance....positively, to make one a partaker of the salvation by Christ."³⁹

This newly born infant was in some way to bring this salvation to God's people. It was the salvation of which all the prophets had prophesied for so long a time. It

³⁹. Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 610.

was the salvation which so many of the rabbis and learned men of Israel understood only ⁱⁿ the selfish sense of a restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Instead of this kind of "salvation" the Lord had prepared from eternity a spiritual deliverance for His people. It was a saving from the power of sin over the lives of men.

This deliverance and salvation was now at hand. For the Lord had finally sent the Savior of the world. And this Savior was to be "for revelation to the Gentiles." Here again is indicated the spiritual character of the salvation of God. All the nations of the world were to partake of it. The atonement of Christ was for all men. And "glory" would come to Israel for from their nation had come the Savior of the world. This Savior was now here, here in the very temple with Simeon.

But in all this great joy was evidenced one sad, but important, fact. Simeon told Mary, the mother of the Lord, "this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)" (2, 34. 35 RSV). This is an obvious reference to the sufferings and death of Christ. In a way it is a commentary on the song which Simeon had just finished singing. For this salvation could only come to the people of God if this Savior would bear their sins. And He would bear their sins only by suffering under men, by dying on the cross of Calvary. This would indeed cause a sword

to pierce through His mother's heart who was at the foot of the cross when He died (John 19, 25). But by that very death He was to purchase redemption for all the nations of the world, for Simeon, for Joseph, even for His own mother. Surely the reference is to the atonement of Jesus Christ. The glory spoken of in verses 29-32 is apparently in direct contradiction to this prophecy of the sufferings of Christ. But it is not contradictory in the eyes of God. Nor is it contradictory or paradoxical in the eyes of Christians. For they know that on the cross Christ suffered and died to take away their sins and so make them at-one with God.

Regarding the genuineness of this passage, Plummer pertinently remarks:

"That Simeon says so little about the Child, and nothing about the wonders which attended His birth (of which he had probably not heard), is a mark of genuineness. Fiction would have made him dwell on these things."⁴⁰

Equally remarkable in this section of Luke's Gospel is the account of the widow Anna who came into the temple at this same time. We are told that she too recognized the Savior of the world in this infant child. She gave thanks to God and kept speaking to others about the Christ child. Here is a fine example of witness bearing to the Lord Jesus. She spoke of Him to all those "awaiting redemption in Jerusalem" (38). This redemption for which

40. Plummer, op. cit., p. 68.

the people in Jerusalem were waiting was no mere freedom from Roman bondage. "People" refers to those pious Israelites who knew that a far greater freedom than this was needed to make them free. These people knew of their sins. They knew of the necessity for redemption, a redemption which could not come through the mere external observance of the Law. This redemption from the penalty of sin ⁴¹ could only come through the Messiah who was to suffer and die for His people. And now here was that very Messiah. This passage too, like the above, is a clear reference to the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. It shows that already early in His life He was recognized as the great sin bearer of all nations.

Our next passage again takes us back to the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

Matthew 8, 16. 17 (Mark 1, 29-34; Luke 4, 38-41). ⁴²

"And when it was evening they carried to Him many who were possessed with demons; and He threw the spirits out with a word, and He healed all those who were sick; this was done in order that the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled who said, 'He took our infirmities and

41. Cf. Heb. 9, 12: "He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (RSV).

42. The passage from Matthew is taken because it is the only one which lists the quotation from Isaiah.

bore our diseases."⁴³

This section is taken from the narrative which treats of the great Galilean ministry of the Savior. The scene was laid in the city of Capernaum. The Lord Jesus together with James and John had gone into the house of Simon Peter and Andrew. The mother-in-law of Simon was sick in bed with a fever. When the Lord heard of this He immediately went to the woman, took her by the hand, raised her, "and the fever left her" (Matt. 8, 15 RSV). The evening of that same day the people brought to Christ "many who were possessed with demons; and He threw the spirits out with a word, and He healed all those who were sick." Then follows the quotation from Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." Matthew says that this healing work of the Savior was in direct fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Messiah. Later we shall see that the Lord saw in Himself the complete fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies. But now we are concerned with the question of whether or not this passage teaches the vicarious atonement of Christ.

The passage from Isaiah certainly does. For it refers to the sin bearing of the Messiah which is identical

43. Cf. also Matthew 12, 15-21. In this passage too Christ is spoken of as fulfilling a prophecy of the prophet Isaiah in regard to the healing character, both spiritual and physical, of the work of the Messiah. This is in accordance with the intention of Matthew who writes to establish the fact that Christ is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament.

with vicarious satisfaction. But Matthew makes the quotation refer to the healing not only of our sins but also of our diseases, to the so-called "thaumaturgic" aspect of Christ's ministry. Is this a misuse of Scripture? Or has the passage no relation to the doctrine of the atonement? According to many it has not.

And yet there seems to be more in the passage than such theologians think. For the prophecy of Isaiah is so clearly spiritual that it seems unlikely that Matthew would use it in a mere physical sense taking away all its atonement significance. The truth is that Matthew throughout his Gospel thinks of Christ as our burden bearer, as our substitute. He took on Himself all our sins and iniquities. That was particularly manifested when He died on the cross. But throughout His earthly ministry He was healing people's diseases, showing His sympathy for all of them. He recognized that disease was a direct result of the ravages of sin. And like the true Messiah that He was the Savior removed the penalty of sin in its earthly aspects as well as in its spiritual implications. Both the pardonings of sin by Jesus and the healings rested on the basis of His atoning death.⁴⁴

This interpretation of the passage is borne out by

44. In answer to the argument of the faith-healing groups that Christ came to perform a "double-cure," cf. Popular Symbolics, Editor-in-chief, Th. Engelder, p. 105n (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1934). See also F. E. Mayer, American Churches, Beliefs and Practices, pp. 48-49 (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1946).

the statements of numerous commentators. To quote just two:

"...in the original Hebrew, the Messiah is represented as bearing and expiating our sins. But our diseases are undoubtedly connected with sin on the one, and death on the other hand; while the suffering of Christ depends on His taking on Himself our sufferings, which again is connected with His carrying them away....Christ takes away disease, in token of His removing its root, sin, by taking upon Himself death as the full wages and the full burden of sin."⁴⁵

"Christ fulfills the prophecies in all respects, and is himself the completion and truth of them, as being the lamb and victim of God which bears and takes away the sin of the world. The text in Isaiah refers properly to the taking away of sin; and this, in the evangelist, to the removal of corporeal affliction: Matthew, referring to the prediction of the prophet, considered the miraculous healing of the body as an emblem of the soul's salvation by Christ Jesus. (The evangelist here only alludes to those words, as being capable of this lower meaning also. Such instances are frequent in the sacred writings and are elegances rather than imperfections. He fulfilled these words in the highest sense, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree; in a lower sense, by sympathizing with us in our sorrows, and healing us of the diseases.-- Wesley.)"⁴⁶

In this passage from the Gospels even brighter light is thrown on the atonement of Jesus Christ. For that atonement was no mere isolated fact occurring at the death of Christ on the cross. It was tied up with His entire ministry of preaching and healing. Here was a man who not only would bear our sins and take them away but could also be sympathetic to our physical diseases.

45. Lange, 17, p. 158.

46. Clark, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

For purposes of brevity the next passages may be studied as a group. We mean all the passages which speak of Christ forgiving sins. In a way this will come under consideration in a later section of this paper, yet it might be well to insert the study of at least one such passage at this point. For if Christ was to be our Savior He most certainly should have had the authority and ability to forgive sins while He was still alive. The passage we shall study, indicative of the character of the entire group, is taken from the Gospel according to St. Mark. ⁴⁷

Mark 2, 1-12 (Matthew 9, 1-8; Luke 5, 17-26) (Translation of pertinent verses). V. 5: "And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven....(9) What is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise, and take your pallet and walk? But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins on earth,'--He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, rise, take your pallet and go to your house.'"

47. Most modern scholars believe that Mark was the first evangelist to write, that Luke and Matthew based their works on this Gospel. Cf. pages 16-18 for a brief listing of the possible dates of the Gospels. We might say however that this early dating of Mark is necessitated by the various source hypotheses. The only way in which they concern the topic of this paper is when the exponents of the theories try to limit all our actual knowledge about the Savior to the first written Gospel, considering the additions of the other evangelists as theological interpretations and later interpolations. But even if Mark is considered as the first evangelist to write the atonement is still taught in his Gospel. The passage under consideration studies such a passage from Mark.

Here as so many times Christ's marvelous power proved itself both in a spiritual and in a physical sense. Not only could He heal the paralytic's body. He could also heal his soul. The story is of course the one of the paralytic of Capernaum who was probably healed in the house of Simon Peter. The people of the city crowded about Jesus in the house filling the small rooms to overflowing. Four men were carrying this paralytic on a cot. They and the paralytic had heard of the marvelous healing power of Jesus. Denied entrance by the crowds around the doors the men ascended to the flat, low roof of the house, removed a few large tiles from the roof of the ceiling under which Jesus was teaching and let the cot down directly in front of the Savior.

Jesus saw the faith of this man and told him that his sins were forgiven. This was gross blasphemy to the many scribes and Pharisees present. But the Lord quickly silenced them by proving that as the Son of God He had both the power to forgive sins and to heal diseases.

There are two very interesting phrases used in this narrative. One is ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, "the Son of Man," and the other ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, "on the earth."

"These two phrases point at supposed disabilities for forgiving. 'Forgiveness takes place in heaven, and is the exclusive prerogative of God,' was the thesis of the scribes. 'It may be exercised even on earth, and by the Son of Man,' is the counter

thesis of Christ. Therefore 'Son of Man' must be a title not of dignity but of humiliation. Here = one whom ye think lightly of; even he can forgive."⁴⁸

As the true Son of God the Savior of the world forgives sins and then proves His power and authority to do so by performing a miracle.

"...he now performs the miracle of healing which all could see, that all could know that (the Son of Man, Christ's favourite designation of himself, a claim to be the Messiah in terms that could not be easily attacked) he really had the authority and power...to forgive sins. He has the right and power here on earth to forgive sins, here and now without waiting for the day of judgement."⁴⁹

The narrative of the healing of the paralytic is especially interesting to us because of the reference to Christ forgiving sins. That was His purpose in coming to earth, "to save His people from their sins" (Matt.), 21). Already, before His vicarious death, Christ was forgiving sins but only on the basis of His coming atonement. One important point to remember is that Jesus atoned for our sins not only by dying on the cross but also by living for us here on the earth. In the past we have called that the "passive" and the "active" obedience of Christ. And those terms are as good as any others to describe the complete atonement of Christ for the sins of the world. He lived for us. He died for us.

48. Bruce, op. cit., p. 149. The reference is to Matt. 9, 1-8.

49. Robertson, Word Studies, I, p. 269.

Both are true facts. And by living and dying He atoned for our sins!

The next passage is one of the most important in the synoptic Gospels relative to our topic.

Mark 10, 45 (Matthew 20, 28). "For the Son of Man came also not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many."

The narrative from which this passage is taken recounts a happening of the so-called later Perean ministry of the Lord. Christ had again told His disciples of His approaching death in unmistakeable terms. But according to Luke, "they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said" (Luke 18, 34 RSV). And not only did they not understand what Jesus was talking about but almost as soon as He had finished speaking the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, came to Him with a selfish request. Together with their mother they took Jesus aside and asked Him to give them great authority and glory in heaven, to have permission to sit beside Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven and help rule His people. It is undeniable that they still thought of Christ's Kingdom in earthly, materialistic terms. The Messiah was going to establish the kingdom of Israel again in all its glory. And if the Christ was going to do that these two men wanted in on the ground floor. They wanted to make certain of their position of

eminence in this kingdom. How quickly they had forgotten the sayings of Jesus about the horrible death He would have to suffer! Indeed they had never understood them.

The Lord of course answered that He could not grant such a selfish request. The other disciples in some way heard of this request of the two brothers and became properly indignant. Then Christ called them to gather around and taught them a lesson which they should never forget--but which unfortunately they soon did. He gave the analogy of the government exercised by the Gentile nations. Their rulers were almost without exception selfish men interested only in their own lives and their own personal advancement. "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them" (Mark 10, 42 RSV). But that was not to be the case among Christ's followers. The mark of Christians is to be their unselfishness, their willingness to serve one another. "...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave to all" (10, 43. 44 RSV). This was exemplified in the purpose of Christ's entire life and death. For even He came not to be served but to serve, "and to give His life a ransom for many."

Here if ever is given the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. And what is more it is given in the very Gospel which critics claim to be the first Gospel written, that

which is supposed to give the original, actual teaching of Jesus. This is no interpolation. This is the heart and center of Christ's entire program for His Christians. It is a program of service. And this service is fully illustrated by the life of the Son of Man Himself. More important, it flows from the atonement which He made for the sins of the whole world, "His life a ransom for many." Let the critics try and explain away this teaching of Jesus. It cannot be done. Christ's purpose in living and dying was to give His whole life in substitution for the sins of the world.

This purpose becomes even plainer as we study the words of the text closely. The Greek of Mark reads:
δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον
ἀντὶ πολλῶν. The word λύτρον means the price which is paid to release (λύειν, "to loose") a person held in bondage or slavery. The meaning was clearly grasped by Luther who wrote in the explanation of the second article of the Creed that Jesus Christ "has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

In the monumental work, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources, the authors, James Hope Moulton and

George Milligan, give examples of such a meaning of the word λύτρον. We quote but one:

"Thus in P Oxy I. 48⁶ (A.D. 86)...we read of a slave Euphrosyne who has been set free ὑπὸ
Δία Γῆν Ἡλίου ἐπὶ λύτροις
'under Zeus, Earth, Sun, for a ransom.'"50

A. T. Robertson writes:

"The word translated 'ransom' is the one commonly employed in the papyri as the price paid for a slave who is then set free by the one who bought him, the purchase money for manumitting slaves."51

Adolf Deissmann, in his Light from the Ancient East, says:

"...when anybody heard the Greek word λύτρον, 'ransom,' in the first century, it was natural for him to think of the purchase-money for manumitting slaves. Three documents from Oxyrynchus relating to manumissions in the years 86, 100, and 91 or 107 A. D. make use of the word....it is not impossible that all three adumbrate traces of sacrificial manumission."52

Adam Clark remarks:

"The original word is used by Lucian in exactly the same sense, who represents Ganymede promising to sacrifice a ram to Jupiter, λύτρον ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, as a ransom for himself, provided he would dismiss him. The whole Gentile world, as well as the Jews, believed in vicarious sacrifices. Virgil (Aen. v. 85) has nearly the same words as those in the text. 'Unum pro multis debetur caput,'--One man must be given for many. Jesus Christ laid down his life as a ransom for the lives and souls of the children of men."53

It is evident that the Savior knew well the words He

50. Moulton-Milligan, pp. 382-383.

51. Robertson, Word Studies, I, p. 163. The reference is to Matt. 20, 28.

52. Deissmann, pp. 327-328.

53. Clark, op. cit., p. 117.

was choosing in thus stating the purpose of His death on the cross. He meant to say that His death would be the ransom price to buy back the souls of all men from sin. This ransom could not be made with money as one might purchase the freedom of a slave. This ransom required a price so great that only the sinless Son of God could pay it. Here is atonement, satisfaction for the sins of the world. But some may ask, Is it a vicarious atonement? How do we know that Christ died in our place, as our substitute?

That fact is indicated by the preposition ἀντί. Moulton-Milligan give clear evidence from the papyri that the current meaning of the word was "instead of," "in place of."

"By far the commonest meaning of ἀντί is the simple 'instead of.' P Tebt II. 34324 (ii/A.D.) ὥστε ἀντί ἐλαίωνο[5] φρο(ρίμου) [ἄρουρα] καὶ κτλ. 'making 2(63/64) arourae converted from productive oliveyard' (Edd.). P Giss II. 4710 (ii/A.D.) a corselet bought for 360 dr. ἀντί πλείονος, 'under its value.'.... This shades into 'in exchange for' or 'in return for'; Calder 455 (c. mid. iii/A.D.) τόνδε σε Μυρδορέη Διονύσιον ἀντί β(ί)ου πολλῶν καὶ τῆς εἰρήνης στεῦμα, 'thy statue here, a Dionysius (in marble), M. (erected, thus honouring thee with a crown in return for guarding the life of many and for preserving the peace' (Ed.)."⁵⁴

Robertson, in his Grammar, gives the following:

"...face to face....Now the various resultant ideas grow out of this root-idea because of different contexts....These important doctrinal passages (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45) teach the substitutionary

54. Moulton-Milligan, p. 46.

conception of Christ's death, not because ἀντί of itself means 'instead,' which is not true, but because the context renders any other resultant idea out of the question. Compare also ἀντί-λύτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων by Paul (1 Tim. 2:6) where both ἀντί and ὑπὲρ combine with λύτρον in expressing this idea. Cf. ἀντί-τυπος (Heb. 9:24). In Mt. 2:22 ἀντί τοῦ πατρὸς the substitution takes the form of succession as son succeeds father on the throne. Cf. ἀντὶ-ὑπάτος (Ac. 13:7). In Jas. 4:15 ἀντὶ τοῦ λέγου the result is also substitution, the points of view being contrasted. In Heb. 12:2 the cross and the joy face each other in the mind of Jesus and he takes both, the cross in order to get the joy. The idea of exchange appears also in 1 Cor. 11:15.... (Cf. also χάρις ἀντὶ χάριτος, John 1:16). As the days come and go a new supply takes the place of the grace already bestowed as wave follows wave upon the shore. Grace answers (ἀντί) to grace."⁵⁵

Moulton's Grammar:

"'In front of,' with a normal adnominal genitive, passes naturally into 'in place of,' with the idea of equivalence, or return or substitution, our for."⁵⁶

Blass-Debrunner's Grammatik:

"...the local meaning if (directly) before, in front of, over-against, denotes figuratively barter, exchange... in which one thing is given for, instead of, another...and in consequence assumes its place. It governs the Genitive, that being the case of...exchange.... Hence ἀντί is the preposition chiefly used to denote the price for, in exchange for, which one gives or receives an article of merchandise."⁵⁷

55. A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, pp. 572-574.

56. James Hope Moulton, "Prolegomena," A Grammar of New Testament Greek, p. 100.

57. Albert Debrunner, Friedrich Blass' Grammatik des neutestamentliches Griechisch, p. 364.

Liddell-Scott, in their Lexicon, list many ancient sources where ἀντί can only mean "instead of," "in the place of." Examples are taken from Homer, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Xenophon and many others.

Kittel, Wörterbuch:

"In seiner sinnlichen Grundbedeutung gegenüber kommt es im NT nicht vor, sondern meist in der Bedeutung a-anstatt, mehrfach in Figuren wie κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ R 12,17; 1 Th 5, 15; 1 Pt 3,9, γάρων ἀντὶ γάρωντος J 1,16.... Aus der Bedeutung anstatt entwickelt sich b. die zugunsten = ὑπέρ Mt 17,27: δοῦναι ἀντὶ ἐμοῦ καὶ σοῦ
für = für Rechnung von...

"In Mk 10,45 par: δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν ist ἀντὶ πολλῶν der Stellung wegen von λύτρον, nicht von δοῦναι abhängig. Deshalb hat ἀντί die Bedeutung a.... Das dahingegebene Leben Jesu ist der hinlängliche Preis zur Loskaufung der Vielen.... Zu ihren Gunsten tut er [Jesus] nichts anderes, also dasz er an ihre Stelle tritt." 59

And finally in regard to ἀντί, Dana-Mantey's

Grammar has the following:

"There is conclusive proof now that the dominant meaning for ἀντί in the first century was instead of.... This statement refers to the papyri usage. Professor Whitesell (Chicago) made a study of ἀντί in the Septuagint and found thirty eight passages where it is rightly translated instead of in the RV. Since ἀντί is used in two atonement passages in the New Testament, such a translation needs careful consideration.... But does it mean instead of in Mt. 20:28 and Mk. 10:44...? Either that, or else it means in exchange for, and each implies substitution. The obscurity of this passage is not the result of linguistic ambiguity,

58. Cf. Liddel-Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 153.

59. Kittel, op. cit., p. 373.

but of theological controversy."⁶⁰

These references should be sufficient to prove to even the most radical of critics that the Lord Jesus here (Mark 10, 45; Matt. 20, 28) has in mind the idea of substitution. His death would be in place of, a substitution⁶¹ for, the lives of all other people. All men are by nature under the condemnation of God. If no one would take their place and pay a ransom for them then they would have to suffer the torments of hell and damnation. But that is just the exact purpose of Christ's death on the cross. He suffered the torments of hell and separation from God for this very purpose that He might offer up a ransom for our lives. He died in our stead. He took our place. No other meaning is even remotely possible.

And yet the teaching of the atonement by Mark and Matthew is denied. William F. Cooley for example, whom we have cited before, says:

"Jesus' statement that 'the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many'--the only case in which he uses the word 'ransom'--is often cited. Now, no doubt Jesus was then looking forward to his all too probable violent death, but

60. Dana-Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 100.

61. Incidentally the word πὸ λλῶν used in this passage does not indicate any exclusive character on the part of Christ's atonement. It does not support any limited atonement theory. For the term is used by way of antithesis to the one whose death was the ransom for the many. Many is simply used in contrast to the one, Christ. Cf. Lange-Schaff, 17, op. cit., p. 365.

that he referred to any metaphysical 'ransom'-- any discharge of a speculative legal relation to Satan or to God--is not suggested in the least."⁶²

We know that Cooley has his particular theory about the work of Christ to advance, therefore he so limits the atonement teaching of this passage. It seems impossible that he could have approached this passage in an objective way to learn its actual meaning. He considers it one of the mysterious sayings of the Savior and so interprets it in accordance with his own peculiar analogy of faith. That is a completely subjective method of handling passages which do not fit into our own preconceived notions about the Scriptures.

George Barker Stevens, in The Theology of the New Testament, gives two other examples of this attempt to limit the meaning of the word λύτρον:

"Baur assigns this meaning: 'Jesus gives his life for many, that is for all who will appropriate this benefit, hence for men in general, as the price on account of which they are redeemed, in order to free them as prisoners from a bondage which can be nothing else than the bondage of sin and death.' But he held that this idea finds no confirmation elsewhere in the Synoptics except in Mt. xxvi. 28, and that on account of its singularity we must conclude either that Jesus never used the expression, or that it had, as he used it, quite a different form from that which the passage has assumed in our sources. For this conclusion there are no critical grounds; the passage is found in Mark (x. 45), the earliest of the Synoptics, and its originality is beyond suspicion.

"Risschl has elaborated the view that λύτρον is the equivalent of ῥοῖ, a protective covering. This view is based upon the use of

62. Cooley, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

λύτρον several times found in the Septuagint...as a translation for קָדֹשׁ....The linguistic grounds for this interpretation are acutely criticised by Wendt (Teaching of Jesus, II. 228, 229)....Its principal difficulties are: (1) The Seventy use λύτρον to translate several different Hebrew words; the word does not, therefore, consistently represent קָדֹשׁ, and no presumption exists that Jesus originally used this, or a kindred, word. (2) The phrase ἀντί πολλῶν is capable of a more natural interpretation if λύτρον means 'ransom-price' than it is if it means 'protective covering' (Schutzmittel)."⁶³

When the Lord Jesus spoke these words it is unlikely that there was any doubt whatsoever in the minds of any Jew present as to the meaning. The word "ransom" or "redemption" was familiar to every Hebrew. Under the Law the method of commutation by the payment of a ransom was employed in all cases where things were due to God which from some ineligibility could not themselves be presented. When the Lord spoke of His death as being a ransom for the lives of many His hearers would understand His words by the analogy of the national customs in which they had been born and bred. The meaning would be clear enough to His disciples.

"They would understand that there were many first-born whose lives would be spared because His life would be surrendered, or, as in the case of the man whose ox had gored a Hebrew to death (Ex. xxi. 30), there were many forfeited lives which should be restored, because His life should vicariously bear their punishment and be taken away. The very word ransom or redemption...would recall a host of associations connected with the

63. Stevens, pp. 126-128.

Mosaic idea of 'redemption,'--itself a conspicuous variety of bloodless sacrifices."⁶⁴

If there was any misconception or misunderstanding of Jesus' words it was on account of the same spiritual hardness of heart which characterizes the approach to Jesus of so many theological scholars of recent years. Even F. W. Farrar has to admit:

"The words 'ransom,' 'redemption' express the effects of Christ's work in delivering us from the bondage of sin, of Satan and spiritual death. This was achieved or purchased for us--the metaphor is derived from the purchase of slaves--by the life and death of Christ just as the analogous Hebrew words are applied in the Old Testament to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Our Lord when He spoke of giving His life as 'a ransom for many' simply expresses the truth that we were the slaves of sin, and that by His life and death He delivered us from that bondage."⁶⁵

Another thought which bothers many scholars is the legal concept involved in the idea of the payment of a ransom. They claim that it is unjust and childish to speak of God as being angry over sin. They claim that it is superstitious to think that one death of but one person, no matter who that person might be, even if it is the sinless Son of God Himself, could ever possibly atone or be a substitute for the lives of other people. This they say would be grossly unjust on the part of God, to punish one man for the sins of others. And

64. Alfred Cave, The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement, p. 279.

65. Farrar, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

still that is the very "injustice," if you wish to call it that, which is given us in the Scriptures. For they plainly teach that Christ's death is the evidence of God's wrath against sin and His love towards sinners. They teach--the synoptic Gospels also--that Christ took upon Himself our sins and infirmities and bore the punishment we merited by those sins. That may be legalistic, i. e. making use of legal terminology, but there is no other way out. F. L. Steinmeyer asks:

"For how can legal terms be avoided when one is dealing with a problem in which the conception 'righteousness of God,' occupies a prominent place, and whose central difficulty lies in the ideas λύτρον, λυτροδοσία, on which so strong an emphasis is put by our Lord Himself and by His apostles? In order to avoid them, it would be necessary to deprive these expressions of their plain and natural signification, and to understand them in a sense with which the Scriptures are totally unacquainted."⁶⁶

We can think of one more important objection to this passage and its relation to the atonement teaching of the Scriptures. That is the claim that it was the apostle Paul, a man who probably never knew Jesus and who was deeply influenced by Greek philosophy, who amplified and adapted Jesus' λύτρον to the Greek world of his day. But scholars who claim this to be true are forced to eliminate Old Testament influence and terminology from the mind of Christ. They must foist various interpretations upon the plain words of the

⁶⁶. F. L. Steinmeyer, The History of the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord, p. 10.

Savior so as to fit them into their own particular theories of the atonement. They are forced to disregard the obvious testimony of the papyri. And finally they fail to consider that the New Testament is a unit, one complete thing, and that no teaching can be separated from any other simply because it was written by another man a years earlier or later.

The next passage for our consideration is one taken from the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector, as written by Luke.⁶⁷

Luke 19, 10. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

The incident took place at the end of the later Perea ministry. Immediately after the meeting with Zacchaeus the Lord Jesus set out for Jerusalem, where He would meet His death. This thought was uppermost in His mind just before He began His journey and must therefore be implied in His statement. Now Christ was passing through the town of Jericho. He had healed the blind beggars sitting by the roadside (Luke 18, 35-43). In the city of Jericho lived a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus by name,

67. The particular passage we will study, Luke 19, 10, is also given in Matthew 18, 11 in our Authorized Version. Nestle's Greek text considers this to be an interpolation. Enough important manuscripts testify to its genuineness to warrant its insertion in the text of Matthew's Gospel. However since there is doubt we will use the Luke passage which is undoubtedly genuine.

very wealthy by virtue of his extensive extortions of money. He had heard of the wonderful deeds of the Savior. Being a small man and unable to get a good look at Jesus because of the crowd he ran ahead, climbed a sycamore tree and there waited for the Savior to pass by. As Jesus walked past He called to Zacchaeus in the tree, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (19, 5 RSV). Zacchaeus came down and joyfully received the Lord in his home. Here he was converted by the Savior, made a true Christian. His faith immediately evidenced itself in his desire to pay back all the money he had received by illegal means. And the Savior told the others in the house, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (19, 9. 10 RSV).

The passage is clearly a reminiscence of Ezekiel 34, 16: "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

One question before us is, Does this remark of the Lord refer only to Zacchaeus, or does it have a universal signification? Many think it refers only to the class of tax collectors or publicans of which Zacchaeus was a member. So, Bruce believes the term points to the social degradation and isolation of the publicans. They were social lepers, and the Lord Jesus is here thinking only

of their group.⁶⁸ And we are again met by Cooley who does all he can to limit the atonement teaching of Christ. He states:

"Modern Christians are apt to think that 'lost' in this passage means a state of fatal alienation from God, one which can be overcome only through the sinner's appropriation of the 'satisfaction of Christ'; but the idea appears to have nothing in its favor, except the fact that generations later speculative theologians taught the church to think that way."⁶⁹

And yet we are faced with the conviction that in this passage the word "lost" does refer to the "state of fatal alienation from God." Thayer remarks:

"ἀπόλλυμι ...Used of sheep, straying from the flock: prop. Lk. xv. 4....Metaph. in accordance with the O. T. comparison of the people of Israel to a flock (Jer. xxvii. (1.) 6; Ezek. xxxiv. 4, 16), the Jews, neglected by their religious teachers, left to themselves and thereby in danger of losing eternal salvation, wandering about as it were without guidance, are called τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότες τοῦ οἴκου Ἰσραηλ: Mt. x. 6; xv. 24, (Is. liii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 25); and Christ reclaiming them from wickedness, is likened to a shepherd and is said ἦν τε εἶν καὶ σωθεῖν τὸ ἀπολωλός."⁷⁰

Clearly the reference is not just to one class of people, the tax collectors. For indeed that idea only flows out of the larger thought that Christ came to seek and to save all the lost. The Savior is in effect repeating once again this thought for the benefit, not only of

68. Bruce, op. cit., pp. 604-605.

69. Cooley, op. cit., p. 92.

70. Thayer, op. cit., p. 65.

Zacchaeus, not only for the other "sinners" at table with Him, not only for the disciples, but for the entire world. The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom in place of many. That is the same thought which is here stated in different terms. There the concept of redeeming a slave from bondage was used. Here the picture of a shepherd with his flock of sheep colors the words of the Savior.

The whole world had left God, was off wandering in the darkness of sin and despair. Not only Israel was in this condition but all mankind was in the same state, Gentiles as well as Jews. But the great Shepherd of the flock (Luke 15, 3-7) came down from heaven to gather the sheep together again to one fold, the fold which might be called peace with God or simply, salvation, the word which the Savior Himself uses. Many sheep refuse to follow the Shepherd. But the Shepherd's love extends over all of them. For that is why He came down to this earth, "to seek and to save the lost." Behind the salvation of Zacchaeus is all the saving work of the Lord Jesus. The verb "came" treats of His messianic work in its entirety.

"Zacchaeus, like others, was evidence that the great purpose was vastly more than an intention-- the seeking and saving power in this gospel is the atonement which Jesus wrought, which was effective through the promises of the old covenant and through the fulfillment in the new. The neuter participle 'what has been lost,' just because it is neuter, states the object in the widest way; compare John 3:6 and similar neuters. The perfect tense has its present connotation: 'has been and consequently now still is lost,' and this in the intensive sense: that which has perished and is now in that

condition--a true description of the wreck that sin has made of us."⁷¹

The thought of the passage should be clear. The Savior states His purpose in coming to earth. He has come to seek and to save the lost people of God. They wandered away from the Father. Christ came to bring them back to Him. Here in plain, unmistakable terms we have the purpose and aim of the Savior. And knowing as He did that He now had to go to Jerusalem and be handed over to the authorities for crucifixion, who can doubt that His own atoning death is uppermost in His mind as the means of bringing these lost sheep back to the fold of God?

We now have come to the Lord's institution of the Last Supper. This is given by all three synoptic writers, with only minor syntactical differences in the presentation. We shall give a translation of the pertinent passage in each account.

Mark 14, 24. "And He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.'"

Matthew 26, 27. "And taking the cup, having given thanks, He gave it to them saying, 'All of you drink from this; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

Luke 22, 20. "And the cup likewise, after supper, saying 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"

⁷¹ Lenski, II, op. cit., pp. 1068-1069.

It will be seen that each writer gives the essential feature of the statement of the Savior, namely that His blood was to be poured out for the disciples and for "many." Matthew gives the additional explanation of the Lord, "for the forgiveness of sins."

The circumstances of the utterance are too well known to require more than a few words by way of introduction. Christ was celebrating the Passover with His disciples. As He took the traditional cup of wine and the traditional bread which was to be broken He gave a new meaning to the ancient Jewish rite, instituting the sacrament of the New Covenant.⁷² Our purpose is not to go into a complete study of the significance and meaning of this sacrament of Christ's body and blood but simply to study the words of the Savior as they pertain to the topic of this paper. Does He throw more light on the doctrine of the atonement?

One important word in the institution is διαθήκη. This word and the concept it represented played an important part in Old Testament theology. The word used for covenant in the Old Testament is ברית. According to Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon the word implied the following

72. For a thorough study of the rites connected with the Passover itself and the institution of the Lord's Supper see Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, pp. 479-512. Cf. also William Moenkemoeller, The Festivals and Sacrifices of Israel, p. 15 (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1932).

connotations, among others:

"Spoken of a league between nations or tribes Josh. 9, 6sq. or between private persons and friends 1 Sam. 18, 3. 23, 18....Elsewhere it signifies also the condition of God's covenant with Israel, viz. a) the covenant promise of God, Is. 59, 21. b) Oftener the precepts of God which are to be observed by Israel, the divine law."⁷³

This particular covenant to which Christ evidently refers in the passages we are studying is given at some length in the book of Exodus, chapters 19 to 24. In Exo. 19, 5, 6, God made the covenant promise to His people: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." In chapters 20 to 23, God gave the covenant law, the Ten Commandments and their full amplification. And then, in chapter 24, we are told of the ratification of the covenant with blood. "And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." (24, 8).

Again in Leviticus 4, 18-20 we are told of how the covenant may again be renewed and sins be forgiven the people by the shedding of blood. "And he [the priest] shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar

⁷³. William Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 159. (Translated by Edward Robinson, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company).

which is before the Lord....And he shall do with the bullock as he did with the bullock for a sin offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them."

In his preface to the Old Testament Martin Luther wrote:

"Darum nennt auch St. Paulus Mosis Gesetz das alte Testament, Christus auch, da er das neue Testament einsetzte, und ist darum ein Testament, dasz Gott darinnen verhiesz und beschied dem Volk Israel das Land Canaan, woe sie es halten würden. Und gab es auch ihnen, und ward bestätigt durch Schöps- und Bocks-Tod und -Blut. Aber weil solch Testament nicht auf Gottes Gnade, sondern auf Menschenwerke stund, muszte es alt werden und aufhören, und das verheiszene Land wieder verloren werden, darum, dasz durch Werke das Gesetz nicht kann erfüllt werden. Und muszt ein ander Testament kommen, das nicht alt würde, auch nicht auf unserm Thun, sondern auf Gottes Wort und Werken stünde, auf dasz es ewiglich währete. Darum ist es auch durch einer ewigen Person Tod und Blut bestätigt, und ein ewiges Land verheiszten und gegeben."⁷⁴

This then was the covenant which God made with Israel. It was a covenant of works but nevertheless one that was ratified by the blood of animals. It is obvious that the Lord Jesus had this same covenant in mind when He made the assertion that He was giving a "new covenant." For Jeremiah the prophet had written, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." (31, 31). Here the Lord was finally establishing this new covenant, the new agreement of God with the spiritual Israel.

74. Martin Luther, "Vorrede auf das Alte Testament," Sämtliche Schriften, XIV, col. 14. (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1898).

"In the Hebrew to make a covenant was to cut up the sacrifice and so ratify the agreement (Gen. 15: 9-18)....Jesus here uses the solemn words of Ex. 24:8, 'the blood of the covenant' at Sinai. 'My blood of the covenant' is in contrast with that. This is the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31; Heb. 8."75

"Die διαθήκη ...ist nicht sein 'Testament'--weder im Pls--noch im Mk-Text ist von seiner διαθήκη die Rede--, sondern nach Analogie der at.lich-jüdischen Idee Verfügung, Stiftung Gottes. Die Ausführung der neuen Verfügung, die Gott zur Regelung des Verhältnisses zwischen sich und der Menschheit erlassen hat, die Verwirklichung des eschatologischen Heilswillens Gottes hat Jesus als seine Aufgabe angesehen. Die neue Gottesordnung ruft sein blutiger Tod ins Leben, den der Abendmahlskelch vergegenwärtigt."76

"This new covenant binds men to exercise faith in Christ, and God promises them grace and salvation eternal. This covenant Christ set up and ratified by undergoing death; hence... τὸ ἀίμα τῆς διαθήκης."77

One important word in the statement of Christ is that expressed by our English preposition "for"--"for many," "for you." Matthew uses the Greek preposition περὶ; Mark and Luke use ὑπέρ. However this constitutes no real problem. For the two prepositions 78 could be interchanged and often were in Greek writing.

75. Robertson, Word Studies, I, p. 209.

76. Kittel, op. cit., p. 136-137.

77. Thayer, op. cit., p. 136.

78. "While these prepositions are often interchanged, ὑπέρ is the more definite expression. Matthew, however, adds the explanation, εἰς ἄφεσιν: and therefore, in accordance with biblical typology, only an expiatory offering can be meant." Lange-Schaff, op. cit., p. 473. "The last part of this statement, and consequently what is implied in it, viz. the atoning purpose contemplated by the shedding of blood...is to be understood as

ὑπέρ expresses the same idea as that expressed by ἀντί.⁷⁹ It clearly means "instead of," and so here too we have the substitutionary concept of Christ's death involved. Christ's blood is poured out ὑπέρ πολλῶν or ὑμῶν, that is, it is poured in our place, as substitution for us, not merely "for" us, or "for our sake." Christ took our place on the cross. He poured out His blood so that we would not have to pour out our own. That is substitution. That is the vicarious atonement. On this use of ὑπέρ compare

A. T. Robertson's Grammar:

"In the Alcestis of Euripides, where the point turns on the substitutionary death of Alcestis for her husband, ὑπέρ occurs seven times, more than ἀντί and πρό together.... There are a few other passages where ὑπέρ has the resultant notion of 'instead of' and only violence to the context can get rid of it."⁸⁰

In his excellent little work, The Minister and His Greek Testament, the same scholar devotes one entire chapter to the use of ὑπέρ in this substitutionary sense.

setting forth more precisely the idea expressed by περί. It must not be supposed, however, that ὑπέρ ... is essentially different from the latter [i. e., περί]; but is to be distinguished from it only in respect to the different moral basis on which the idea contained in it rests (like the German um and über), so that both the prepositions are often interchanged in cases where they have exactly one and the same reference, as in Demosthenes especially." H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, II, Part I, p. 211.

79. Cf. pp. 52-55 of this paper for study of ἀντί.

80. Robertson, Grammar, p. 630.

We quote but one brief paragraph:

"The substitutionary use of ὑπέρ appears in Thucydides I. 141, Xenophon's Anabasis 7. 4, 9, and in Plato's Gorgias (515, C). In the Epistle to Diognetus (p. 84) we actually see λύτρον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. So then it was never fair to say that the Greek idiom required ἀντί for the idea of substitution."⁸¹

And finally one more example of such use from the early Greek is given by Moulton-Milligan:

"...when one man writes a letter for another, seeing that he is unable to write it for himself, e. g. P Tebt I. 104³⁹ (B. C. 92)

ἔγραψεν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ Διονύσιος
ἑρμαίους σου ὁ προγραμμένως
διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν μὴ ἐπίστασθαι
γράφματα"⁸²

Again we ask the question, On the basis of such a passage can anyone be so bold as to deny the vicarious atonement of the Savior? And the answer is, as always, Yes! Cooley writes:

"If Jesus really meant to represent himself as the expiator of sin for all mankind, it is most improbable that he would have left this world-embracing principle so vague that his reporters could recall but one reference to it on his part, and even as to that be unable to agree upon just what he said. Moreover, the Gospel narratives indicate that Jesus was not interested in the expiatory side of Israel's religion, a side magnified far too much by Christian theologians."⁸³

We answer that Christ may not have been interested in

"The expiatory side of Israel's religion," but He certainly

81. Robertson, p. 36. A study of the entire chapter and book will prove profitable for any pastor or student.

82. Moulton-Milligan, op. cit., p. 651.

83. Cooley, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

was interested in His own expiatory atonement. Compare the passages we have studied thus far. Compare the reference in Matthew, "for the forgiveness of sins." The whole thought of the disciples present at the supper was colored with the Old Testament ritual of sacrifices and ceremonies. The Lord knew this and yet He deliberately made use of such language as could not possibly be misunderstood by His followers! If the disciples did misunderstand Christ it was ^{not} the fault of the Savior. For His words can only express the vicariousness of His coming death. If He did not mean to teach the atonement then He was using language which would lead every sincere Christian to the belief that His death was an atonement. And under no circumstances can we believe that the Christ would stoop to deceit of any kind. Indeed, "no guile was found on his lips" (1 Pet. 2, 22 RSV). Therefore He must have meant to teach His vicarious atonement for the sins of the entire world. No other teaching can be found in His words.

The Lord Jesus clearly and deliberately associated His work with the Old Testament sacrifices. He spoke of "the blood of the covenant." And those were the exact words used by Moses when the covenant was sealed at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24, 8). The words of Christ recall that scene in the desert and clearly ascribe to His own death a sacrificial aspect. ⁸⁴ And that fact is further brought

84. Cf. Cave, op. cit., p. 280.

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out by the phrase which Matthew uses, "for the forgiveness of sins." According to Bruce this phrase

"may be a comment on Christ's words, supplied by Mt.; but it is a true comment. For what else could the blood be shed according to Levitical analogies and even Jeremiah's new covenant, which includes among its blessings the complete forgiveness of sins?"⁸⁵

And George Barker Stevens says:

"What could any person familiar with the Old Testament understand by a covenant in Christ's blood, or by the giving up of his life as a ransom, except a sacrificial death? If his 'blood shed for many' does not mean substantially the same as 'shed for the remission of sins,' we must say that the misunderstanding of the early Church was quite inevitable, for certainly no person of the time could have understood the language otherwise."⁸⁶

Here again is the vicarious atonement. The blood of Christ is being poured out, He says, for many for the forgiveness of sins. That means that God in Christ forgives us our sins. Think back over the entire doctrine of the atonement. God, just because He is a just God, had to punish our sins. But instead of punishing the sinners He sent His only Son to bear our punishment. Christ suffered and died for us bearing our sins up to the cross as a priest carried an offering up to the altar. And there they were all washed away in the precious blood of the Savior, "like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1, 19 RSV). Why God should send Christ to do that for us is beyond our understanding. We only

85. Bruce, op. cit., p. 312.

86. Stevens, op. cit., p. 132.

know that He did love us. And we know that Christ made an atonement for our sins. That is the true basis of the Christian religion.

We have but one more passage to consider by itself. That is a passage which in a way gives the practical application to be made from the doctrine of the atonement and so forms a fitting conclusion to this study of individual Scripture texts from the synoptics.

Luke 24, 46, 47. "And He told them that so it was written for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance to forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations."

According to Luke this was the last time the Savior was together with His disciples. Immediately after He spoke these words He led the disciples out as far as Bethany, blessed them and ascended into heaven. But before He went He left with them this purpose of their ministry, to preach "repentance to forgiveness of sins... in His name."

To do anything "in the name of Jesus" means simply to do it on the basis of the revelation of Jesus which one has received. So, Plummer remarks:

"On the basis of all that His name implies: it is His messiahship which makes repentance effectual."⁸⁷

Christ had left the disciples. But He had now left them

87. Plummer, op. cit., p. 563.

firm believers in His vicarious atonement. And that atonement and no other theory of religion was to be the basis of their teaching and preaching. They were to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28, 20 RSV). They were to make disciples by preaching this simple Gospel of the death of the Lord Jesus for the sins of the entire world. It did indeed turn out to be foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews. But to those who believed it it was the power of God to forgive their sins. The disciples' message was that which Christ taught them, that which He lived for them. There is no excuse for us if we preach any other Gospel!

This completes our study of the various individual passages which teach the vicarious atonement. If the purpose of the Gospels will be remembered--to give background material on the life of this Christ whom Paul and the other apostles preached--that, together with the overwhelming conviction engendered by a study of the atonement passages, should convince any honest seeker that the three synoptic Gospels do teach the vicarious satisfaction of the Lord Jesus. However, there are two more important points to be discussed before we turn to the witness of scholars who back up our original thesis. These points are: 1) The Savior knew Himself to be, and taught accordingly, that He was the promised Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah; and 2) briefly,

that in His own person He fulfilled the Old Testament Messianic prophecies concerning the Good Shepherd who would lead the people of God back to His fold.

The point we wish to prove is that Christ knew Himself to be the promised Messiah. He knew Himself to be the Suffering Servant foretold by Isaiah the prophet.

Many of the chief New Testament teachings about the Messiah, the Christ, are supported by Rabbinic theology as learned from the ancient Rabbinic writings. Thus the following doctrines may be clearly seen in such writings: the pre-mundane existence of the Messiah; His elevation above Moses and the angels; His cruel sufferings and derision; His violent death, and that for His people; His work on behalf of the living and the dead; His redemption and restoration of Israel; the opposition of the Gentiles; the partial judgement and conversion of the Gentiles; the universal blessings of the latter days; and His kingdom. It must be admitted however that there was only indistinct reference to the removal of sin by the ⁸⁸ Christ in the sense of vicarious sufferings.

The Lord Jesus knew of such Rabbinic theology and acknowledged that in His person were fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Of course He also had to remove the cloud of materialistic

88. Cf. Edersheim, I, op. cit., pp. 164-165.

conceptions of the reign of this Messiah which was over the heads of all Israel. And this He did, particularly by showing that He would fulfill all the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

In Matthew 8, 16, 17, which we have considered before,⁸⁹ the Lord fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (53, 4). We have seen that His healing of diseases is only a part of His much larger character as sin bearer of the human race. For in removing sins of people the Christ also was prepared to remove the results of sin in people, disease and affliction.

In Luke 22, 37 we are told that Christ, in one of His last discourses before His trial, told the disciples that the prophecy of Isaiah (53, 12, "He was numbered with the transgressors"), had to be fulfilled in Him. Perhaps the disciples did not understand at the time. But the Lord's teaching remains. He foretold that He would be tried as a common thief or murderer and that He would hang on the cross between two law breakers.

Many scholars have found in the Baptism experience of Jesus proof of His messianic appointment as the Suffering Servant. J. W. Bowman in his work, The Intention of Jesus, writes of the quotation, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1, 11 RSV):

89. Cf. pp. 41-44.

"The significance of the quotation consists in the fact that this passage in Isaiah [42, 1] represents the ordination formula of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. By combining the two passages, (Isa. 42, 1; Psalm 2, 7) accordingly, the voice succeeds in at once anointing the unique Son as the Messiah and ordaining him as the Suffering Servant! Or, to express the same thought in slightly different terms, it not alone confirms to Jesus' consciousness the fact of his Messiahship, but it serves at the same time to define the nature of that Messiahship as one issuing in suffering, trial, death--the cross."⁹⁰

But, some argue, Christ never claimed Himself to be the Suffering Servant. He never came out with the bold statement that He was such a Messiah. And yet the references to the Servant prophecies are so obvious, e. g., Mark 8, 31; 9, 31; Luke 22, 37, that no reasonable doubt can be entertained that Jesus identified Himself with the figure there delineated. This fact is of the greatest significance. For the essential feature of the work of the Suffering Servant was the justification of many by the bearing of their sins. This double-sided mission of sin bearing and justifying is without doubt the supreme service which by His suffering and death the Servant was to perform.⁹¹

Hodgson remarks with respect to this fact:

"If, as I have tried to show, the Gospels give us the picture of One who believed Himself to be the Messiah, then there is no antecedent objection to the view that this idea of Messiahship brought with it into His mind the thought of Himself as

90. Bowman, p. 39.

91. Cf. Dillistone, op. cit., p. 65.

called to die for the sins of mankind. Even if He were but a human fanatic with a delusion of Messiahship, he might have drawn this idea from the 'Suffering Servant' passages in the Old Testament....If...a critical study of the Gospels is consistent with the view that as Messiah He viewed His suffering and death as a call to bear the burden of human sin, it is from this source that the Christian doctrine of the Atonement has sprung."92

And, finally, anyone acquainted at all with the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 53 is bound to be struck with the remarkable fulfillment of that prophecy in the history of the passion and death of the Lord Jesus. Here as we are told by Matthew, Mark and Luke is a man "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53, 3). He was "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities...and with his stripes we are healed" (4. 5). "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (7). "He was taken from prison and from judgment" (8). "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (9). "He was numbered with the transgressors" (12). Isaiah is standing at the foot of the cross. He has followed Christ throughout all His suffering and sorrow. Compare those verses listed above with the passion narrative of the synoptic writers and then deny that the writers were thinking of the atonement of the Savior as being in direct fulfillment of Isaiah 53! "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!"

92. Hodgson, op. cit., pp. 108-110.

Another group of passages are those in which Christ fulfilled other Old Testament prophecies in regard to the Messiah who would deliver Israel from their spiritual bondage to sin. In other passages Christ admitted that He was the Christ, the prophecied Messiah.

Luke 4, 18-21. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has annointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'...Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (RSV).

The Lord was in His home city of Nazareth of Galilee. On a certain Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, "as his custom was" (v. 16), and there He stood up to read from the book of the prophet Isaiah. He read Isaiah 61, 1. 2. And when He had finished reading this glorious prophecy of the sin bearing Messiah He openly admitted that in His own self this prophecy was fulfilled. The people of Nazareth would not believe this but that does not affect the point we wish to make.

Christ clearly taught that He was this Christ who would take away all the sins of the people, who would preach the Gospel of vicarious atonement to all men. It is obvious that here He was thinking and speaking of His death on the cross, in addition to His ministry of healing

as the complete fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Here again we have the admission of Christ that He was the Messiah who would bear the sins of the people and take them away by His death. The people of Nazareth were quick to see the Messianic claim involved. Jesus could only mean that the year of Jubilee had finally come, that the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah had come true, that in Him they could see the Messiah of prophecy. This is no apocalyptic eschatological Messiah whom Jesus here set forth but the one who forgave sin and bound up the broken-hearted.⁹³

Under this head we might also include all the passages in which Christ spoke of His forthcoming death. He told His disciples many times of His approaching suffering and death: Matthew 12, 40; Mark 8, 27-37; 9, 12; 14, 1-9; and others. In reference to the passages Mark 14, 25 and Luke 22, 29, Dillistone writes, quoting Vincent Taylor, The Atonement in New Testament Teaching:

"He is still sure that the Kingdom will be established; He will yet drink the wine of the Messianic banquet. The ring of joyful confidence is unmistakable. This hope can only mean that He believed His death to be a necessary step to the establishment of the Kingdom. He must suffer and die, then the Rule of God can be consummated; this and nothing less is the implication of His words.' The necessity of the cross for the full establishment of the Kingdom seems to be well attested by these sayings."⁹⁴

93. Robertson, Word Studies, I, p. 58. See in addition the passages where Christ is spoken of as forgiving sins: Mark 2, 1-12; Luke 7, 47-49; etc. Cf. pp. 45-48 of this paper.

94. Dillistone, op. cit., p. 62.

The Savior did not think of His coming death in terms of a tragedy from which He could not escape. He realized that it was absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of His great purpose in coming to earth, to atone for the sins of the world.

Then there are all the other passages in which Christ referred to His Messiahship, or in which the evangelists clearly teach that this Man was the true Christ, or in which His apostles confessed that He was the Christ. Compare Mark 8, 27-37; 12, 35ff; 14, 61; Matt. 25, 30f; Luke 22, 67. 70. If this Man was not the Messiah, He gave every indication that He was. His whole life and teaching breathed His Messianic purpose to bear the sins of the world. He did often command His disciples to tell no one that He was the promised Christ. Why did He do this? The one thing to remember is that such commands were given only to those who had already discovered the fact of His Messiahship. And that fact was by virtue of its very nature incommunicable. Every man had to be convinced for himself. Not "flesh and blood" but the "Father who is in heaven" had to reveal it to a man's soul (Matt. 16, 17 RSV). Even at His trials the Savior refrained from throwing "pearls before swine" (Matt. 7, 6). He followed His usual custom of extracting the confession from the lips of His accusers without having to place it there Himself. This confession was always "the product of their own spiritual insight." A blunt claim would bring

nothing but jeers and mockery and further hardening of hearts.⁹⁵ One good example of such a confession was made by the centurion at the foot of the cross when Jesus died, "Surely this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27, 54 AV).

One additional interesting proof for the vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus is that brought forward and developed by F. W. Dillistone, The Significance of the Cross, whom we have quoted previously. Throughout His earthly ministry the Savior often referred to His relationship to His people as that of a shepherd to his flock. His purpose was, as we have seen, to seek and to save the lost.⁹⁶ And that according to the prophet Ezekiel was the chief function of the Messiah's mission: "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick" (Ezek. 34, 16). It cannot be by chance that Jesus so often referred to His relation with the people or His disciples as that of a shepherd with his sheep (Mark 6, 34; Luke 12, 32; 15, 3-7; Matt. 15, 24). It was His purpose to be the second Moses, the Shepherd who would lead God's flock out from the bondage of their present state into the freedom of the flock of God. But this would not be without cost. In Mark 14, 27 He takes the prophecy of Zechariah and

95. Cf. Bowman, op. cit., p. 173.

96. Luke 19, 10. Cf. pp. 60-64.

applies it to Himself. He was the Shepherd who was to be smitten while His sheep would be scattered. But, as He goes on to say, He would rise again and again lead the flock into the paths of God.

"...Knowing, as we do, how prominent a place these Scriptures held in the mind of the Lord, is it fanciful to think that he conceived the laying down of his life as comparable to that of the Lamb whose life was given in order that the people might go free? He too would redeem the many by submitting himself to suffering and death. But that would not be the end: he would, by his resurrection, lead forth the many into newness of life. Shepherd--Lamb: this is one of the supreme paradoxes of Jesus' ministry. Redeemer--Ransom: it is the same paradox under another form. In this way only could the flock be delivered out of bondage into their true home within the fold of God."⁹⁷

In the paper thus far we have tried to present our views concerning the doctrine of the vicarious atonement as it is taught in the synoptic Gospels. The conclusion is the same as that mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The Gospels do teach such a doctrine. The statement of the Savior is clear, "The Son of Man came...to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10, 45). No atonement theories are propounded. Details are not always given. It remained for Paul and other inspired apostles to do that. In fact they had already done it. The Gospels teach us that this Christ of Paul is our own personal Savior from sin, that He can sympathize with us in

97. Dillistone, op. cit., pp. 43-45.

our afflictions for He too suffered as we must do, but above all that He died on the cross to take away our sins. That is vicarious atonement.

We now turn to a brief review of the teachings of prominent New Testament scholars on the subject of the atonement in the synoptic Gospels.

Our first consideration is the very nature of the office and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Did He come simply to teach a new way of life? And if He did why should we follow His teachings more faithfully than those of Confucius or Socrates or some other heathen philosopher, all of whom taught some sort of a "social gospel." Was there anything unique about the teaching of the Savior which should lead us to follow His advice about human relations?

The first question that immediately presents itself is, What was the Lord's own view of His ministry and of His mission on earth? We have seen from the study of the individual passages in the synoptic Gospels that He again and again spoke of His aim in life as being more than simply teaching men how to live with one another and with God. He came to give His life a ransom for many. He came to seek and to save the lost. He shed His precious blood for the forgiveness of sins. He stated that the apostles should preach forgiveness of sins in His name.

And so Amos R. Wells in his work, Why We Believe the Bible, in the chapter entitled "Why We Believe in the Atonement," asks:

"What was Christ's own view of His death?

"That it was far more than the triumph of the evil forces of this world, a spectacle to evoke pity for His sufferings, admiration for His courage, emulation of His forgiveness and patience, and hatred of the pride and cruelty that sentenced Him to the cross. Christ, as all four Gospels show, taught that His death had supernatural power to free men from the entanglements of an evil past and lift them into a new fellowship with God. He came to earth, He declared, to give His life as a ransom....Whoever in grateful affection should eat His flesh and drink His blood should have eternal life....Whatever may be our thought regarding Christ's death, there can be only one understanding of Christ's thought of it,-- that it was a sacrifice for the sins of the world."⁹⁸

Henry W. Clark, The Cross and the Eternal Order, writes:

"From all that Christ said and did, from His preaching and from His miracles, from His proclamations and from His silences, from the very atmosphere which enfolded Him and in which He lived and moved and had His being, Christ emerges upon our vision as consciously holding within Himself the power whereby the power in possession was to be overthrown."⁹⁹

We have further seen that many claim that there is a wide divergence between the apostolic view of Christ's mission and that held by the Savior Himself. However such a judgement is often given after only a cursory study of the actual content of Christ's teaching. And as a rule

98. Wells, p. 94.

99. Clark, p. 55.

100. Cf. pp. 9-13.

such an opinion is based only upon the study of the Sermon on the Mount and other Law preachings of the Savior. James Denny, The Atonement and the Modern Mind, argues that to follow such opinions would be to forget the place which Jesus had in His own teaching. If we grant that the main subject of that teaching is the Kingdom of God, it is clear as anything can be that the Kingdom depends for its establishment on Jesus, or rather that in Him it is already established in principle; and that all participation in its blessings depends on some kind of relation to Him. All things were delivered to Him by the Father and it was coming under obligation to Him, and by that alone, that men knew the Father and His pardoning love. 101
That was atonement teaching.

C. S. Lewis in his delightful little book, The Screwtape Letters, says that the so-called "historical Jesus" simply makes of Him a crank vending a panacea. All such views of the Savior place His importance in some peculiar theory He is supposed to have promulgated. And in place of a real Savior, experienced by men in prayer and sacrament, is substituted a merely probable, remote, shadowy and uncouth figure. Such an object cannot be worshipped. Then we have merely a leader acclaimed by a partisan, and finally a distinguished character approved by a judicious historian. The earliest converts were

101. Denney, pp. 26-27.

converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a single theological doctrine (the Redemption) operating on a sense of sin which they already had.

102

Following Christ as a great Teacher has no particular merit in itself. As stated before we might just as well make some great heathen philosopher our guide in life. And even that tendency is continually cropping out among Christian writers today who simply place Christ in a list of the world's great men together with Confucius, Buddha, Lincoln and others. But a Christ like that is not worth much to an honest person who has come to a full realization of his sinful nature. At any rate Christ is not such a person. He told us that the purpose of His life and death was to save us from our sins. He died vicariously in our place to make atonement for our sins.

It is true that the epistles of Paul contain more on the atonement than do the Gospels. There are more individual passages treating the atonement in his writings than there are in those of the three synoptic writers. Besides referring back to our statements that the Gospels came later in the history of the early Church in order to give material on the life of this Savior whom Paul preached, we add the following, by Clark:

"Admittedly, it is rather from the general impression made upon an open-minded reader of the Gospel

102. C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, p. 119. (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1945). But see the entire chapter, pp. 116-120.

accounts than from definite texts that all this is drawn. Yet there are recorded utterances enough of Christ's which, if scanned deeply enough, and still more if taken in combination, suggest it; and not a few which, if one goes back to them after the general impression has stamped itself upon the mind, seal and counter-sign the impression itself. The very directness and insistence with which Christ makes Himself the central figure of His mission implies a consciousness of being in the most intimate and literal sense at war with malignant powers; for that His mission was avowedly a revolutionary one, designed to correct and transform the existing order of things, is a fact lying so obviously on the surface that it can be questioned by none; and if it is His own personality that He stresses as the source of the revolutionary change, this can only mean a claim that there resided in Him and issued from Him another power whereby the revolutionary change was to be wrought out and the malignant powers deposed. His person had, in Martensen's phrase, a 'metaphysical and cosmical significance'; and that constant self-assertion of His, of which greatest wonder is that one does not find it wonderful, shows that He Himself took it so. And if we seek for actual utterances to serve as signposts pointing along the same road, the search need not be long; nor will it yield scant results."¹⁰³

Such a general impression of the purpose of Christ is no mere subjective uncertainty. It is more than metaphysical speculation. It is open-minded objectivity. The impression that Christ is our Savior from sin asserts itself upon practically every page of the Gospels.

Many take the Gospel of Mark to be the earliest known record of the life of Christ which we possess. Many who do this assert dogmatically that anything added to this record by Matthew or Luke is mere theological opinion, added by later writers under the influence of current

103. Clark, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

Greek speculative thought. Can that be the case? No doctrine of vicarious atonement in the sense which the Gospels teach it was known among the Greeks or for that matter among any pagan peoples. Vicarious substitution may have been known. But was it ever taught to be an atonement for the sins of the world? And even if the Gospel of Mark is to be so regulative that anything that adds to it something further by way of claim, revelation or reverence must be ruled out we are still left not only with the insistent problem of the person and mission of Jesus facing us, but with sufficient hints in that Gospel alone as to what the solution is. We see a person creating universal surprise at His claim to be the Messiah, creating amazement among His own followers by His miracles of healing. Thus even in this Gospel Christ's personality raises the problem of His divine relationship and redemptive mission.

We are often met with the objection that Christ should have boldly asserted His claim to His Messiahship and His redemption. We reply that the great mission of Christ was to make the Gospel as much as to preach it. That is the record we find in the synoptics, the clear testimony to the Son of God suffering and dying for the sins of the world. The life of Christ was more than His words. His very actions revealed the Father to

104. Cf. Orchard, op. cit., pp. 24-26.

men. He did not translate all that He did into words. He left to the apostles that task, men who were with Him throughout His life or to those to whom He personally revealed Himself.

105

"How...can it be maintained that the Atonement was a theory invented by His followers without any intimation from Himself? His chief mission was indeed to make the Atonement which, when completed, was to be proclaimed; but this was evidently in His heart all the while, and most emphatically declared, both during His living ministry and after His resurrection, in His parting words....

"But even if Our Lord had not thus emphatically witnessed to the Atonement in distinct words, His whole ministry breathed it. This pervaded His teaching, animated the letter, explained the symbol, interpreted the miracle, slept in His silence, lived in His death."106

James Denny remarks:

"It was enough if Jesus made his disciples feel, as surely He did make them feel, not only in every word He spoke, but more emphatically still in His whole attitude toward them, that He was Himself the Mediator of the new covenant....There was more in Christ than even His own wonderful words expressed, and all that He was and did and suffered, as well as what He said, entered into the convictions He inspired."107

The Lord Jesus Christ did come to make the Gospel. He also came to preach it. If we take the two together, as we must, there will be little doubt left as to the aim and intention of His ministry on earth. It was to save people from their sins. That was accomplished by

105. Hall, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

106. Ibid., pp. 36-38.

107. Denney, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

taking upon Himself their guilt and their punishment, then experiencing the wrath of God on the cross. We may receive the blessings of this redemption simply by taking them. And that is faith, taking what God has to give us in and through Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Christian writings of the first century, we find no attempt made to discuss at length the reasons for the death of Jesus. There is, as Dillistone points out,¹⁰⁸ no carefully constructed argument, starting from certain premises and advancing towards definite conclusions, with a view to demonstrating the logical necessity of the cross. Instead we find a vivid presentation of the actual sequence of events and a number of vivid metaphors serving to describe the significance which these events possessed for Jesus, which they possess for all those who believe in Him. That is the way the Gospels teach the vicarious atonement. No theories are brought forward. The facts are simply stated in clear language. Theological opinions have foisted peculiar teachings onto Jesus Christ. A thorough study of the text of the Gospels will do much to remove the fog of controversies which have beclouded the mind of Christ. And once the fog is blown away we may see the Gospel of vicarious atonement.

Admittedly, a study of the other New Testament writings

108. Cf. Dillistone, op. cit., p. 35.

will serve to clarify in our minds the exact teaching of the Lord. That too is perfectly legitimate. For, as Sheraton remarks,

"It can be abundantly demonstrated that there is nothing in the Epistles, in the apostolic teaching about Christ, which is not, at least seminally, in Christ's own words and in the Gospel records. Throughout both we have absolute loyalty to Christ's teaching, and between both we have complete harmony. If there is development, it is legitimate development. There is nothing in the apostolic exposition which is not in the Gospels, which contain in germ the whole complete revelation of Christ. There is nothing in the Gospels which we do not owe to apostolic testimony. In neither Gospels nor Epistles can we reach Christ except through the Apostles. Both are of apostolic origin, and both present one and the same Christ to us."¹⁰⁹

The Christ of St. Paul and the other apostles is identical with the Christ of the synoptic writers. Dr. H. J. Ockenga, Congregational pastor of Park Street Church, Boston, declared in a lecture given at the University of Michigan:

"There have been men like Heitmuller and Bousset who have attempted to establish a mediatory step between St. Paul and the primitive church, but when we examine the record concerning the primitive church, we find that is exactly what they believed.

"They believed Christ died for our sins and that He rose again, and whether one approaches it from the Synoptic Gospels or the Johannean Gospel, or the Book of Acts or from the Epistles, he will find there is a total agreement on the fact that Christianity consists of the message that Christ died for our sins and rose again."¹¹⁰

109. Sheraton, op. cit., pp. 517-518.

110. Harold John Ockenga, The Nature of Protestant Orthodoxy, p. 3. (Distributed by The Student Service Commission, 77 West Washington Street, Chicago, 1946).

In his chapter on "Reconciliation and Justification," James S. Stewart, A Man in Christ, refutes the charge that Paul overlaid the simple thoughts of the Gospels with complexities of doctrine unwarranted in their origin and ruinous in their effect. He brings proof from the parables of the Savior to show that the teaching of St. Paul in regard to justification is consonant with Jesus' teaching. For example, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20, 1-16), the Lord Jesus conveyed the thought that the person who tries to bargain about final reward will always be wrong, and that God's loving-kindness will always have the last "unchallengeable word." So too in the parables of the dutiful servant (Luke 17, 7-10), the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18, 9-14), and particularly the Prodigal Son (Luke 15, 11-32) this objective justification is taught by Christ. All human merit is excluded. Only the grace of God in Jesus Christ stands firm. But, Stewart says,

"Jesus did more than teach all this in words: He expressed it in His life. His whole attitude to sinners embodied it. He sought them out. He overturned all human verdicts. He would observe no canons of merit. He made the first last. He was the divine initiative incarnate. Men suddenly knew, looking at Jesus, that God had accepted them. His fellowship gave them a new standing. For this end He was born; for this, in word and deed, He laboured; for this He laid down His life. Here is the true root of Paul's conception of justification. It is no invention of his own. It is no mere legacy of Jewish scholasticism. It springs from Gospel soil. It bears the stamp of Paul's deep, evangelical experience. It mirrors the life and death and teaching of his Lord."¹¹¹

¹¹¹. Stewart, pp. 253-254.

H. J. Ockenga remarks:

"There is no room for the intervention of a Greek church between primitive Judaism and the Pauline redemptive theology. There is no room for the invasion of a Greek culture or Greek ideas. Here we have contact with the very earliest form of Christianity in the Church, and here are the...things which go back to the original and have continued ever since as the heart and nature of orthodox Christianity."¹¹²

Paul and the other apostles taught the very same Gospel that Jesus Christ taught, the Gospel of vicarious atonement.

The conclusion to this paper may be briefly stated. A study of the Gospels furnishes clear testimony to the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. We find no later traditions of the Church but the teaching of the Lord Jesus Himself. And that is vicarious satisfaction teaching. He came to die for our sins!

¹¹². Ockenga, op. cit., p. 8.

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