

Jesus and Atonement

John Obelenus

Scope

In this presentation we are not going to talk about justification, sanctification, or some "one-step removed" theories of atonement. These ideas and concepts are necessary, relevant, and important. However, we need to start from the beginning. We need to find the original ideas that allow us to talk about justification, sanctification, and other "one-step removed" theories. These "one-step removed" theories may be contemporary, historical, or even Biblical. My aim is not to weigh in on the correctness, height, depth, or breadth of these analogies of atonement.

In this presentation we are going to talk about history and atonement. Precisely what happened when Jesus was crucified, and three days later risen? Why did it happen? How did Jesus himself understand these events? And what can we understand from these events? These are the questions we must start with.

Introduction

It is my understanding that good theology is able to do three things. Good theology harmonizes (1) the history, what actually happened, with (2) what the texts tell us, and (3) what we experience in the world today. Both historians and theologians must answer the inevitable question of why Jesus died? The theologian must have an answer beyond just "because of my sins". While that answer is true, it fails to reckon with a lot of evidence. Pilate, nor the Jewish leaders were thinking they'd kill Jesus to save Christians, or Jews, from the judgment of sin.

We must address all of the history regarding Jesus' crucifixion - and why it happened. This will bring us, on some level, to talk about Jesus' self-perception. In my mind that is always a scary topic to address. It seems to rest on so many presuppositions.

How exactly does a teacher, a Rabbi of Israel, be martyred by his own? Surely there have been many Israelites martyred at the hands of their oppressors throughout the centuries. But how do we square the picture of a pious rabbi's life ending on a cross? We will not settle for a picture that declares that Jesus' teaching and healing ministry as a wrongful characterization of his person. That he was actually a rouge lawbreaker who is given an air of respectability through fable. Nor will we accept a picture in which Jesus as a peaceable rabbi is unwittingly taken in and killed. A wrongful death does not make a willing belief in atonement. There are many many other Messiah-claimants who died a martyr's death, but no atonement belief came from their followers. As a result, we must make sense of Jesus' crucifixion in light of his ministry, and his ministry in light of his crucifixion. They belong together. They should not be two ideas held in tension in one person. But rather they should be two different ways of understanding the one purpose and person of Jesus. The question now becomes; How can we put these two pictures together? What is the common bond between them? Jesus vision of Messiah and self-perception holds the answer for us. That is what links his ministry of teaching and healing with his desire to go to Jerusalem and submit to crucifixion. We're going to focus on Jesus' vision of Messiah from Isaiah.

First, however, many contemporary and conservative strands of Christianity contend that Jesus died because his teaching contradicted Judaism.¹ And of course because he claimed to be God. To the second claim we have already provided massive evidence to the contrary. Though, we must make a

1 N.T. Wright, Jesus, Israel and the Cross SBL 1985 Seminar Papers pg 76

case that Jesus cannot be tried and crucified by his own people merely for his actions based on, and interpretation of, the Torah. This is a necessary argument. If we conclude that this could not be the cause of his crucifixion, it forces us to look elsewhere.

Second, we will establish the character of Jesus' ministry. We are in dire need of a compass to find our way. I propose that Isaiah is that compass to understanding Jesus' character and actions in his ministry. Why he, as a Messiah-claimant, appeared different than all the other Messiah-claimants of the day.

Third, we will establish Jesus' claim to authority and what that entailed for his opponents. Of course these run-ins with the establishment caused much controversy and would ultimately lead to his crucifixion. If we were in fact naturalists, that is where the story would end. However, we establish that Jesus meant to go to his death, and it served a redeeming purpose. With the help of Jesus' ministry and Isaiah we will determine how that is so. I don't want to give away the ending, so we will start with the contemporary idea that Jesus died for contradicting Moses and Torah.

Jesus and Torah

Not only does much of contemporary and conservative strands of Christianity believe that Jesus freely contradicted Moses, even some scholars do:

And Christianity, for its part, from important teachings of Jesus forward violates the teachings of the Torah... Much that Jesus taught, and still more that his disciples taught, does not meet that criterion but violates the teaching of Moses our rabbi.²

He continues:

The theology of the Oral Torah tells a simple sublime story: (1) God created a perfect, just world and in it made humans in God's image, equal to God in the power of will. (2) Humankind in its arrogance sinned and was expelled from the perfect world and given over to death. God gave humankind the Torah to purify its heart of sin. (3) Humans educated by the Torah in humility can repent, accepting God's will of their own free will. When they do, humans will be restored to Eden and eternal life.³

It is my assertion that Jesus fits precisely within the (above) confines that Neusner places Oral Torah. Evans, in the conclusion of "Who Is Jesus" responds to Neusner's case by going through the people of Qumran, Samaritans, and Philo, in addition to the early Christians, all of which claim to be a valid understanding and living out of the Torah of Moses. He rebuts:

The charge that what Jesus taught "violates the teachings of Moses" is true only in the sense of the qualification Neusner supplies "Moses our rabbi". Yes, that is true; Jesus and his apostolic successors do violate the teaching of Moses, but only after Moses has been presented as the great rabbi who taught the Oral Torah, as the sages taught it. But Jesus and his successors believed that they, as surely did the covenanters of Qumran, interpreted Moses correctly.⁴

Therefore Jesus is not found guilty of transgressing the Moses of history, only the Moses of the Oral Torah, the Moses of faith as it were. One can hardly blame Jesus of being at fault with something that did not even begin to exist until forty years after his death and ended around one hundred and thirty years later.

² Jacob Neusner, *At What Point Do Judaism and Christianities Meet?*, Who Is Jesus, ed. Copen, Evans, pg 126

³ *ibid* pg 33

⁴ Copen, Evans ed., *Who Was Jesus?* pg 170

Other scholars are seemingly one hundred and eighty degrees away from Neusner on this point:

The collection of Jesus' sayings, although subject to a great deal of interpretation, began with Jesus himself. As a rabbi, he taught his own people what his views were. ... But Christianity is about that genius: his name is Jesus, and he cannot be comprehended outside the environment of his own Judaism. He was Jewish not only in the circumstances of his life, but in his dedication to that identity.⁵

In fact, Jesus' parables are primary examples of Jewish haggadah⁶

Many Jewish teachers from the period would have strongly embraced the commandment of Jesus "But I say unto you, Love your enemies"⁷

Young goes so far to stress that to understand the diversity of Second Temple Judaism one cannot discount the gospels and Jesus!

In fact, one must seriously entertain another pertinent question: can ancient Judaism be understood apart from the Jesus of the Gospels? The examination of the wide diversity in Judaism of the Second Temple period cannot exclude the Gospel records.⁸

In reflection on Mk 1.22⁹ Daube concludes that this is the people's reflection that Jesus is able to teach with the ability and power of a rabbi, even though he was never associated with a particular school, or rabbi to teach him.¹⁰ That is Jesus is able to draw out from the Hebrew Scriptures doctrine and praxis for the people like other rabbi's of the time would.

In the instigating dialouge between Peter Zaas and William Lane Craig that started the *Who Is Jesus?* book Craig makes many references to Jesus' claim to divine authority, to stand in God's place in all the encounters that Jesus finds himself in. Thus Jesus' statements like "But I say unto you" can and should be taken as standing at odds with all opponents: including Torah and Moses. In discussion Zaas corrects Craig by stating that Jesus is not overturning Torah but rather interpreting Torah.¹¹

However Daube argues that we should find no "divine authority" claim here. In his treatment of the phrase "But I say unto you" he establishes that Jesus is interpreting existing understanding ("You have heard", "It was written"). In rabbinic writing a different form was used:

In the Rabbinic form it is the cautious, scholarly, devout, interpreter of holy writ who speaks and it spoken to. "I might understand literally" - 'I', namely, the scholar investigating the text. 'But thou must say' - 'thou', namely, again, a scholar investigating, a fellow-scholar addressed in an imaginary debate... "I might understand literally"... "But thou must say, there are grounds for not taking it this way".¹²

The rabbi's of later years would write with characters doing the answering for them. Often they would

5 Bruce Chilton, *Jesus a Galilean Rabbi*, *ibid*, pg 157

6 Brad Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* pg 7

7 *ibid* pg 10

8 *ibid* pg 27

9 "They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." NASB

10 David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, pg 206

11 Copan & Evans ed., *Who Was Jesus?* pg 33

12 David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, pg 57

interact directly with another rabbi's propositions. We see the situation with Jesus is much different. He is interacting with himself, and is giving a speech, he is not writing in an academic dialogue with a specific rabbi. He places the misunderstanding on the lips of his audience, and gives them the correct interpretation from himself. This is certainly a claim to authority; Jesus as a rabbi, Jesus as a prophet, and to those in the know, Jesus as Messiah. But it is not a claim to divine authority, or of overturning the law. Jesus works within the law, interpreting it using the same methods as his contemporaries. This is certainly a brief sketch of Jesus' interaction with the law. Much could be done to make a stronger case. However, it might not be necessary. If we look at the accusations made against Jesus in his trial with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, what exactly are they?

I will destroy this temple... and raise it in three days¹³

That is truly the first specific accusation given as testimony against him. This is a foundational point of understanding why, in history, Jesus died. Not even the Jewish theological charge of blasphemy is based on anything anti-Torah or anti-Moses. EP Sanders concludes that "The synoptic Jesus lived as a law-abiding Jew".¹⁴ And Sanders reflects on the trial as well:

An accusation of blasphemy was of course an extremely serious charge. There are two points which keep us from saying that here the synoptic Jesus is depicted as taking a stand which is contrary to the law or which constitutes a serious point of dispute with his contemporaries: (1) The words which are attributed to Jesus in the passages where the charge 'blasphemy' occurs (The Healing of the Paralytic; Mark's Trial Scene) are extremely hard to construe as blasphemy... Even taking the trial narrative at face value, one would have to conclude that the opponents already had something against him, and that it was not his words at the trial which got him in trouble. If we accept Mark's account as it stands, we must note that Jesus was not arrested for giving himself titles and that he was first accused of threatening the temple. When this charge failed (since the witnesses did not agree), the high priest was forced to find a cause for execution in Jesus' own words. He got him to confess to two titles, each of which had a very wide range of meaning, applied to him. The high priest decided to take them at their most extreme and cried, 'Blasphemy'.¹⁵

Therefore we are well within the bounds to say that Jesus was not crucified because he was anti-Torah, or anti-Moses. He was neither. Nor was he crucified for his particular interpretation of Torah or Moses. He was crucified for being anti-Temple, but that is getting ahead of ourselves. Now we can move on to why Jesus was crucified, and why Jesus thought it necessary.

Jesus Vision From Isaiah

We ought to understand Jesus' ministry in light of his crucifixion, and his crucifixion in light of his ministry. How does Jesus define his ministry? With Isaiah. In both Luke and Matthew, Jesus' ministry is opened with quotations from Isaiah 61. Jesus even explains his Messianic action to his cousin John with Is 61. All of the gospel writers therefore continue to use Isaiah to understand Jesus. In Luke Jesus introduces himself in the synagouge:

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF

¹³ Mk 14.58, Mt 26.61

¹⁴ EP Sanders, Jewish Law From Jesus to the Mishnah, pg 90

¹⁵ ibid pg 92

THE LORD." And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.¹⁶

In Matthew, Jesus' introduction comes packaged as the Sermon on the Mount. Again, for Matthew this is Jesus' public opening of his ministry, and the inspiration is from Isaiah. Jesus has long parallels with Isaiah¹⁷:

Matthew 5

3 Blessed are the poor [πτωχοι] in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn [πενθουντες], for they will be comforted [παρακληθησονται]

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth [κληρονομησουσιν την γην]

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness [δικαιοσυνην], for they will be filled

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy [ελεθησονται].

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God ...

12 Rejoice and be glad [αγαλιασθε], for your reward is great in heaven

Isaiah 61 (LXX)

1 The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor [πτωχοι] ...

2 ... to comfort all who mourn [παρακαλεσαι παντας τους πενθουντας]

7 ... they shall inherit the earth [κληρονομησουσιν την γην]

3 ... they shall be called generations of righteous [δικαιοσυνην]

1 ... to heal the broken in heart

10 ... let my soul be glad [αγαλιασθε] in the Lord ...

Also from the Sermon on the Mount, "You are the light of the world"¹⁸ from Is 49.6 and 42.6. Jesus' inspiration from Isaiah is important. Jesus uses single verses from Isaiah multiple times, each with different meanings in different situations. It shows that Jesus is not proof-texting, or simply quoting something the people know. This is a topic with which Jesus has meditated on and found deep meaning.

Clearly Jesus finds his self-identity and ministry rooted in Isaiah. In most common treatments of Jesus his life is cut into three pieces; his teaching, his healing, and his death. We saw that he introduced himself with Is 61.1-2. His first major teaching came from Is 61. And one major point of his ministry, for Israel to be the light of the world, is found at his birth, and at least twice in Isaiah. We can also see that his understanding of healing is found in Isaiah as well.

When we reach Mt 12 Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Immediately some Pharisees set out to conspire to destroy him. Jesus withdraws, but crowds follow and he heals them all. Matthew tells us to understand this in light of Is 42.1-4

Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put

¹⁶ Lk 4.17-20

¹⁷ Stanley Porter ed., Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament pg 67

¹⁸ Mt 5.14

My spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A battered reed he will not break off, and a smoldering wick he will not put out, until he leads justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.¹⁹

On another healing occasion Jesus exorcizes many spirits and heals infirmities in Mt 8. Matthew tells us to understand this with Is 53.4

This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES”²⁰

Of course, Jesus' death has always been reflected upon in the Servant Song in Isaiah 53. But here we have an understanding of healing an exorcism found there. The two are linked, however strange we might find that. Matthew seems to tell us that Jesus, in healing, took away infirmities and disease himself. That is a form of substitution.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.²¹

This is a summation of both Jesus' ministry, and his crucifixion. Remember we must understand each in light of the other. We cannot only apply this passage of ransom to his death, nor his ministry. It belongs to both. We should not be surprised to find ransom in Isaiah:

For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Since you are precious in My sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, And gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.²²

Again we see ransom. I grant that ransom, or exchange, and substitution are not identical, but in this respect I offer that they are close enough to group together. On this link, McKnight reflects:

Here the image of “ransom” is explained: Egypt's and Ethiopia's and Seba's subjugation pays the price for Israel to be released from captivity in Babylon. If this is in the background of Mk 10.45, then Jesus sees his death as the “ransom price” to release his followers from their own captivity.²³

In the immediate passage in Mark, in Jesus ministry, that captivity is personified in the next section with the blind man. This substitution we see in Jesus' ministry, at a point of healing, is telling. Christianity, for two millennium, has been talking about understanding Jesus' death as substitution. The substitution is the same in both his ministry and his crucifixion. At Calvary, as I will argue, the captivity is from sin in a very real sense.

McKnight continues on, reflecting on Is 53:

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the

19 Mt 12.18-21

20 Mt 8.17

21 Mk 10.45

22 Is 43.3-7

23 Scot McKnight, A Community Called Atonement pg 87

Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.²⁴

The singular theme of these verses in Isaiah is simple: a death, understood as a ransom price, leads to the liberation of others. This is what Jesus is saying in Mark 10:45. We are dealing here, then, with a metaphor of liberation – as Israel was set free, so the “many” will be set free. But from what? The contexts in Exodus and Isaiah provide the answer: captivity and oppression.²⁵

This basic ransom, exchange, substitution idea can be found in Jesus' ministry and crucifixion. We can make a general statement that can support “one-step removed” theories. To summarize the basic idea:

Christ's suffering and death cleanses those who have strayed from the covenant, and being made “to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21) he personally bears away the sins (Is 53:11), as the goat takes them into the desert. In this he restores us as cured (righteous) to God and to the community, But, as we might expect, the symbolism does not provide a description of the literal “how”.²⁶

With this idea found in basic forms of Scripture, we can see it more vividly in Jesus' actions and life plan. We have “zoomed in” to see details, let us now “zoom out” and see the “grand narrative” as some have put it. We can see Jesus' ministry through to its climax, the crucifixion and resurrection. First, I want to start with Jesus' claim to authority.

Jesus Claim to Authority

There is one thing that people on every side of historical Jesus studies can agree on. Jesus claimed to be a prophet. Many of the crowds thought he was a prophet, he spoke and acted like one. Even Herod thought him a prophet. As a prophet, he stood to speak on behalf of God. Prophets would speak with authority and were often marginalized like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and even John the Baptist. As a prophet, Jesus' statements would at least command the ear of his opposition. Of course, John the Baptist did just that. Most Bible-readers know that he was beheaded because of his comments about Herod's marriage. But most don't know what symbolism lies behind his baptism, and behind the baptism Jesus and his disciples performed in the gospels:

In this context of a national call to repentance for redemption or a warning about imminent judgment, John's practice of immersing people finds its true significance. John's baptism does not find its context in personal salvation rituals or in personal piety; instead, it is a call for a national revival, and those who submit to his baptism are expressing their agreement with this mission to Israel. Those so baptized were making a “public statement”...

When applied to John, we cannot think of a water baptism and not think of uncleanness and purification. That is, John's baptism is in some sense a purificatory rite (cf. John 3:25).²⁷

If John is calling on Israel to repent of her sin, by cleansing in the waters of the Jordan one has to wonder why the Jordan. The Jordan is very iconic and was not chosen without a reason. McKnight follows the clues that John baptized from the far side of the Jordan, that is the region of Perea, Herod Antipas' territory (not Judea), around Bethany. McKnight says:

²⁴ Is 53:11-12

²⁵ Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* pg 88

²⁶ Beilby and Eddy ed., *The Nature of the Atonement*, pg 136

²⁷ Copan and Evans ed., *Who Was Jesus?* pg 79

We can now conclude that John baptized in the Jordan in order to reenact the foundational story of ancient Israel, the Entry into the Land. John asked his followers, and Jesus was one of them at this point, to leave Israel by crossing the Jordan, stand with him at the edge of the Transjordanian bank, confess the sin of Israel, enter into the water as a baptismal act of repentance, and then reenter the Land as a purified people ready to take the message of an eschatological repentance to the whole Land.²⁸

One must wonder further about John's baptism. Apparently, evidence suggests that Hillel was also baptizing converts in this time period.²⁹ These were Gentile converts to Judaism. Baptism was a part of conversion, it was hotly debated just how important between Shammai, Hillel, and their schools until the Talmud was completed. This debate would have been underway during the years of John and Jesus' ministry. The baptism of Jewish people implied that they, to some degree, were outside the covenant. We can understand why they would symbolically reenter the Land now. We would also understand that John is implicitly saying those who refuse to repent and submit to baptism remain outside the covenant. Thus baptism is always a heated topic of discussion, one Jesus brings up to the Pharisees when questioned about his own authority.

John, believing the kingdom of heaven imminent, preached the baptism of repentance. A Rabbi like Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, about AD100, predicted that at the approach of the Messiah the gentiles would come in flocks to be received. Eliezer would never have applied proselyte baptism to people already Jewish. It was because John did so that he was called "the Baptist". Yet the eschatological character of his and early Christian baptism was Jewish. Some rebukes administered to Pharisees and Sadducees according to Matthew and Luke closely correspond to an opinion, held by many Rabbis, that people seeking admission in the days of the Messiah were not to be trusted.³⁰

John rebukes the Pharisees with his prophetic authority, mocking them about their apparent wish to repent. This is how the stage is set, two authorities vying for their voice.

As Jesus' ministry continues many realize he is not an ordinary prophet. He is more than John the Baptist calling in the wilderness. John for one, did not perform any miracles. Jesus is healing almost everyone he comes into contact with. He goes on to forgive sins, and call twelve close disciples. Everyone, even the Pharisees know the stakes have been raised. Even the demons know that Jesus is Messiah. John the Baptist, imprisoned, wonders about Jesus' role as Messiah. He desperately wants clarification. Peter finally realizes Jesus to be the Messiah. In this crowd, I don't think I need to make the case that the persona of the Messiah was vaguely defined. It was vague enough to have six other Messiah claimants in the first 140 years AD.³¹ Jesus, in his role as prophet and Messiah, made many claims perhaps his largest against the Temple. I will argue that this is the final straw that causes his crucifixion. This is one of the biggest clashes of authority there could be. A "more-than-prophet" doing his best Jeremiah impersonation, declaring the Temple – the center of Judaism at that time – as impure, dirty, and worthy of God's judgment. To be sure, the community at Qumran did the same. But they didn't go into the Temple and cause a scene. Nor did they ride on a donkey into Jerusalem echoing Zechariah's vision of Messiah. Jesus posed a real threat, whereas the community at Qumran did not, they left Judea for the desert.

Moreover, Jesus seemed to identify himself as the true representative of Israel. He put twelve disciples,

28 *ibid* pg 81

29 Daube offers a whole chapter on comparing Jewish baptism with John's Baptism in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*

30 Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, pg 119

31 Anthronges, Judas the Galilean, Theudas, the "Egyptian Prophet", Menaham ben Judah, and Simon bar Kohkba

as twelve tribes around himself. The catch-phrase “Son of Man” alerts us to this idea. Of course the phrase originates in Daniel 7.13:

I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him.

We are all familiar with the images in this vision that Daniel has. Each of the beasts represents both an individual (king, v17) and a group (kingdom, v23). That is, the beasts stand for both a people group, and that groups representative leader. The interpretation given in v18 says that the people group represented by the Son of Man will receive the Kingdom, this parallels the Son of Man's ascent to receive the Kingdom. Therefore, Jesus comes to represent the renewed, and or reconstituted Israel, the true people of God who will receive the Kingdom. That is the backbone of the phrase “Son of Man”.

Wright summarizes:

It is historically probable, then, that Jesus not only proclaimed the judgment of God against Israel, but also, in summoning men and women to follow him and in his healing miracles and table-fellowship with outcasts, enacted the inauguration of the reconstituted Israel of the new age, an idea and an entity which only attains coherence if he in some sense represents or embodies Israel in himself³²

Putting all these ideas together we arrive at one conclusion. Jesus is forming a rival definition of Israel, an admittance by faith and repentance, not one of bloodline to Abraham. And he is doing it with the authority of Messiah. By the climax of his ministry even his opponents realize this by putting “King of the Jews” over his cross. Only they won't follow God's Messiah. This idea that Jesus' authority challenges the status quo is foundational to understanding the religious and political reasons behind his death. In that history, we can find the theology about that death.

Jesus' Substitution with Sin

We have established that Jesus in his ministry was inspired by Isaiah. And as a result of reflecting on Isaiah would find an understanding of substitution and ransom inherent in his ministry. This substitution, or ransom, as McKnight argued, was to the end of liberation from captivity. Where the captivity can be seen from the context of Jesus' actions in each particular case.

Jesus welcomed “sinners” and ate with them, and he healed those afflicted with a variety of physical and mental ailments. Jesus restores to membership in Israel those who had been on the margins of the holy society, whether through physical defects (compare 1QSa 2:4-9) or moral or social blemishes. The healing miracles and the table-fellowship with sinners are, in fact, all of a piece, and very instructive for the hypothesis I am developing. Jesus' physical contact with lepers, with the woman suffering from the haemorrhage, with corpses, and so on, render him unclean just as did his eating with Matthew, or with Zacchaeus. Those two stories, in fact, could be seen as paradigmatic for this aspect of the ministry. Jesus identifies himself with sinful Israel, and thus contracts her uncleanness: nevertheless, when he emerges from Zacchaeus' house to face the accusing crowd, it is not he who is unclean but Zacchaeus who is “a son of Abraham.” The miracles and the welcome to outcasts thus invite the same interpretation as I have given to the call of the “twelve”: they only make sense if Jesus, who eats with the sinners, is himself the centre-point of the reconstituted Israel that is being called into existence.³³

32 N.T. Wright, *Jesus, Israel and the Cross* SBL 1985 Seminar Papers pg 86

33 *ibid* pg 84

This is the logical conclusion of Jesus ministry as substitution/exchange/ransom. Every action he takes with the outcast, diseased, possessed, and sinful individual is a lesson in liberation and restoration. Let me make myself clear that this is not penal substitution. Penal implies a legal situation, a situation of definition. Jesus here makes no claim of that at all - rather he makes a far bigger claim. That Zacchaeus is actually restored to the people of God, the people of Abraham. That those who are sick are actually healed. Because Jesus takes the infirmity on himself, the sin on himself. And instead gives back salvation. Salvation not in any ethereal sense, but a rock hard realistic sense. You'll notice that Jesus describes his actions with Zacchaeus as seeking the lost³⁴, and that is exactly what Isaiah is talking about, gone astray. And this continues right on until the cross. But before we get to the cross, we have to go through the last supper.

All the synoptics contain the most important point: "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many"³⁵ This is a conflation of Is 42.6, "covenant", and Is 53.12, "poured out for many". These are both verses we've encountered before. McKnight reflects on the Eucharist:

... Jesus is asking his followers to participate in his death. But rather than dying with him on the cross, he asks that they merely ingest bread and wine to identify themselves in the story of Jesus and so learn to participate in his death by faith. Jesus identifies with them in his death and incorporates them into his death. In fact, he dies instead of them as a substitutionary act. He exhorts them to participate in the benefits of his death by eating and drinking.³⁶

And Matthew – but only Matthew – adds in 26:28 "for the forgiveness of sins," which indicates both a personal resolution of one's relationship with God through the Torah (guilt) and the restoration of Israel (the corporate state of forgiveness)... Passover and the exodus are front, back, left, right, and center events to commemorate one thing: liberation from Egypt. As such, Passover became the event of the year for Israel to remember God's faithful ransoming, rescuing, saving work. And Passover was a reminder of God's faithful promise to be King and Savior of Israel. This can only mean that the event was fraught with political implications for Roman rulers as Israel thought of what God might again do for Israel.³⁷

I have mentioned Jesus' critique of Peter in the garden previously. Jesus, in going to the cross, refuses to be the nationalistic-warrior Messiah that all the other Messiah-claimants have taken up. I want to make a fuller statement about power, but it must wait. For now we can say this about Jesus:

...claiming to represent Israel, he is cast out by those who themselves claim to represent Israel; in urging Israel to forswear rebellion, he is himself executed as a rebel by the Romans. The death he dies is Israel's death, and the pattern of healings and welcomes which make up so much of the gospel narratives indicates the motive: he dies Israel's death in order that Israel may not die it. He takes the wrath of Rome (which is, like the wrath of Assyria or Babylon, the historical embodiment of the wrath of God) upon himself so that, in his vindication, Israel may find herself brought through the judgment and into the true Kingdom, may see at last the way to life and follow it while there is yet time.³⁸

When we look at Pilate offering Jesus to go free what do we see? We see Barabas going free. This is a man guilty of sedition being set free. Where a man innocent of sedition will die for that charge.

34 Lk 19.10

35 Mk 14.24, Mt 26.28, Lk 22.20 – Luke differs, opting for "you" instead of "many"

36 Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* pg 84

37 *ibid* pg 85

38 NT Wright, *Jesus, Israel, and the Cross* SBL 1985 Seminar Papers pg 90

Substitution again. Jesus dies to set Barabas free. While at the same time, Jesus is making an indictment of the method that the Jewish people are using to achieve their nationalist hopes. Jesus is telling them that their militant zealous plan to be rid of Rome will not work - watch them kill me under that very same guise. Jesus, representing Israel, shows them their future judgment at the hands of Rome. They would experience that judgment only forty years later in the destruction of the temple. Which Jesus already demonstrated for them on the cross. Jesus' warnings of judgment towards Israel and the temple specifically seem to focus on a national sin which entirely distracts from their ability to be the light to the world they are supposed to be. Jesus died for Israel, hoping that they too would be set saved, if they would only repent. Saved not only as individuals, but as a nation too. This is one strong reason that we find Paul not coming to a Church replaces Israel theology, but a Church is the people of God, as Israel is the people of God (inasmuch as they've repented, for not all Israel is Israel). This is why Paul can intimately say that Jesus died for his sins. This is what Jesus' ministry did as a whole - this isn't a secret doctrine. Jesus went in and erased sin where repentance was found. Moreover, this is no longer strictly limited to Israel. Not a conclusion of Pentecost, but a natural outworking of Jesus is that the world is involved. If Israel was supposed to be the light to the world, Jesus came to do what Israel could not – be that light.

We'll let Wright summarize again:

For Jesus to claim the status of Messiah, or to be the representative of the true people of God, or to have authority over the temple, was to make at the same time a statement of the greatest possible political and religious significance. It was to claim that God's plans, and Israel's national destiny, revolved around him and his fate. There were only two courses open to his hearers: either believe him and accept the consequences, or get rid of him— both courses involving, again, theological belief and “political” action...

The matter is summed up in the parable of the Wicked Tenants: when the son comes to claim the inheritance, the tenants say “come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” Whether this represents Jesus' interpretation of his death or that of Mark and the others, it fits very closely with the rest of the narrative. The role assigned to Jesus is that of Israel: those who themselves claim to represent Israel are naturally offended.

It is Luke, once more, who highlights this interpretation in his account of the Barabbas incident. In 23:25 he writes: “He [Pilate] released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.” Jesus dies, quite literally, the death meant for Barabbas (the point is repeated in the narrative of the two thieves, to which we referred earlier); and Barabbas is the one “whom they asked for,” the one whose acts of violent rebellion are taken by Luke as expressing the secret desires of the people. Jesus receives the punishment the Romans characteristically meted out to rebels. As if to emphasize the point, Luke follows this with the warning to the daughters of Jerusalem (23:27-31), in which Jesus identifies himself explicitly with the national aspiration: if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? This is what the Romans do even to one not guilty of rebellion; how much more when the sons of the women at present bewailing him take up actual arms and fight for God and country.³⁹

This leads us directly to Jesus' assault against their ideas of power.

Jesus' Critique of Power

39 NT Wright, *Jesus, Israel, and the Cross* SBL 1985 Seminar Papers, pg 89

Since Israel could not be what they needed to be Jesus, as prophet and Messiah, critiques them. The most damaging critique is about power. This is found both against the leaders and the people. It is about how power should be used, what power is, and the judgment of God towards those who abuse power. If the reversals of the Sermon on the Mount can be understood anywhere, they can be understood in this context of power.

Throughout the Gospels when Jesus mentions his crucifixion there is often, either before or after, a discussion about power. In Mark's gospel, it happens in every occasion. It can't be a coincidence.

The first example is Mark 8:31-35. In v34 Peter correctly responded to Jesus' question about who he was. This is Jesus' first mention to the disciples about his death at Jerusalem. This close correlation is not by accident. It tells us that Jesus going to the cross was a defining characteristic of himself as Messiah. This is the time Peter takes Jesus aside and tries to convince him that this isn't what happens to the Messiah. Jesus accuses Peter of not being interested in God's things, but men's interests. Then Jesus says his followers must deny themselves and carry their cross. And whoever wishes to save his life must lose it. Several verses later Jesus mentions that some of them standing there will not die before seeing the Kingdom in power. Peter's response seems very typical of the Jewish people. They seemed to want a warrior Messiah, surely they supported such false-Messiahs like Bar Kochba that led a violent revolution. Therefore Peter's rebuking of Jesus is talking about power, the power of the Messiah. Jesus says that Peter is interested in the power of men, not God's. Since Jesus is talking about his going to the cross. And then Jesus tells them they will see the Kingdom power and takes them up on a mountain to show them. Jesus seems to be constantly contrasting Kingdom of God power with worldly power.

In the very next chapter, 9:31, Jesus again tells them about his crucifixion. They are still perplexed by this statement and discuss it amongst themselves for the rest of their journey. When they arrive, Jesus turns and asks them what they've been discussing. They don't answer him, but the Scriptures state they were discussing who the greatest would be. "The Greatest" is a position of power. Jesus sits them down and tells them that the greatest is the servant of all. And he brings a child and tells them you must receive me as this child. The disciples are still thinking that the power of the Kingdom of God is like worldly power. Jesus tells them that power in the Kingdom looks like serving people, and like being a child. Children know nothing of deceitful rulers and abusive power.

Again in the next chapter, 10:33-34, Jesus tells them he is going to die. This is when John and James come to Jesus and ask to be on his left and right side in the Kingdom - positions of power, second and third in the Kingdom. Jesus replies by asking them if they will be able to do what he is about to! In Jesus' mind, the ability to rule is intimately involved with your godly sacrifice in following God's leading, and substitution for others.. John and James wanted to be a part of Jesus' glory. Surely they think of the lavish palaces of Herod and other rulers of their time. They aren't thinking like Jesus is. Again Jesus' reply is that to be great you must be the servant and slave to all.

In addition to seeing power related to Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus also contrasts it with the power of the rulers of his day as well. John the Baptist from prison, sent messengers to Jesus to confirm Jesus' Messiahship. John, in prison, expected vindication as God's true messenger. And indeed if Jesus was the Messiah, he is already identified and on the scene. After Jesus answers with Is 61 to the messengers, he turns to the audience rebuking them about their treatment and expectation of both John and Jesus.

Why had they gone out to the wilderness, following John? To see a reed shaken in the wind? Was this the sort of royal movement one might have expected in Galilee? ... Any claim, by John about Jesus or by Jesus about himself, to be the king of the Jews would of course pose a direct challenge, however absurd in terms of actual power, to Herod Antipas. Herod had chosen as his symbol,

placed on his coins (instead of a portrait, out of wariness of Jewish scruple) a typical Galilean reed... Jesus' question, uncoded, means more or less: were you looking for another Herodian-style king? Surely not; you wanted something far greater than that, something more than simply yet another pseudo-aristocrat, lording it over you like a pagan tyrant. And you got it.⁴⁰

Wright makes the connection between Jesus' teaching of ethical conduct and Jesus' critique of power:

Instead of conceiving her national task as a holiness which involved separation, Jesus invites Israel to find her vocation in a different sort of *imitatio Dei*, which will mean forgiving enemies instead of vengeance against them, going the second mile on behalf of the hated Roman soldier, taking the pain and anger of the present situation and offering love in return. The table-fellowship with sinners is not merely the acting out of grace to sinners: it is an acted parable of what Israel should be like, a welcoming, mercy-offering community, rather than an exclusivist company concerned with separation from defilement and hence always likely to run into conflict with Rome (so Borg, ch. 4 and frequently). This is a revolutionary Jesus of a rather different sort to Brandon's, but, as Borg so clearly shows, one who was making a definite political statement nonetheless. He who is not with the national hope is against it; he who announces that it is fulfilled, and yet systematically undermines it, is a traitor. The parallel with Elijah, and particularly with Jeremiah, could hardly be clearer.⁴¹

Jesus is not only the interpreter of Moses, not only the one Moses warned Israel to listen to, but as her representative is instructing Israel on how to truly be Israel. As a result, those who do not follow in Jesus' way are in danger of judgment. Here we are focusing on just Jesus' comments of power, though of course it is applicable in many areas. One of Jesus' pronouncements on Jerusalem occurs in Luke:

And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"⁴²

Wright goes on to say:

What could occasion a terrible beatitude such as this, overturning the normal first-century cultural assumption that barrenness was a woman's greatest curse? The answer, in the light of chapter 8 above, must be that Jesus was warning, one last time, of what would happen as the result of Jerusalem rejecting 'the things that make for peace'. (Lk 19.42) She had chosen the way of revolution, of confrontation with Rome; the youngsters playing in the streets in Jesus' day would become the firebrands of the next generation, and would suffer the terrible consequences. The mothers should save their tears for when they would really be needed.

How does the quotation from Hosea 10.8 ('they will say to the mountains "Fall on us"', etc.) fit in to this? The entire context of the original passage, though normally ignored, is most instructive: ...

It is all there: the vine that has become proud and gone to ruin, the judgment on the sanctuary, the rejection of YHWH and of the king, the terrible judgment which will result from trusting in military power, the dire warning to the mothers and the children – and, finally, the death of the king. The

40 NT Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* pg 496

41 *ibid* pg 83

42 Lk 23.27-31

application to Jesus' contemporaries fits at every point with the picture we have drawn overall. The judgment of which Jesus was warning the women of Jerusalem was the devastation which would result from the city's rejection of him as the true king, and his message as the true way of peace. His own death at the hands of Rome was the clearest sign of the fate in store for the nation that had rejected him.⁴³

Throughout Israel's history they often rested on their military power, or the power of their allies, Egypt for instance. We hear prophetic cries that Egypt will not be able to save them from the judgment coming. We can see here Jesus is doing the same. Jesus pronounces judgment on the Temple as impure, corrupt, and tainted. Jesus pronounces judgment on the way the Jewish people use power, specifically militarily and politically. Because of his actions, specifically against the Temple, Jesus gets a trial. Because of his claims to authority over and against the current rulers, Jesus gets crucified.

Conclusion About Jesus and Atonement in History

I developed the two strands of power and substitution together because they play against each other. We need to understand Jesus' death as more than the sacrifice of a noble man. We need to understand Jesus' death as more than a tragedy. In simple terms those are true. But that in no way comes close to exhausting Jesus' intention and the reality of what happened. As a part of Jesus' ministry he understood Isaiah to be talking about restoration, liberation, and healing. He performed these miracles by getting intimately involved with people, ransoming them, substituting for them, taking their infirmities away. As a result, he was calling on Israel to repent of her sins, to reenter the covenant. When people repented he was there to forgive them and make that forgiveness and salvation a reality now, in advance of the Kingdom. Because of that notion of substitution found in Isaiah, Jesus goes to the cross. As a substitute for Israel, whom he represents. He goes to the cross in typical prophetic fashion pleading for God's forgiveness for the nation. Having the authority of the Messiah Jesus declares the Temple to be unclean and unfit. Again, not because it is outdated, or outmoded, but purely because of its corruption, much like those at Qumran. Jesus' clash with the authorities shows us his conception of power and how it should be used, unmasking the abuse of power by those with it.

Jesus told his disciples to identify with his death in a makeshift Passover meal. To believe in Jesus' message and identify with him would save you from the judgment coming on Israel. Jesus' blood acted as the Passover blood, covering the people from the judgment of God upon the nation. Jesus' love was his motivation. Surely Jesus experienced a relationship with God better than any man previously in history. Sin had no hold on him, he was entirely pure. The spirit of God moved and worked with him in so many ways. Jesus experienced, in life, in reality, what he wanted to impart on everyone else. A perfect peace in covenant with God. Jesus' love and compassion for those not in that covenant compelled him to act the way he did in his ministry. Ultimately it compelled him to go to the cross. And God vindicated his message, and his actions in resurrection. Completing the historical survey, we now have a foundation upon which we can tackle a future subject of "one-step removed" theories, biblical, medieval, or modern.

Jesus' Crucifixion Without Resurrection?

As I started, there were many Messiah-claimants, and many who died a martyrs death. None of these figures created an atonement theory among their followers. All of their followers reacted in much the same was the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are

43 NT Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* pg 568-9

walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened."⁴⁴

They would have an empty hope without a resurrection. As disciples they quickly would have moved on, either finding another Messiah figure, or just returning to their lives. Jesus would not have been vindicated of his claims to Messiahship. He would be another in a long line of martyrs. Not one other Jewish martyr generated a concept of atonement by his followers. We can surmise that Jesus generates this concept of atonement from two points: (1) his life, and (2) his vindicating resurrection.

... a Messiah who was executed by the occupying forces was not, after all, the true Messiah. This is not a subtle theological point, though it has huge theological implications. It is merely a truism of first-century politics.⁴⁵

There is then no curiosity about Jesus' resurrection. It would have historically been necessary for any Jew to believe in him as Messiah. Moreover the resurrection is Jesus' victory and vindication. The resurrection is truly the origin of the Christian faith. It is also considered by a notable apologist William Lang Craig to be one of the best attested facts by the ancient world.⁴⁶

As Jesus battled diseases, spirits, and death in his ministry he always came out victorious. No wonder then Jesus comes out victorious on the cross. Remember they are both acts of substitution. Both require God's power to overcome. Both required Jesus' willingness, compassion, and love. Again, without a resurrection there is no vindication. Without a resurrection, there is no reason to think that Jesus' blood covers us as a Passover. Without a resurrection Jesus' substitution with us fails. Our sin and ailments overwhelm the Messiah, God's anointed. Unlike Zacchaeus, Jesus does not walk out unharmed, and we would not walk out sons of Abraham. Without a resurrection, there is no footing for a "new creation" in being identified with Jesus' crucifixion. That identification is surely the point of Christian baptism and the Eucharist. Even if we were to identify with just a death, why would that change us without a newness of life? It would not. Everything surrounding any Christian idea of atonement relies on the resurrection as much, if not more, than his death. We must begin to think of Christian atonement as an atonement of life, not of death.

Jesus' Implications For Us

I've focused thus far on two threads, substitution and power. When we understand Jesus in this way, what are the logical conclusions we must address about these two ideas? We must not fall victim to the same uses, and abuses of power that Jesus critiqued and judged. In Jesus' day it was "in fashion" to think a violent revolution would have solved Israel's problems with Rome and brought back God's holy institution. Jesus seems to think otherwise and condemns Peter's actions at precisely the exact point any other Messiah claimant would have welcomed it.

He was challenging existing construals of the tradition, precisely at the point where his contemporaries were expecting a military victory over Israel's enemies; that was part of the whole

⁴⁴ Lk 24.17-21

⁴⁵ NT Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, pg 485

⁴⁶ Copan & Evans eds., *Who Was Jesus?* pg 22-27

point.⁴⁷

We must also recognize how Jesus involves himself in the life of an individual in regards to substitution. It is intensely personal, intimate, and life-changing. Jesus gives us a well known parable about how we are to treat others in Mt 25. We are to give what we have, our of form of substitution, to be responsible stewards of the gifts God has given to us. To whom much is given much is required, and to who has, more will be given. This is the community to which God has called us. A community which is given God's spirit, so that we may all be like Jesus, to do his work. To be the light to the world, the true Israel. To do what Israel could not do.

Instead of oppression, there is fellowship, instead of hierarchy, there is spiritual giftedness, instead of abusive power, there are the twin powers of love and sacrifice (1 Cor 12-14)⁴⁸

The followers of Jesus both proclaim and embody atoning justice by fighting injustice and establishing just that kind of justice. Their forward guard is surrounded with the banner of grace and forgiveness.⁴⁹

Jesus' ministry and death is here to reshape our idea of God's idea of power, of Kingdom power. We are not supposed to "lord it over, as the Gentiles do". The question now is why? The answer lies in Jesus' ministry. We've often said that God has a special place in his heart for the poor. Why? Because God gave mankind stewardship, a position of power, over the world. Mankind is fallen and broken. They abuse power and oppress people all over the world with their power. God does not do this with his power - we understand he has been gracious with us all along. Jesus as Messiah did not abuse his power, rather he used his power to reach out to the needy and oppressed. As a result of man's brokenness other men and the world have received essentially the wrath of fallen people. They've received the short end of the stick every time. And God is not happy about that. That is why Jesus preaches about a reversal of fortunes "Blessed are the poor in Spirit... Woe to those who are rich". Therefore, if we want to imitate God, imitate Jesus, be a vision of ruler-ship in the coming Kingdom, we will serve, restore the oppressed and needy, and show the world how power is supposed to be used. With that said, the church can and should emulate Jesus in his ministry's form of substitution. By getting deeply involved in people's lives. Giving freely of what is theirs, materially, monetarily, time, and knowledge. When people interacted honestly with Jesus in his ministry their reality was entirely changed. And today when people interact honestly with Jesus as the head of the body, they are changed. The same needs to be said of the Church. When people interact honestly with us as the Church, we need to be ready to do God's work for that individual. Jesus' atoning substitution was not limited to an ethereal or legal metaphor. It entered the world to reflect what the coming age would be like.

We were originally created in the image of God, that is to reflect God into the world. We fell. We ceased to reflect God, only ourselves. The Kingdom, the coming age, is when everything in creation will be restored to reflect God once again. But, Jesus came onto the scene and gave the world a sneak preview of what the coming age would be like. He brought the "powers of the next age" into this one in the form of exorcisms, healing, restoration to the community, and liberation from sin. Everyone who accepted Jesus' statements and status as God's true messenger experienced the power of the next age in their life. And through the substitution atonement found in the cross many who have never met Jesus have experienced that same power. That same healing, that same restoration to community, and that same liberation from sin. The atonement restores, to a degree, our position as images of God in this world, that we may reflect God back into the world. That we may show the world just what the next

47 NT Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, pg 593

48 Scot McKnight, A Community Called Atonement pg 129

49 ibid pg 133

age, the Kingdom age, will be like.

One of the biggest things that is present in this age, but will be absent in the next is, again, the abuse of power. I want to highlight a lecture from James Carroll given January 23rd from the Religion & Violence conference.⁵⁰ It points to a civil understanding of atonement that we must rid ourselves of.⁵¹ It is based on the idea that atonement is primarily an atonement of death – and not of life. Of sacrifice, without vindicated substitution.

Carroll follows American history as it institutionalizes death and sacrifice, specifically politically and militarily, borrowing religious rhetoric and creating a civil understanding of atonement. That idea of civil atonement is now so inbred into our cultural upbringing that we need to separate that out. Much like we have to realize when we enter a Western 21st century reading into an ancient phrase. We have to weed out these ideas created in the last two hundred years of what an atonement of death and sacrifice is, and let Jesus' talk to us instead. We can only do that if we recognize our cultural upbringing. One of Carroll's starting points is that violence against a scape-goat is considered atoning. That is to say; "If we just kill a few, we will be saved from more suffering and violence". Another is the imperialistic agenda of this country, freedom, as if Jesus was interested in spreading the Western ideal of freedom.

Carroll explicitly reminds us that violence is an element of the basic human condition, not a religious human condition. We Christians would understand this to be the cause of the fall of man. It occurs by the very basic "us" vs "them" mentality. And of course I am reminded of Boyd's work *Myth of a Christian Nation*, and the scriptural tenet that all war and strife is based on the lust of our heart.⁵²

This is far more difficult than merely protecting the civil religion, which perhaps partly explains why so many prefer focusing on the civil religion. Doing the kingdom always requires that we bleed for others, and for just this reason, doing the kingdom accomplishes something kingdom-of-the-world activity can never accomplish.⁵³

Therefore it seems to be rid of the "us" vs "them" is to be in community with those that are not "us". It means being the light of the world like Israel was called to be. Since we are added as branches to the trunk of Israel let us be a light to the Gentiles, that we may provoke the roots of the tree to jealousy that they might seek to be grafted back on. The implication for the Church is that the more inward focused it becomes, the less it will be able to go out into the world. It will find more barriers in it's way. It will not have compassion on those who are not a part of it. It will forget how. "Us" vs "them" causes strife, differences, and problems. For sure there is a line in the sand, but we are to go across it. To be with the sinner as Jesus was.

The American civil understanding of war and violence has never been so crystal clear after he analyzed our history. I am appalled that at least some of this self understanding is not taught in schools. He brilliantly traces the development of the sacrificial atonement throughout our history. And it comes full circle with Kant's duty ethic that the ends justify the means. It all coalesces into a temple system with Lincoln, and ultimately his death. The Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Gettysburg Address are the civil scriptures of this country with Lincoln as the dying Christ figure who moves for freedom and union. American/Western freedom is today of first importance of course, but union being the true historical reason. For the "freedom" which was apparently so hardy fought for was easily

50 All lectures available here: <http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/education/?institute-2008&p=schedule&timezone=telecast>

51 This is mostly addressed to an American audience, though anyone familiar with the era of the Second World War would find the rhetoric similar

52 James 4.1-4

53 Dr. Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* pg 119

discarded directly after the civil war. Jim Crow laws, reconstructionism, and violence against Native Americans continued. We know that God has set up the kingdoms of this world, and has ordained them. We also know this in no way sanctions their behavior. God has merely entrusted to them, given them stewardship over the governance of his world. Just like Israel was judged for her misconduct by Babylon, and then Babylon, God's instrument, was judged for her misconduct, so will the rest of the kingdoms of this world be judged for their own misconduct. They will fall and be removed from power because of their abuses. As such, the Church, the signpost of the coming Kingdom, a reflection of God, should stand as the true peacemakers God has called us to be, as he called his Son to be. It should not collude with the misconduct of these kingdoms, on a corporate or and individual level. And as the Church we should so judge ourselves whether we be in the faith in the aim of winning our brethren.

In a phrase, we are to be like Jesus. The Jesus of history. The Jesus who substituted himself for sinners, died in their place, that they may not die but be passed over. The Jesus who did not use the sword, who denounced the violent tendencies of his Messianic office, and said "Blessed are the peacemakers". May the spirit of God and of his Christ empower us to be who we are supposed to be.