

Intro:

As I said this morning, I think it is no accident that our passages coincide today as they do. The Lord wants you to understand something today.

Let's quickly look at where we are in our great paragraph in Romans 3.

“Luther called this paragraph ‘the chief point ... of the whole Bible’.”¹

Rm 1.18-3.20: All men convinced under sin as sinners under the wrath

3.21: But now... a new ‘without-law’ kind of righteousness revealed

3.22: new righteousness available by faith to all who believe

3.23: available even to constant sinners – still have righteousness, if they have believed

3.24: those who believed are being declared righteous because of redemption that is in Christ Jesus

That brings us to a new idea. So far we have been talking about salvation as it relates to sinners. We have been talking about what salvation means for us.

Today we are going to start considering what the salvation wrought in Jesus Christ means for God.

Read Rm 3.25-26

I have said that our passage is connected with Lev 16. The key is the word ‘propitiation’.

- The word is used by the LXX to translate ‘mercy seat’ in Lev 16
- The word is used in Heb 9.5 to specifically refer to the mercy seat

The mercy seat is the cover of the ark of the Covenant in the Holy of holies where the blood of the bull and the goat were sprinkled once a year to atone for the priest and to cleanse the Holy of holies from the uncleanness of the people.

In our passage, it is not the mercy seat itself that is in view, but the final sacrifice of Christ which accomplished something for man far better and for more completely than the sprinkling of the mercy seat ever accomplished in the OT.

I have given our message this afternoon this title:

The Public Propitiation

Proposition: The means of access to God is now publicly, permanently, and completely open in Christ.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 242.

I. The meaning and purpose of propitiation

A. The sprinkling of the mercy seat reviewed (Day of Atonement)

1. The priest, clothed as a servant, sacrifices the bull
2. The priest places the burning incense in the holy of holies first
3. The priest sprinkles the blood of the bull on the mercy-seat [atone for himself and his sons]
4. The priest sacrifices the goat
5. The priest sprinkles the blood of the goat on the mercy-seat [cleanse sanctuary for sins of people]
6. The priest performs the scapegoat ceremony, in public, dressed as a servant
7. The priest bathes and reappears to lead in regular worship, dressed normally (like a king)

B. The meaning of propitiation

1. A theological term you should know because it is in your English Bible
2. Often confused with expiation
 - a. Expiation refers to the effects of a sacrifice on the offerer
 - b. Sins are expiated, their guilt is removed, the sinner is cleansed
3. The OT Day of atonement, with which our term is connected, had to do with making a way of access to God, of cleansing the tabernacle
4. Propitiation is that which makes someone 'propitious'
 - a. God's stance toward man before the propitiation is wrath (Rm 1.18) [this is not 'propitious']

Presenting favorable conditions; favorable: *propitious weather*.

Indicative of favor; auspicious: *propitious omens*.

Favorably inclined; disposed to bestow favors or forgive: *propitious gods*.²

- b. God's stance toward man after the propitiation is grace

² propitious. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/propitious> (accessed: May 02, 2009).

This is like the change that takes place when the kid hits the ball through the living room window of the man next door... this produces wrath. Judgement is pending.

But the kid works hard and earns the money for a new window... this produces a change – favor ensues.

- The wrathful man is propitiated.

C. The means of propitiation

1. There is some confusion and ambiguity with the prepositions in our verse

Lit.: ‘The one who God placed on display [as] a propitiation through the faith in his blood’

- a. Faith doesn’t produce the propitiation, so that can’t be connected the way it initially appears – more in a minute
 - b. Faith doesn’t have as its object ‘the blood’ but Christ *everywhere else in the Bible...* unlikely to change here
2. The best way to see this is this way: “propitiation in his blood [obtained] through the faith”
 3. The means of propitiation is ‘his blood’, that is, the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the cross
 - a. This is what changed the stance of God
 - b. This is what changes wrath to grace: ‘his blood’

D. The purpose of propitiation

1. As long as man is under wrath, the way to God’s grace is barred
2. As soon as God’s wrath is satisfied, the way to God’s grace is open

Propitiation opens the door to grace, to God’s eternal favor.

Please note: God did this – God made Christ the propitiation.

II. The means of acquiring the benefits of propitiation

A. The benefits are acquired through *the* faith

1. The phrase has the article in the Greek (most manuscripts, including some older ones)

2. The article points back to the previously mentioned faith (3.22)
 - a. That faith, ‘the faith’, the one that acquires the ‘without-law’ righteousness
 - b. The faith also enters the door to grace opened by the propitiation

How is it that you can have confidence to pray and that God will hear you?

- The propitiation in His blood

B. The object of faith here is a blood sacrifice

1. God’s wrath means death
 - a. God said to Adam, ‘dying you shall die’ (‘you shall surely die’) (Gen 2.17)
 - b. God said ‘the soul that sinneth, it shall die’ (Ezek 18.4, 20)
2. When our passage says God is propitiated, that means a death occurred
3. The Faith looks at that death and sees the door open for grace because of it

But remember this: “Faith does not have any part in the propitiation, though it avails itself of it. *Propitiation is by blood alone.*”³

BTW, how did the Day of Atonement benefit the OT believer?

- The average believer stood around outside the tabernacle waiting for Aaron to show up
- Aaron emerges with a goat, confesses the national sins over the goat, and sends the goat out into the wilderness
- You have to believe 1) that Aaron killed the other goat, and 2) that God is willing to let you worship for another year because of it

³ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 119.

What do you actually see of God's willingness to accept the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement? Nothing. It is all faith.

But in the New Testament, we do have something the OT saint didn't have...

III. The public proof of propitiation

A. Notice the word of public presentation

1. Set forth (KJV)
2. Displayed publicly (NAU)
3. A few commentaries and lexicons:
 - a. "To place in public view, to exhibit in a conspicuous situation, as goods are exhibited or exposed for sale, or as premiums or rewards of victory were exhibited to public view in the games of the Greeks."⁴
 - b. "*To expose to public view*, in which sense it is the technical term with profane authors in speaking of the bodies of the dead (to let lie in state) ... the middle points to the owner of the thing exposed: ... Rom. 3:25 (the middle seems to denote that it was his own Son whom he thus *set forth*)"⁵

B. Compare the propitiation on the Day of Atonement

1. Almost all the sacrificial work done 'behind the veil' – hidden, in private

This is because it is very hard for sinning man to get access to holy God, especially if all you have is the blood of bulls and goats.

2. Even the public part has its private work: the congregation doesn't follow the scapegoat out into the wilderness to watch what happens

⁴ Barnes, p. 87.

⁵ Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

C. Notice that God did this

“It is quite alien to biblical thought to overlook the agency of God the Father in the provisions of redemption and it is perversion to represent the Father as won over to the exercise of grace and mercy by the intervention of Christ’s propitiatory accomplishment.”⁶

1. What did God do? He put his own Son to death in public, open shame
 - The offering on the cross was open, unconcealed, in public view.
 - He was put to OPEN shame.
 - He is the world’s spectacle
2. What did God do? He rent the veil in two (**Mt 27.51**)
 - a. No more hidden sacrifice
 - b. No more hidden way to God
 - c. No more barriers
 - d. No more wrath
 - e. No more need for yearly sacrifices just to keep contact with God

“Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.” NAU

Conclusion:

The Day of the Atonement was the pinnacle of the Hebrew calendar, in some ways greater even than the Passover.

But the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was a perpetual, annual, earthly, inadequate way to gain access to God.

In Jesus Christ, whom God put on display as a propitiation, we have a ‘new and living way.’

Hebrews 10:20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

Do you look at that event, the death of Jesus on the cross, and see that it gives you access to God forever? That’s ‘the faith’.

⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 117-118.