

“PSA”

In the fourth chapter of my book, ATONEMENT MATTERS, I used these three letters as shorthand for Penal Substitutionary Atonement. I want to explain to you what this means since the beginning of March finds us quickly approaching Palm Sunday & Good Friday.

PSA gets to the very core of what Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection. In it we see the threefold purpose of His saving work.

Atonement

The word atonement in the Bible speaks of bringing forgiveness to man and turning away God’s wrath for sin (e.g. Exodus 32:30; Leviticus 1:4). Therefore, the term often describes the saving work of Jesus Christ, and rightly so. Paul writes in Romans 3:24-26 that we “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” The term “propitiation” speaks of a sacrifice which turns away the wrath of God due to sin.

Paul goes on to say that the one who is justified is forgiven of His sins (Romans 4:7-8).

Substitution

Second, we see that the death of this sinless one (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26) was in the place of others. He died vicariously to bring forgiveness and reconcile us to God (1 Peter 3:18). Consider just a handful of New Testament examples: “the Son of Man came...to...give his life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28); “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3); “who gave himself for our sins” (Gal. 1:4); “...the Son of God...gave himself for me....” (Gal. 2:20)

Penalty Payment

How is it that Jesus was able to die in the place of man to bring forgiveness and to turn away God’s wrath? He paid the penalty due to man for sin, which is death (Romans 6:23). Consider two examples which show us the substitutionary atonement was “penal” in nature. In 2 Cor. 5:21 we read: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Paul says here that Jesus was made a sacrifice for sin—to pay sin’s penalty. The same truth is emphasized in 1 Peter 3:18 where the Apostle writes: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”

So What?

So what is the big deal about understanding the death of Jesus Christ? It is important since the words Jesus spoke about His saving work must be believed for salvation (John 5:24). Those words include the PSA! If we are to grasp what Jesus did on the cross, we must see He made atonement as our substitute in paying sin’s penalty for us.

This Lent may we boast with the psalmist, “He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.” (Ps. 62:6)