

Sermon Notes

➤ The Revelation of God's Righteousness

In Romans 3:21 Paul finally starts to unpack what he has stated in 1:16-17: in the Gospel God's righteousness has been revealed in and through Jesus.

➤ The Result of Salvation: Redemption

In some of the most condensed and packed sentences of the New Testament, Paul gives us two "results" of what Jesus achieved for us: redemption and reconciliation. The first of these, redemption (3:24), evokes the picture of freedom from (the) slavery (of sin). Paul will elaborate on the practical implications of this freedom for our life in the coming chapters.

➤ The Result of Salvation: Reconciliation

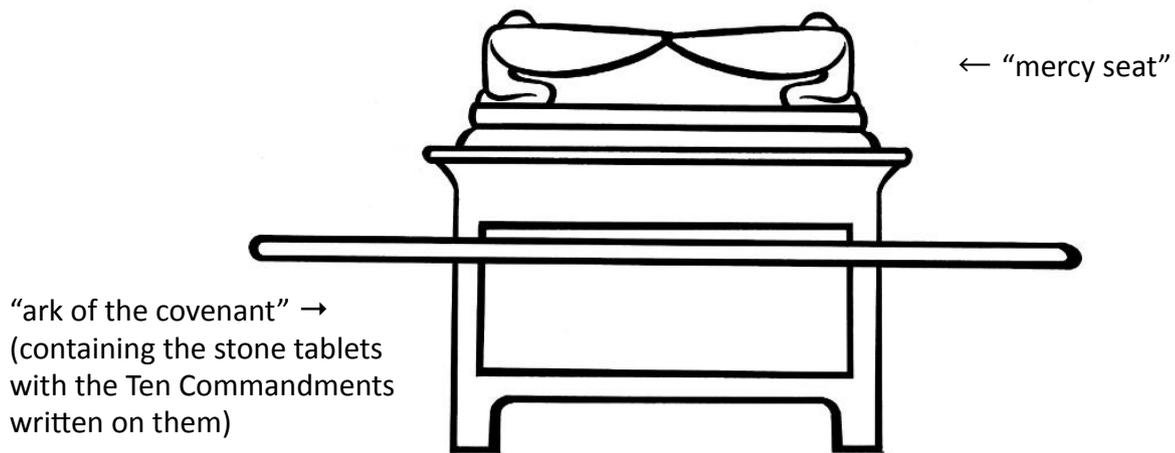
The second result is what the cross is all about: reconciliation with God. Paul states that "God put him [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood" (NKJV, ESV). "Propitiation" means "reconciliation", but the word Paul uses actually means the cover (ἱλαστήριον / כַּפֶּרֶת) of the ark of the covenant, also called "mercy seat". From the mercy seat God would speak to his people (Exodus 25:21-22), and in front of it atonement could take place on the day of atonement (Leviticus 16:13-16). (→ See image on page 2)

On the day of atonement (Leviticus 16), the blood which was sprinkled on the "mercy seat" illustrated the (re-)consecration and sanctification of the people (back) into God's presence. Something similar, yet incomparably superior happens on the cross: as Jesus offers himself *for us*—once and for all as the perfect sacrifice, carrying away the sin of the world—, he reconciles *us* through his blood "into" the relationship with God.

As Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:19, "God was *in* Christ reconciling *the world* to Himself". On the cross the Father does not turn against the son by punishing him or pouring his wrath out over him.¹ Neither is the Father turning his face away: on the contrary, he himself is acting in Christ as he reconciles us with himself.² The cross is not the reason *why* God loves us—he has always loved us and sent his son to die *because* of his love for this world —, rather it is the proof *that* and *how much* he loves us.

Questions for Discussion

- 1 Can you recall a recent dispute or a conflict you had with another person? What was it all about? (Only share what you are comfortable sharing.) How did it feel to be caught up in this controversy? Are you happy with how the the situation resolved? How do you feel about the result?
- 2 Do you remember a situation in which you have been offending someone else and received grace and forgiveness from that person? How did you react to this response?
- 3 What is the conflict we are facing according to Paul? Who needed to be reconciled? And what does the solution look like?
- 4 Have you ever been doubting that God "can" love someone like you?
- 5 In 2 Corinthians 5:19 Paul remarks that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself". How do you react to this statement? How does it make you feel?



Additional notes

- 1 In the New Testament the notion of God’s wrath is never used to describe Jesus’ death on the cross. Just like in Romans 1:18-3:20, it always is a reference to the last day, the last judgement, and the fact that we then will escape God’s wrath because of Christ: Romans 5:9; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:10.
- 2 Jesus’ experience on the cross, like David’s in Psalm 22, “feels” like being abandoned and forsaken by God, but neither Jesus nor the Gospels say that the Father in fact did abandon him. And Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19 makes clear that even on the cross God was in Christ. A powerful illustration of what happened on the cross is Massacio’s painting “Holy Trinity”.