

A tool of torture became a symbol of hope.

²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col 1:20-NIV)

You loan your car to Rebekah, your only daughter who possesses a newly minted and perfect driving license and record. While driving for the first time, she backs out of the driveway and gets off driveway center and hits the streetlight. The street light flickers and then suddenly goes out. Needless to say, she has sustained significant damage to the back of YOUR car. Not to mention the light pole.

Let’s say your coverage excludes streetlights on your street, hit by daughters driving for the first time. All of the rest of the city’s streetlights are protected from menacing drivers with newly minted licenses, little experience and now not so perfect driving records.

Because of the error in judgment, a legitimate mistake, a missing of the mark your daughter Rebekah assumes that you will be mad at her. And mad for a long time. In fact, as a dad you are a demanding parent, and she is not sure if you will ever get over it. Let alone offer your family car for her driving.

What are you going to do?

Option One: You demand that your daughter pay for the damage. She must find her own way out from guilt and emotional pain.

Option Two: Each of you share in the cost connected to the damage, financially and emotionally. Not realistic because you can’t carry her partial guilt and emotional pain. This option is out.

Option Three: You absorb the cost of the damage to the car and light post. And you forgive her wayward driving mishap. Even more you declare her guilt free.

Beka, it was an accident, we will get the car fixed and you will be driving before you know it. One more piece of advice, “don’t carry any guilt for the mistake.” Let it go. Move on! Slowly Rebekah puts the accident in her review mirror, including the guilt and emotional pain of the accident.

Reconciliation to God for sin and wrongdoing always requires some type of payment. *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Rom 3:23-ESV)*

(all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory – standard). Oh, you are not even sure if there is a God. Well, within each of us is a moral compass that registers toward spiritual right, and wrong; that moral compass was placed there by God. It is a part of your hard wiring.

Your parents raised you to know the difference between right and wrong. Because you have a moral compass, placed there by God, your **true north** is always attempting to align itself with God’s standard.

Now, the problem is because of sin, our capacity to align ourselves with God’s standard is broken.

Sin causes the needle of true north to be compromised permanently. I often refer to this **broken compass** as your south bound gravitational pull toward sin. With a broken moral compass, we wander aimlessly through life and are eventually blindly seduced into thinking that our only hope is climbing some type of behavioral or moral ladder to reach God.

What are we hoping to do, once we have climbed high enough on the moral ladder-**tell God we are sorry?** Is that all it takes?

The problem is that simply telling God we are sorry does not undo the damage caused by our waywardness. Our missing the mark. Our sin. So, God

absorbed the cost of YOUR sin's damage through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross.

Let me paint a picture of what God has done to cancel your sins. God is hanging on a cross.

Stop! Shouted the Centurion. Stand back the burly and bulky Roman officer tells the religious crowd that has stopped to gaze as the criminals carrying crosses pause because of pain.

The eyes of the crowd fixate on the first criminal at the front of the line, he is the most badly beaten. His back is lacerated to the bone. His right is puffy and bruised to the point of almost being shut, he must have taken a few blows to the head.

3 men carrying timbers.

3 men marching off to their execution.

In the crowd watching are the high priests with their ceremonial pointed hats and Pharisees with their expensive robes.

Suddenly, Jesus looks Mary's way. He forms a face that is holding back pain, so she can't see his real agony. Jesus wants to hold her close. His garments were too soiled with blood.

Mary looked Jesus' way, she grimaced but she also remembered, Jesus own words, this is what he came to earth for, and this is the will of the Father.

Then Jesus glanced at John the disciple, John was wiping the tears from his eyes, and without words Jesus sends a message, "shield Mary from what is about to happen. Cover her eyes and cover her eyes from the sounds and sights."

The nails went in. The cross went up. The blood came down.

The Roman soldier looked at the executioner; he wore a special garment that had pockets containing towels and a larger than usual hammer hanging from the executioner's side. Suddenly with a deep Italian voice, the soldier declares, "Crucify that one first."

For the next few minutes, the parade of soon-to-be executed victims ascended 30 yards to a bluff called Golgotha. Which means the place of the skull. No stranger could mistake this as the place of execution.

On this day, 3 upright beams stood naked against the blue sky. 3 ordinary cypress beams, like those carried by the condemned men. The top of each beam had been planed down, so the cross beam could fit across them.

Shockingly, four soldiers moved in closely to Jesus and began to strip him of his clothes. A murmurous sound filled the air from nearby onlookers. Suddenly a pile of sandals and loose clothing sat nearby. The crucifixion was about to begin.

The hammer slings. The skin rips. The savior yells.

When the prisoners were stripped naked, a single cloth was wrapped around their loins, and between their thighs, and tucked into the back. The sun was high. Nearby leaves from trees rustled in the wind. Coveys of small birds darted across Golgotha.

The executioner laid the crossbeam behind Jesus and brought Jesus to the ground quickly grasping his arm and pulling him backward. As Jesus stumbled and fell to the ground, he was carefully positioned for crucifixion. Jesus gave no resistance. He gave no words.

Suddenly the executioner probed the wrist of Jesus to find a hollow spot. When he found it, the executioner took one of the square cut 5-inch iron nails from his pocket and positioned it against the spot, behind the line life. Then the raised hammer went to work and suddenly slammed the nail into the beam with precision.

Immediately the executioner jumped to the other side and repeated the event. Once satisfied the condemned criminal could not pull himself loose, the signal was given to lift the crossbeam. When the cross beam was set firmly, the executioner placed a sign above Jesus' head, which listed the name of the prisoner and his crime.

37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews. (Matt 27:37-NIV)

Finally, two soldiers, grabbed Jesus' feet, placing the right over the left and thrust the 3rd and final iron nail through to the wooden beam. Over the years, the Romans learned to place the feet nailed to the cross so the condemned could stretch himself upward.

Jesus was crucified. For 6 hours, Jesus faced the Holy City for one last time. Secured by 3 iron nails, Jesus would move ever so slightly, attempting to find a moment of relief from pain.

During those 6 hours in Jerusalem, God allowed 3 nails to be embedded into Christ, winning a victory for all who ask for salvation.

For days, 5-inch nails sat in a storage bin. The cross beam had been leaning against a wall. A wooden sign positioned on a table would soon hang above the condemned. The end was near. It was Friday.

A tool of torture became a symbol of hope.

Why is the cross the symbol of hope? To find the answer, look no further than the cross itself. The design could not be simpler.

One beam horizontal. One beam vertical.

One beam reaches out like God's love. The other beam reaches up-as does God's holiness.

One beam represents the width of his love, the other beam reflects the height of his holiness.

The cross is the place where God forgive, you and me, without lowering his standard of holiness.

You wonder, how did that happen? God placed our sin on his Son Jesus and punished it there. God is hanging on a cross.

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24-NIV)

Let me describe it this way. God is on his throne. You are on the earth. And between you God, suspended between you and heaven, is Christ on the cross. Your sins were placed on Jesus. God, who punishes sin, releases his wrath and anger on your sins. Wrath and anger of God falls upon Jesus.

Jesus took the blow. Jesus took the 5-inch iron nails. Jesus endured the suffering and pain for 6 hours. Since Christ is between you and God, Jesus is punished, and you are pardoned.

Or another way to say it, Jesus Christ hung crucified between you and God. Jesus is punished and you are pardoned.

Jesus stretched out one hand to the right, and a 5-inch iron nail went in. Jesus stretched out the other hand to the left, and a 5-inch iron nail went in. Jesus did this so you would know Jesus died loving you.

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32-NIV). Now, go to the bottom of your notes and look with me at the final insight. Here it is-

The One who wore a crown of heaven also wore a crown of thorns.

I want to take a moment and pause, reflect, worship and express thanks. Ok, that was just a taste of what we will do in a few minutes as we conclude.

In your notes I am illustrating the benefits of Jesus atoning death by identifying the benefits of Nail 1, Nail 2 and Nail 3.

We start with Psalm 103:3, who forgives all your sins, and heals all of your diseases. You are going to see a pattern in scripture, where God forgives sins, and heals our bodies (bodies include emotions).

The clear example of this pattern is found in Is 53. Isaiah 53 is a prophetic glimpse of how the Messiah will suffer.

Isaiah 53 is the ONE passage, above all others, that has been used over the centuries by Christians to be a prediction that the messiah will suffer and die for the sake of others. Ok, does that make sense? Look at Isaiah 53:5.

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed. (Is 53:5-NIV)*

This is a beautiful passage. The piece parts all fit together in our example.

Nail #1- The cross provides forgiveness of sins.

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities; (Is 53:5)*

Nail # 2-The cross provides physical healing.

...and by his wounds we are healed. (Is 53:5-NIV)

Nail # 3-The cross provides emotional healing.

...the punishment that brought us peace was on him, (Is 53:5)

Two experiences are clearly observed about Jesus' death. He was stripped naked, and he was clothed with our sins. Let that sink in. **His nakedness was removed, not with loin cloth, but with a sin cloth.** The shame of nakedness was replaced with the unlimited shame of sin. In your notes I put it this way.

Soldiers stripped Jesus naked. Christ wore our sins.

Now, the term for this experience in theology is called Jesus, **substitutionary atonement.** You know what a substitute is. Something that takes the place of. For example, to use something or someone instead of another thing or person: substitute something for something You can substitute oil for butter (= use oil instead of butter) in this recipe. substitute something with something You can substitute the wheat flour with almond flour (= use almond flour instead of wheat flour).

Maybe you are familiar with these words that illustrate substitute: designated hitter, surrogate, proxy, fill-in, ok, you get it.

Now, let me illustrate atonement. And atonement means to make a payment. To make amends. Grace. Forgiveness. Pardon. Salvation. Restoration. Now, let's put these two words together-substitutionary atonement and feature 2 benefits.

Two Benefits of Jesus Substitutionary Atonement

**Our sins are cast as far as the east is from the west. (Ps 103:12-Voice)*

You see, God takes all our crimes—our seemingly inexhaustible sins—and removes them. As far as east is from the west, He removes them from us.

**He was abandoned by God, so we would never be abandoned by God. (Matt 27:46-NIV)*

⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli,^[a] lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")

The One who wore a crown of heaven also wore a crown of thorns.

The song amazing grace is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **252 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times every day, in every language and every continent.

**Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969*

**Elvis sang it in Vegas.*

**Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.*

**Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.*

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when

played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw.

When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the **poetry** and its **common street language**.

Read the poetry with me.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun. (2x)

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is that has ever been written. And then there is the street language – vs. 1.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me. (that saved a what...wretch –pirate)

For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

When was the last time that a song broke into the top 10 that had the word wretch in it? I don't know if it has ever happened or ever will. This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves from Africa to England. His name was John Newton as you see.

Not Isaac Newton the gravity guy,

Not Cam Newton the football guy,

And not Wayne Newton the Hollywood guy (as one family member told me recently as a funeral)

This was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do. What his father taught him.

Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed. And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

Do you think he was being a little tough on himself? A lady on **Twitter** had a profile that described herself as, "**The wretch the song Amazing Grace wrote about.**" Yikes, there is a back story there.

Do any of you ever think of yourself as a wretch? Probably not, really. We see wretches on the evening news. Wretches are killers, bombers, and terrorists. The word fits those kinds of people very well. Just doesn't fit people like us very well.

The back story of John Newton is one day he came in contact with the blazing brilliance of the Holiness of God. The moment he contemplated that the God of the Universe that he was exploring, was perfect. Spotless. Totally righteous and absolutely good in every way. The more that Newton thought about himself by comparison, the only word that seemed to fit was-WRETCH.

If he is perfect, then I am a WRETCH. Gang he was not beating himself up. Don't think that for a moment. He was just bench marking himself against the holiness of God. And it sort of blew his mind.

It knocked him right of his self-righteous perch. And he saw himself for who he really was. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a WRETCH like me.

John Newton did not wake up one day and think that his profession was immoral. He read the pages of scripture thoroughly and comprehensively and saw the absolute holiness of God and thought to himself one day...

...I am even worse than my profession. I am immoral. Compared to God's perfection, I am a WRETECH. And then he started thinking about it more:

1. **God always only ever tells the truth**-I tell lies, lots of them.
2. **God loves** with a perfect love, I love very imperfectly, sometimes I hate.

3. **God is patient**, I am often short tempered,
4. **God is gracious and forgiving**, I seek revenge and hold a grudge.
5. **God is impartial**, I am prejudice, look at what I did for a living.
6. **God is totally pure**; I am so far from being totally pure.

Benchmark me against my colleagues, maybe I can hold my own, but benchmark me against the blazing brilliance of a holy God, only one word describes me, **I am a wretch**.

I will often use amazing grace in a funeral setting where maybe the family wants their friends and loved ones to hear of salvation, and are not quite sure, how to give that opportunity. So, I will suggest, why not sing Amazing Grace, invite your family, like John Newton, to use this song as a song of salvation. You sing it. Believe the truth of what it says about you, "a wretch."

But go a step further, and invite Jesus Christ to save you, just like Isaiah 53:5-he was pierced for my sins. This is your scripture for salvation, this is your song for salvation-who saved a wretch like me.

*But he was pierced for our **transgressions**,
he was crushed for our **iniquities**;
the punishment that brought us **peace** was on him,
and by his wounds we are **healed**. (Is 53:5-NIV)*